



# Naked in School The Exported Rebellion

Seems Ndenyal

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Kevin and Denise spend a year at college abroad, pursuing their dreams for productive careers. What they find is totally not what they expect, as the Moirai—the Fates—keep tossing curveballs in their direction, as chance and circumstance keep interfering with their plans.

Reading *Kevin and Denise* and *Roger and Cynthia* first will provide needed context; also there are spoilers to the prior tales in this story.

This story is published as adult entertainment and contains material of an explicit, sexual nature.  
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## Chapter 1

It was a hot, rainy afternoon in mid-August when the taxi carrying the two weary travelers pulled up in front of a three-story block of flats in the Lambeth borough of South London.

“What crappy weather! I thought London would be cooler, and look at how hard it’s still raining!” Denise Roberts complained as she gathered her laptop bag and backpack from the seat.

“Ah, lassie, thisn’t usu’l August weather,” the cabbie sighed. “We gen’ly git 20-degree temps an’ na’ much rain this month, but it gotta be more’n 30 now.”

“Reminds me of Jakarta, actually,” Kevin Coris remarked. “This is just as hot as there.”

He reached over to pay the fare and the cabbie grinned and nodded at the generous tip.

“Lass, Ay’ll loan yeh me broolly t’use; Ay git yer bags for ya and ‘elp y’carry. This ‘ere yer flat?” he pointed.

“I think so. Kevin, it’s number 7, right?”

“Right, sweetie; I hope the agent is here. She said she’d be here—ah, that must be her...”

“Lemme pop th’boot; wait t’git out fer me.”

He opened the trunk, grabbed the umbrella, leaped out of the vehicle, and went to Denise’s door. She accepted the driver’s umbrella and climbed out as the man flipped up his poncho hood over his head and went back to collect the luggage.

A stocky, middle-aged woman had appeared at the building door, waved, and opened her umbrella as she came out of the building.

“You must be the Corises,” she called as she came down the steps. “Sorry for the poor weather reception; this is most unusual weather.”

“Yes, that’s us, and that’s what our driver said about this monsoon,” Denise acknowledged.

Their luggage was unloaded and brought indoors quickly with four people carrying items, Kevin sharing the cabbie’s large umbrella with Denise. The cabbie smiled with gratitude when Kevin slipped him a £10 note.

“Thank’uh, guv’nor, much ‘preciated!” he enthused as he collected his umbrella. “Yuh ‘n th’lass stay dry!” he grinned and headed back out into the pouring rain.

“I’m Angela Jones,” the agent introduced herself. “Welcome to London. Now the agreement we have is for your letting the flat for nine months, extending to a year if needed; am I correct?”

“Yes, ma’am, although we’re only scheduled to be in classes at the university till spring, we might need to stay a little longer. You see, we’re to be the guardians of a girl until her

grandparents return to England sometime between May and July next,” Kevin explained.

“Ah, yes, your file with the letting papers mentioned that. Well, let me show you around the flat, explain some details, and give you my contact numbers. If you ever need help, please ring my mobile and don’t be afraid to get me whenever. And there’s also some final papers to sign. I see that we’re to draw your letting fee straight from your bank, and I really appreciate that. Now let’s go up; I’ll give you a hand with the bags.”

Soon their business with Mrs Jones was finished and she departed with a chipper reminder to call her if there was anything else her agency could do to help them.

“Whew,” Denise remarked as she closed the door behind the departing woman. “I’m not sure how much more of her sugar-coated cheeriness I could take. How does she do it? Especially in this miserable weather. Can we open a window? It’s pretty stuffy in here.”

“Hmmm, no AC here, but that’s common in Europe from what I hear. A few ceiling fans. Yeah, let me open a window or two where the rain won’t come in,” Kevin mused. “And let’s see about unpacking. Our household stuff should be here in a few days, but it’s nice to have the kitchen equipped fairly well, anyway.”

“Yeah, I see that there are two sets of bed linens too,” Denise called from the bedroom. “Well, this will certainly be an adventure!” she grinned as she started to unpack a suitcase.

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The following day, the two began to plan their time for the weeks before classes started.

“So we need to do the final registering stuff, oh yeah, also check out how to travel from here to our schools. And pick up Amelia when she gets in and get her registered in school too; is there anything else, darling?” Denise asked as they dressed to go out for breakfast and food shopping.

The rain had stopped overnight but it was still sultry outdoors.

“No, sweetie, but we do want to call on Warren,” he said, referring to Warren Porter, a close Coris family friend from Kevin’s youth when he lived in Seoul, South Korea.

Denise smiled. “Right, he’s so cool, honey; we had such a great time with his family when we visited them in Korea three years ago. I wonder how his kids have adapted to life in London as opposed to Korea?”

“Well, kids of diplomats learn to be very adaptable, you know, and two of them were born here; also Warren did a tour here when they were younger. And remember how many different places I lived in while growing up,” Kevin grinned. “All those different schools. Learning all those languages too. Oh, let’s not forget... we need to ring Amelia’s grandparents—remind me later, honey.”

They left the flat and began the day’s errands. Kevin called Warren Porter in the evening and they were invited to dinner at his Regent’s Park home the following evening; he told them that he

would send a car around to fetch them.

After dinner and some desultory channel-surfing, Kevin sat back in the sofa and closed his eyes.

“You know, darling, everything is moving so damned quickly—we’re always on the go, it seems. Will we ever have a normal life?” he sighed.

“Whatever do you mean by ‘normal’?” Denise asked as she took his hand. “I think we’re just not ‘normal’ people; we seem to get embroiled in crazy events around us all the time. You’re so much like people say your dad was—always helping others. Must be from him that you inherited your ‘white knight syndrome,’ riding to the aid of needy people around you. Thank God you were there for me when I needed it, so I’m never going to complain about that, you know.”

“Yep, and it looks like our career directions have gone in just that way too,” Kevin mused. “Helping people, right? You’ve got this awesome way of projecting your emotional feelings to anyone nearby and an enormous level of empathy, so what career do you pick? Of course, you want to study psychiatry or psychology.”

“Well, two of those shrinks, plus your heroism, saved my life, so I feel the need to help others if I can. And you, sweetie, you have such a talent for persuasion; you can talk people into doing stuff that they’d never do in their wildest dreams. You’d make an awesome salesman. Or politician. Or diplomat. So what do you pick? All the above, if that’s how your studies in the field of international relations will turn out. That’s why you picked that field, right?”

“Yeah, Denise, I guess so. I want to do like what my dad tried, to cure all that’s wrong in the world. It’s a very idealistic goal—very unrealistic too. But maybe my studies will give me some ideas about where to contribute my share—for whatever I can accomplish. Dad’s foundation helps with third-world legal and health problems, so that’s where I think I want to do something too. Okay—enough serious talk. How about a nice hug and kiss?”

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The following evening, a black limo with diplomatic plates stopped in front of their flat.

“Wow, we’re traveling in style,” Denise grinned.

“Well, considering that Warren is the deputy head of the embassy, I guess he’s got some pull,” Kevin joked.

“Gee, maybe you should wear your Medal of Freedom to make it official; you’re a big shot too,” Denise retorted.

Kevin had received the award from the president three years earlier for his service to the U.S.

“Yeah, you know the perks that come with that? A free tour of the White House, I think is all,” Kevin smirked.

Their ride to Regent’s Park went quickly and soon they were being greeted by the Porter family.

“Kevin, Denise, how wonderful to see you both again, and congratulations on your engagement!” Warren Porter exclaimed when he opened the door. “Did you have a good trip, and have you gotten yourselves settled in your flat?” he asked as he guided them into the sitting room.

“Sure, and thanks; everything went well, except for how this hot, stuffy weather made our unpacking a chore,” Kevin replied.

“Yes, not at all what London is known for. Usually we’re *cold* and damp, not hot and muggy. Anyway, come greet the rest of the family. Hey kids,” he called, “Denise and Kevin are here! Ah, here’s Barbara.”

Barbara Porter came into the room. “Well hello, Denise, Kevin—let me see the ring—oh, how beautiful! Good taste, Kevin, I approve. Also of your fiancée, of course. Congrats to both of you! I’m so happy for you and Kevin, your parents would have been overjoyed for you both. I so miss Audrey and Paul and I know you miss them too, Kevin.”

“Yes, Denise, we’ve told you that Audrey Boninger was one of the top people in the U.S. Foreign Service. Such a shame that her career was cut short that way,” Porter said, taking Kevin’s hand and hers.

Kevin’s parents had perished in a random terrorist car-bombing in Indonesia four years earlier.

“Yes, and I’m sorry that I never got to meet her; everyone speaks so highly of her... Oh, here’s Jeremy!” Denise exclaimed. “Wow, Jeremy! Look at you!”

Jeremy had quietly entered the room and shyly went to Denise as she opened her arms to embrace him.

“Woooo, the guy’s gone and become a man! Hey Jeremy, you’re some hunk now!”

Jeremy blushed as he hugged her, “Aww, Denise...”

“Man, feel those muscles!” she grinned. “You must be what, six-feet-one? two? Look, he’s as tall as Kevin now. And your shoulders and chest... and biceps...” she poked and prodded. “Rock hard. You’ve got a super body. You probably have to use a stick to keep the gals off you, right?”

“Erm, Denise, jeez, please...” he muttered while his parents laughed.

Barbara grinned. “Jeremy hasn’t been on a date yet, Denise. Be kind to him.”

“Muumm! Arghhh! Please!” he complained.

“Sorry for teasing you, Jeremy,” Denise soothed him. “You know that Kevin talks about you like you’re his little brother. And oh, here’s your own little brother and sister too... great seeing you, guys!”

Bobby and Naomi came up to Kevin and Denise and hugged them both.

“Wow, guys, you’ve really grown too—Bobby, you’re eleven now? And Naomi, you’re really pretty and you must be a teenager now, right?” Kevin said.

“Yeah, Kevin, I was 13 two months ago. And I’m mad at you; I wanted you to wait till I grew up so you’d marry me! And you went and got engaged to someone else! But I like Denise a lot anyway, so I guess it’s okay,” she smiled shyly.

“Naomi always had a big crush on Kevin, as you probably know, Denise,” Barbara grinned.

“MUUUM! Why don’t you rub it in some more!” Naomi complained.

The group took seats in the room as Porter diplomatically changed the subject; just doing his job, after all.

“So let’s get all caught up; it’s just about three years since we’ve seen you guys in person. That was a terrific opportunity you two had, going on that South Korean student exchange, and I heard a lot of good things said about your high school group. State was very pleased with the results and folks in the South Korean government were ecstatic. Especially that you and Denise spoke Korean; they totally loved that. Your mission was a great success. Anyway, what major stuff have you been doing since then?”

“Well, lots of things, I guess,” Kevin told him. “You know that Denise and I began college with advanced standing, right? So this fall, we’re in like our third college year, but in earned credits, we’ve got senior status. Also, both of us collaborated with a larger group on a special education study that resulted in two major papers and we took some education grad courses. We each turned one of those papers into a master’s thesis and we’ve actually earned master’s degrees. Our plan for study here is to take several senior-level and grad-level courses; then return to finish at Avery.”

“Okay, say, you’re actually kind of following how the British educational system is set up; did you know that? Undergraduate study here has just three year levels: first, second, and third. They don’t use freshman, sophomore, et cetera,” Porter broke in.

“What do you mean?” Denise asked.

“Let me explain. It’s because of how secondary school here works, and since you’re going to be fostering a teenaged girl—you mentioned you’ll be the guardian of your friend’s daughter—this may help you in knowing about the school grade levels here. She’s—yes, like Jeremy, actually—just finished with the sophomore year. Indonesia and South Korea are both like the States in high-school levels. Here in England, it’s called year eleven and there are special exams called the GCSEs that the schools hold to continue on the academic track. Jeremy can tell you about them.

“The way I understand it, pupils actually study for and begin taking those GCSE exams in subjects covered in years eight and nine and in total, the exams eventually cover as many as ten subjects in all. Then at 16 years old, toward the end of their year eleven, pupils take the last series of GCSEs to allow them to take A-level classes in years twelve and thirteen. A-level means ‘advanced level.’ Otherwise they take a vocational track; this is vocational training or apprenticeships, and even this track usually requires GCSEs in English and math. This system is

really different from the U.S.

“After year eleven, the next grade is called ‘sixth form,’ and it’s divided into two years, lower and upper, also called years twelve and thirteen, the ‘A-level’ class years. Most sixth-form schools are referred to as ‘colleges’ but those are still secondary schools, not like in the States. ‘Colleges’ here are advanced high schools. Then after sixth form comes not college but uni—that’s British slang for ‘university.’

“Now, completing sixth form is functionally the same as the U.S. first post-secondary year, the college freshman year. The university levels are called first year, second year, third—not freshmen or sophomores. Sometimes the kids just starting uni might be called ‘freshers’ but not for their entire first year, usually. After three years of uni, one graduates with a bachelor’s, or can stay on for a fourth year, which is for a master’s degree. Actually, Kevin, the high-school education system in South Korea is very close to the one in the States, and the one in Indonesia is kind of like a combination of the British and American ones. Understand?”

“Wow, that’s a lot to absorb. But it’s really like the U.S. but shifted one year, right?”

“Yes, you can think of it that way, I suppose. There are a few really major differences, as I just mentioned, but generally you can assume that. So what are you going to study? Denise, how about you? I don’t want you to think we’re ignoring you.” he grinned at her.

Naomi had been whispering intently in Denise’s ear; Denise looked up at him and Naomi blushed.

“Oh no, Warren, I’m fascinated by this grade level thing. My classes? I’ll be taking classes at both London School of Liberal Arts and Education and the University Institute of London. There are two education classes I’m taking—educational statistics and adolescent developmental psychology—that I need for the program I designed at Avery, plus biochemistry and cell biology and genetics for my pre-med program. And since the two campuses aren’t far apart—a couple of subway stops—this is doable.”

“I’m impressed; that seems to be a really rigorous program. By the way, in the U.K., the subways are called the ‘underground’ or the ‘tube’ and it’s ‘sitting’ a class or exam,” Porter grinned at her. “A ‘subway’ is kind of a walkway under a street. Just get used to the Britishisms; I had to do that myself and sometimes misusing an idiom can be embarrassing, you know! Jeremy has no problems with the idioms, though,” Porter chuckled. “Naomi and Bobby as well; they talk like natives.”

Jeremy laughed. “Oi, all my mates and the teachers in my schools have been Brits, Dad. And we lived here when I began speaking, you know.”

Porter grinned at him and then looked at Kevin. “Kevin, are you letting your wonderful fiancée outshine you?”

“Ha! She does that all the time! She’s wa-a-a-y smarter than me...” Denise stuck her tongue out at him. “...so I’m limiting myself to only one school. I’m taking classes in finance, management,

political science, and economics at the London Economics Institute. But, wow, you've really got quite the assignment here; Mom had always said that the U.K. deputy-head-of-mission posting was a real plum."

"Yes, thanks, son, I'm sure your mom would have gotten this posting within a few years. My position is 'minister-counselor'; it's the deputy chief of mission post and second to the ambassador—which you know is a political appointment. So I basically serve as the chief operating officer of the embassy. I'll be here perhaps five years, maybe longer, depends on a lot of factors. Hey kids, we've left you out of the conversation—want to ask Denise and Kevin anything?"

Naomi blushed and looked down but Jeremy looked like he wanted to burst.

"Jeremy?" Barbara prompted.

"Kevin, I gotta tell ya, your teaching me *taekwondo* was brill and I'm a fourth *dan* now! I got my fourth degree belt when I left Seoul last January! And *Kwanjang-nim* Park told me that you were the reason I advanced so quickly!"

"Wow, Jeremy, good one!" Kevin exclaimed. "I only made fifth degree a year ago and Denise has studied the Art with me too and she holds a red belt now. You're doing great; are you continuing in London—do you have a *dojang* here?"

"Oh yes, if you can, I'd love to work with you again."

"Yeah, right, and maybe teach *me* this time, okay? And I'm not joking, Master Park is just the best and you've been with him since when? I think you were ten years old, right?"

"Sure, and you were my *kyosah* for maybe three years and taught me a lot," he confirmed.

Kevin turned to Bobby. "Hey Bobby, you gonna follow in your big brother's footsteps? Learn *taekwondo* too?"

"Sure!" the boy chirped. "Jeremy will be taking me to the *dojang* for beginner classes next month. Soon I'll be able to beat him!"

"Whoa, squirt, slow down! The Art isn't about beating up on others, you know," Kevin cautioned. "It's a way of thinking—using your mind and body, growing up, and being a moral and ethical person. The physical training is good for the body and for your health. It's not to be a good fighter, but that happens as you train as a side benefit—okay, buddy? Right, Jeremy?"

"Oh yeah, for sure; I can see the difference between the teens at *taekwondo* and the others in my school; the *dojang* kids seem so much more mature than the other kids," Jeremy acknowledged.

"I can second that," Denise broke in. "When Kevin showed up at my school, he had everyone thinking he was some kind of superhero—he acted with such a commanding presence that everyone took notice."

Barbara looked at her. "Is this about what he did when you had that nudity thing you were forced

to do? When you visited us in Seoul, I recall that you mentioned something about his rescuing you from that.”

“Oh yes. He did so much for everyone and you remember that he got the president’s award. Well, it’s been two—almost three years ago now—some college friends of ours were able to basically stop that nudity program from being mandatory in the United States, and they used Kevin’s work as the basis for getting it stopped. And Kevin, don’t you dare disagree—you’re way too modest.”

Kevin just threw up his arms in resignation. “Okay, darling... whatever...”

“See, he’s finally learning to listen,” Denise smiled.

“Hmmm, maybe he should give Warren some tips,” Barbara joked. “He hasn’t learned yet, you know.”

“Time to change the topic,” Porter grinned. “I know when trouble is coming. And speaking of trouble, that school nudity issue may be ending in the States, but it’s getting huge here.”

“Yeah, Dad, and I’m really scared,” Naomi spoke for the first time. “After what happened with Jeremy and his school and all, I don’t want to have to get naked!”

Denise sat up, alarmed. “What! You mean they have that damned Program here too—excuse my language, but that’s shocking!”

“Oh yeah they do; it was in my school when I got here last January,” Jeremy broke in. “I started here spring term as a year eleven and starting midyear was tough because this was the final GCSE exam year...”

“Right, your dad said you’d explain,” Denise said.

“Sure. Those are the year eleven exams. I think it means General Certificate of Secondary Ed or something. You have to pass those exams with high enough marks to go on to take A-level classes or else you can’t go to uni.”

“Ah,” Denise said, “many states in the U.S. require kids to take some form of standardized exam.”

“Yes, but not really like these,” Porter interrupted. “In the States, those exams are for measurement of achievement. Here, they’re needed for the kids to advance to the next level, so they’re really important. Just like South Korea for getting into university, in fact. Japan does this too. Go on, son.”

“Yeah, so anyway, my first days in school I saw kids walking around in school starkers—so weird!—and when I asked what was happening, everyone looked at me as if I was from outer space.”

Denise giggled, “Yeah, in our school we thought Kevin was the man from Mars...”

“I found out that the idea came from you Yanks,” Jeremy said dismissively. “The Naked in

School idea started there. Some nutters in government thought it would be a great idea to do it here too. Like it was helpful for personal development or some other rot.”

“Yeah, and I’m scared of having to do it; I’ll run away or something,” Naomi moaned. “Maybe Kevin will save me like he saved Denise. Jeremy, tell them the horrid thing that happened with that girl!”

Denise reached around and hugged Naomi, who grabbed her hand and held on tightly.

“Yeah, sis. What Naomi means is that at my school last autumn, you know, before we got here, a girl was killed by her brothers because she got put in the Program.”

“Oh my God!” Denise exclaimed. “What... how...”

“Maybe I should mention,” Porter interjected, “that we have quite a large Muslim community in London; actually all of England does, but there are a lot of Muslims in London and many are very conservative. The schools all have strict dress policies but they’ve adapted school dress policies to allow wearing of the hijab, you know, the Muslim head scarf. I don’t think schools allow the burqa, where only the eyes show, but the hijabs are always allowed. I understand they’re to preserve the girls’ modesty by covering the hair and sometimes neck too. And they also wear long sleeves with their legs covered. Imagine then the loss of modesty, the humiliation, for a girl required by her faith to be all covered up, when she’s put in the Program. Go on, son.”

“Okay, Dad. What I heard was this girl in my school, she was a year ten, refused to go to the head’s office when they called her, so some teachers dragged her there and stripped her off and pushed her, starkers, into the hall. I heard that she ran away to hide and found a closet of some kind and blocked the door shut and wouldn’t come out and since the door was solid, they couldn’t break it in. They called her mum who finally got the girl to come out but only after her mum promised that she had a coverup for her.

“Anyway, I heard that she didn’t come back to school again and then my mum saw in the paper when we arrived in London about her killing... what was it called again, Mum?”

“They said it was an honor killing,” Barbara answered.

“Okay, the girl had been killed by her brothers for dishonoring herself and her family,” Jeremy finished.

“Oh my god,” Denise breathed, “killing for honor? What’s that about?”

Barbara explained. “As I’ve read about it, this is a twisted practice that’s fairly widespread in some middle-eastern Muslim sects. As Warren said, there are lots of Muslim immigrants here and many come from areas where the practice is condoned by the local clerics. An honor killing or other honor-related crime happens when someone in the victim’s family comes to believe that the victim has brought shame or dishonor to the family and has to be punished. I think that the usual causes of family dishonor have been the victim’s getting engaged to someone who the family disapproves of, or having sex outside marriage, or engaging in homosexual activities, or

even involuntary things like becoming the victim of rape. Some Muslim mullahs have even preached that a girl who dresses in inappropriate ways dishonors her family. For the girl in Jeremy's school, her brothers apparently felt that her being naked in public was dishonorable to them so they killed her. Now they've both been charged with her murder."

Porter continued on the topic, "And there have been a fair number of honor killings in London over the past couple of years. Three involved Muslim girls who were in the Program so there's been an outcry by Muslims, demanding to be exempt from being in the Program and that's resulted in a response from non-Muslims who are calling for equal treatment. So far the authorities have decided to maintain the status quo and not exempt anyone, so much so that any exemption is very difficult to obtain."

Barbara resumed her explanation. "Because of problems like that at his school last term, we've switched Jeremy to an independent school for this fall since the Program is only run in state-funded schools. At least that's how the law had to be written to pass. This change will apply to you too, Naomi, next year you'll go to an independent school without the Program," she said reassuring her daughter who visibly relaxed at hearing that comment.

"Yeah, but there was more that happened, too," Jeremy went on. "There've also been suicides. The first one happened—I think it was a couple of years ago in one of the first schools in England where they ran the Program. That girl was a very religious Christian; she was very modest and withdrawn, but when they forced her to strip, she kind of became like a zombie; she was spaced out and went through the first three days like a robot. Then she went missing and didn't show up for school the next day. They found her body later that day huddled in a classroom cupboard. She had overdosed the day before and climbed into the cupboard to die. She had a kind of diary with her where she wrote how she had suffered.

"You know what's sick is that everyone in school has to read what she wrote in that diary so that they know about how not to treat someone in the Program so they don't get so desperate that they want to kill themselves. But I think there's a real good way to avoid that: don't have the bloody Program!"

Barbara shot him a look. "Hey, watch the language, buster. Well, I've also heard of Muslim girls suiciding but I wonder if some of them might be honor killings in disguise."

"There's even more, and this really snowed Mum and Dad..."

"Um, tell them about that Brit slang, Jeremy," Barbara prompted. "'Snow' means something different to us Yanks."

"Erm, sorry, there's this cool Brit rhyming slang they use. Well, 'snow' is short for 'snow flurries,' okay, and 'flurries' rhymes ..."

"... with 'worries'? Oh dear," Denise interrupted, chuckling, "...with 'worries.' A snowed mom and dad. That's so awful it's almost funny."

"Yeah, it's so cool, like a secret language. We kids love to use it," Jeremy explained. "Actually it

goes ‘no snow,’ meaning ‘no worries,’ but we like using ‘snowed’ to mean ‘worried’ also. Hey, do you know what a ‘septic’ is?”

He got blank stares.

“I know!” cried Naomi.

“Yeah, sis, you’d know of course—go ahead.”

“It’s a Yank! From ‘septic tank’!”

The others groaned, then laughed.

“Really?” Kevin grinned. “That’s so bad.”

“Anyway,” Jeremy went on, “what was so bad happened at the beginning of last March, when I got put in the Program, and why Mum and Dad think the school’s not safe anymore. A Muslim girl was picked the same day I was and again, she didn’t go to the head’s office. They didn’t learn from last autumn and sent some teachers to fetch her, and they stripped her off like the other girl. But I happened to be in the outer office when they pushed her out of the head’s office, so I grabbed a curtain off the window, wrapped her in it, got her out of the room, and hid her. Then I found a way to sneak the girl’s clothes and got her out, but she never returned to the school. Then the week after she was stripped, the head teacher’s car was firebombed in the car park just when he was supposed to be driving away but he had gotten delayed in school for a few minutes. That saved him. We found out that the firebombing was because of that girl’s being dishonored. Now the police have to watch out for him and his family.”

“That’s the main reason we wanted to get Jeremy out of that school,” Barbara said. “We didn’t think it was safe, despite that it’s so close to the government center here.”

“And Mum, I’m not done yet, either! I really got in trouble with the school for doing that for her. I also got in trouble when I showed the head teacher all the things that were wrong with the Program and how the rules violated the school’s Pupil Handbook. There’s such a difference between the Pupil Handbook, the dress code, and the Program rules,” Jeremy went on. “I kept my copies—let me get them. Be right back.”

While Jeremy was gone, Kevin remarked, “In the States, the private schools didn’t have the Program while all the public schools did. Do you have a lot of private schools in London to keep him out of the Program?”

“It’s complicated,” Porter said thoughtfully. “The terminology is different and what you think of as ‘public’ isn’t what you’re used to. Let’s see... the ‘public schools’ here are actually tuition based and many of them are boarding schools. They’re called ‘public’ because their enrollment is open to kids from outside their community areas. They aren’t run by the government for the students in their community. Okay... now ‘private’ schools—or ‘independent’ as some are called—operate without government control and confusingly they can be called a ‘public school’ too, open to kids from anywhere. These schools all charge tuition. Now what you think of as

‘public schools’ are really ‘state schools’ for want of a single term and for these, the education is free of charge to the pupils. And there are something like six *different* kinds of state schools but I’m not sure about how they may differ,” he finished with an apologetic grin.

“Another thing is that lots of schools are single-sex; maybe 15 percent of them, I’m guessing,” Barbara said. “I fail to see how that naked Program would be of any use in those schools, from what I’ve read about the Program’s supposed goals. Since the Program is limited to state schools and there are plenty of non-state schools nearby, Jeremy will be attending one of those... ah, here he is.”

Jeremy was carrying two pamphlets when he came back. “See, look at this booklet with the naked kids on the cover. It talks all about how kids have to let themselves be touched in their privates and they can even be made to play with their private parts in front of other kids. And you’re supposed to let other kids touch you and fondle your privates—you can’t refuse to let yourself be groped that way. I couldn’t even bear to watch when the kids were forced to let others do it. When I was put in it, I thought it was so humiliating that I wouldn’t let anyone get near me. Also in classes, kids had to let themselves be used as sex subjects and made to wank themselves too.” He saw the puzzled look on Denise’s face. “Ah, ‘wank’ is masturbate,” he blushed. “The kids weren’t allowed to cover up in any way. If they tried to cover themselves, they could have their wrists braceleted!”



[Click to open Program Booklet](#)

Denise winced. “Yes, Jeremy, we know, we saw all that in the States too and it was bad, like you said.”

“Yeah, but look at this other booklet now. This is the pupil handbook for our school. It lists the dress code which has to be followed and if you don’t dress properly, they send you home. You have to dress just like they say. Nothing in here talks about *NO* clothes! But even more, listen to what this part says: ‘Every pupil has an equal right to feel safe and valued. We do not expect any pupil to feel upset, scared or unhappy about coming to school or being in school.’ And then it says, ‘You do not have the right to touch anybody else or their personal belongings. This means you keep your hands and feet to yourself. Respect the personal space of others and keep any contact to a minimum, unless you are helping or supporting another pupil or friend.’

“But the Program book says we have to ignore all that! The Program makes kids scared to come to school and its rules say that we have to allow anyone to grope us! How does that help us learn how to behave with others? Look at the first page in the pupil booklet here. It says we have to behave with integrity and courtesy: ‘Courtesy simply means demonstrating polite behavior; that you have excellent manners and social conduct. We expect you to be courteous to all other members of the school community and visitors to our school. Behave with integrity and demonstrate courtesy at all times.’

“See, in the Program they’re teaching us that our bodies are public and we have no privacy; that

the school's rules that are meant to protect us can be shoved aside anytime someone in authority gets a dumb idea."

"Jeremy, you sound just like Kevin did when he found out about the Program at our school," Denise remarked. "You'll have a good career as a lawyer, or heaven protect us, maybe even a diplomat."

Everyone chuckled.

Kevin had been paging through the Program booklet. He looked up then. "You know, Warren, the booklet mentions diplomatic status as an exemption item. Our own rules in the States did too. We had an exchange student from England at my first high school who got picked to participate. I told the principal not to force her to strip unless the school got legal advice about forcing her, and that they also must contact the British embassy or consulate for permission. It turned out that the embassy advised her not to participate. Wasn't that the same thing for Jeremy?"

"That's a question that's been roiling our office and also Foggy Bottom," Porter replied. "It's not clear, since the Program is on the books as law in the States—and I know how the courts have ruled there, but that law hasn't been repealed yet. Jeremy did start the Program under protest, as he put it, but then quickly stopped participating. So we've advised embassy personnel to use non-state schools for their kids to avoid the problem."

Naomi and Bobby had long since gotten bored with the conversation and were now sitting in a corner talking quietly. At the next brief lull in the conversation, Bobby piped up, "Are you done talking yet 'cause we're hungry!"

"Sure, sport," Porter said, "you're right and I think Missus Sheppard should have dinner ready by now, actually. Let's go to the dining room, folks."

The rest of the evening passed with the conversation moving to less serious topics with everyone enjoying the excellent dinner. Soon the time came to leave and the Porters extended their invitation to come visit again when Kevin and Denise wanted more "family time."

During the ride home in the embassy limo, Kevin asked Denise what she and Naomi were whispering about. "Sweetie, Naomi was so cute! She was blushing and sneaking glances at me so I'm really curious," he said.

"Girl talk, buster," Denise grinned. "Naomi would be so humiliated."

"Oh come on, I won't let on that you told me."

"Well, let's just say she was *seriously* crushing on you; now don't get a swelled head," Denise laughed. "She thinks you're a major hunk."

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The following morning, the couple's plans included paying a visit to their respective colleges to take care of any necessary final paperwork and to learn the best way to travel between their flat

and the schools.

“Well, according to the tube map, let’s try taking the line from Stockwell station—it’s... um... the Victoria tube to the Warren station... see, it’s the light blue line here,” Denise pointed to the map.

“Okay; if we leave together, we could take the same line and I’d transfer here or here,” pointing to Leicester Square, then Tottenham Court Road, “and go to Holborn,” Kevin said. “Or take the Northern tube to Piccadilly... say, look, Northern also goes to Warren, see? The black line?”

“Oh yeah. We’ll have to try them both to see which is better, like how often trains run. And check out bus lines too.”

“Well, since you’ve got two schools to check on getting to, let’s do yours first. I think that the only thing I need to do at LEI is give my local contact info.”

The first stop was the University Institute of London, where Denise completed her paperwork and then confirmed that the class schedules hadn’t changed. Then the two set out to locate the buildings where the classes were held.

“Kevin, I’ll need to see how to get from here to the Liberal Arts and Education college. It’s about a mile and I could walk, but it’s so friggin’ hot now! Anyway, let’s see about transit for now and when the weather’s bad... it’s London; the weather’s unpredictable, right? I’ve noticed how many people carry umbrellas!”

Soon they arrived at Denise’s other school. Here she found that she had to meet with an academic advisor to go over her Avery University transcript, even though she had already submitted all of the required paperwork and had paid receipts for the classes she would be taking.

“Is there a problem?” she asked the harried advisor. “I’ve got all the prerequisites for these classes, as you can see, and I’m taking them for exchange credit at Avery; my program advisor there set this up with your college.”

“Ah, there’s no problem really, dear,” the woman sighed, “it’s just that with new rulings from the government, we’ve got so much more work on our plates now.”

“Sorry to cause you extra work, then,” Denise sympathized with her. “But I thought colleges were sort of independent from governmental... um... oversight? Is that what’s happening?”

“Yes, it’s oversight, miss. By the way, ‘college’ is the term for the sixth form of secondary schools, dear. We are a university, not a college. Now you see, for most every uni program, the state has no say about curriculum at all, except for unis that offer the teacher ed programs. They keep a close watch over uni teacher training programs. The Ofsted inspectors examined our courses this spring, part of maintaining government standards...”

“Um, ‘Ofsted’?” Denise interrupted.

“Oh yes; you’re a Yank,” the woman grinned. “We’re so different here. That’s the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills and they report to Parliament through the

Department for Education. So everyone enrolling in an ed course needs to be vetted for their preparation in meeting Ofsted standards and there's not a separate 'track,' if you would, for foreign students. That's why I had to go over your packet with you. Well, I see that everything in your record does appear to be completely in order. And of course you needn't appear at the ed school Reception before classes begin, it seems; since you're only sitting these two advanced subjects."

"Um, sorry, I'm lost again," Denise said slowly. "What is it I needn't do?"

"Oh, 'Reception' is the office—our school's main office. Our students beginning their teacher ed program have to go to Reception before classes on their first day to have their orientation. They get instructions about their classes and the other school requirements then. According to your enrollment status, you're not in that group."

"That's good, I suppose..." Denise took a breath. "So I have both classes scheduled now and I just show up at the proper times? I'm being really careful to check because I'm also enrolled at UIL and have classes there five days a week, so I'll be traveling back and forth; I don't need any surprises."

"No dear, your two classes are your only responsibility. Good luck with your studies and please remember that I'm here to help for academic guidance if you should need it while you're enrolled. Nice meeting you."

"Likewise and thanks," Denise said as she shook hands—with a light touch; she had heard that handshaking among British women was not a vigorous activity.

As they left the building, Denise sighed. "Well, that was an experience. If I thought we had a lot of bureaucracy back at Avery, these people put them to shame. Now I know how the Brits got their rep."

"Well, the masters of red tape are in the former colonies, like India or Singapore; a little in Indonesia too. The Brits taught them well. You can go crazy with the bureaucrats in those countries," Kevin grinned. "Okay, my turn now; we've still got time to get to LEI and I only need to let them know I'm here and give my local address and contact info."

Soon they were on their way home.

Later that evening, Kevin was using his laptop and after a while, looked up at Denise.

"So I've been looking at the website of the school that Amelia's supposed to attend. She and her dad Elliott picked it out because it's got a great performing arts program and you know how she likes acting."

Denise came over and sat down.

"This? Norwich Academy Secondary School?" she asked.

"That's it. Very selective—you have to audition. She sent a DVD of a play she was in and some

other stuff because she couldn't appear in person."

"Hmmm," Denise murmured, "it's small too; only about 850 kids. Oh, look at this... it's what Elliott said about Norwich's school year calendar."

"What's that?"

"Schools in England and Wales typically have three terms: autumn, spring, and summer, running from the beginning of September to the middle of July. But I guess that since Norwich is an independent school, looks like they don't follow the national school calendar; they only have two terms. I wonder if there are others like that. Let me look... Ah. Yeah... here's ACS International Schools and they have the same calendar as Norwich, August 28 to June 15. And some more schools too."

"Go back to the Norwich page, honey. Let's look at what it says about the students." Kevin requested.

"Okay. Oh, nice," Denise remarked, "it's multi-cultural—see, English isn't the primary language for about 40 percent of the kids. But they have a high rating; the average GCSE score—that's the test Jeremy said they take in the eleventh year—for their kids is above the national average."

"Yeah, darling, it seems to be a good place and it's why Elliott said we should get a flat here in Lambeth," Kevin said. "The school isn't very far away—maybe two miles. It's nice that Elliott knows London so well."

Kevin and Denise had met Elliott Hadad, Amelia's father and a Brit, when they had visited Jakarta where the offices of the Coris Foundation were located. Kevin's father had created that charitable foundation, a Non-Governmental Organization or NGO, to bring medical and legal services to the under-served populations of a number of southeast Asian countries. Since Kevin's father had died, Kevin was the sole "owner" of the foundation, and kept in close contact with its executive director; he had visited Jakarta to review its current operation. Hadad had recently been recruited to be the foundation's CFO and was sending his daughter to London for her final years of high school study. He had designated Kevin and Denise as her guardians.

"So we'll need to see about Amelia's transportation too, then," Denise mused, working at the keyboard. "Looks like there's a public bus route that comes close. This is so different from where I grew up back in North Carolina—different even from Atlanta. London is really a huge, complicated place!"

"Denise, another thing I was looking at was the differences in school types—what Warren mentioned; he said that there're different kinds of state schools. I was curious about the differences so I looked them up. The differences are basically technical, things like funding and governance and don't involve the kids or the instruction. There are really *huge* differences in their education systems from ours! Look at what these schools are called: academy schools, two kinds of voluntary schools, community schools, foundation schools, free schools... aaggghh! Like Warren said, it's so complicated. Anyway, Amelia is in an independent school—see? It's got a

tuition component and pupils can apply for state grants, like scholarships but they call them ‘bursaries,’ which help keep tuition affordable.

“But while I was searching around, I found something interesting. For all the ‘state’ schools I looked at, their sites show the Naked in School rules. But it’s just like Jeremy said—their pupil handbooks all prohibit the students from doing the things that the Program rules require.

“Then I noticed that there are lots of schools which are single sex, like Barbara mentioned, and they are supposed to have the Program in those schools too. But there’s only one single Program rules booklet, the one for the coed schools! What the heck? There are no opposite-sex bathrooms or locker rooms to be required to be used! All of the other rules that discuss sexual contact between kids are covered in that co-ed Program booklet. Does that imply that they want those boys’ and girls’ school kids to get into homosexual activity—to ‘become more comfortable with their sexuality’—with the same sex? I wonder if any single-sex school is actually running the Program; there’s no way to tell from their websites.

“And yet another difference in the U.S. Program and the one here is that a fair number of schools are not fully state-funded—a lot are run by foundations and even religious groups or companies—so the Program doesn’t operate in those. All those non-state schools don’t follow the state curriculum which includes the Program as part of it. That means that a significant part of the student population would never be in the Program. It beats me how the theory behind the Program could possibly work in this country’s school system.

“Another interesting thing was when I looked at the Program rules, from what I recall, most of the British rules follow very closely to what we had in the States. The only differences seemed to involve permitted sexual contact; seems that in the U.K., the victim has a bit more personal control over what others can do to him. But since the U.S. Program website is long gone, I couldn’t find a copy of the old U.S. Program booklet to compare. But it seems to me like they just copied everything the U.S. was doing without much tailoring to work in the school structures here. This is so completely fouled up that I can see why all the problems Jeremy mentioned are happening. I’m so, so glad I won’t have to deal with all that crap ever again,” he finished emphatically.

“Yeah, me too, and I’m looking forward to this year with nothing to distract us,” Denise said. “Now come give me a hug and let’s get to bed, sweetie.”

## Chapter 2

Three months earlier, Kevin and Denise had finished their second year of college, and had completed the formal requirements to receive masters' degrees in educational program development. Since they hadn't completed their bachelors' work, getting their master's required a number of special waivers—but it was done. The pair enrolled in a six-week summer session and each added nine credit-hours toward their academic progress, which would allow them to take graduate courses in London. For the balance of the summer, they planned to visit Jakarta and Kevin's honorary "family" there, the Coris Foundation staff, especially his "Aunt" Janet Davis, its executive director, who knew him from his birth and whom Kevin had regarded as his second mother.

Summer session ended and the two left for Indonesia after arranging for Denise's mother to ship some of their household and winter clothing items to London so they'd have them available after they arrived and had gotten settled.

Arriving at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, the two were amazed at the greeting they received, since virtually all of the long-time staff of the Foundation came out to meet them and brought them to a country club for a welcome-home party. The last time Kevin had been in Jakarta had been four years earlier; that was when his parents had been killed in the terrorist bombing, and just two weeks later, he had left for the U.S. to attend high school. He had last seen Aunt Janet in Seoul three years ago when she visited him during his South Korean high-school scholar-exchange program.

Janet spent much of the first two days bringing Kevin up to date on the Foundation's projects and he got to meet many of the newer field workers. It became apparent that the work of the Foundation was flourishing under Janet's management; she had secured a number of grants to support their humanitarian work and was able to fund operations using the yields of the investments which the Foundation held. Their activities had grown so substantially that Janet needed to bring a financial specialist into her management group and had recruited an expert from London, someone who actually happened to have Indonesian roots too.

This was Elliott Hadad; he had been the controller for an NGO based in London that supported humanitarian projects in Africa. He was British by nationality but he had grown up in Indonesia; his parents had been British international aid workers when they were younger, working in Southeast Asia. They were still working in international aid and were currently employed by the African Union and were based in England. Janet had recruited Hadad as the Coris Foundation's CFO and he had moved back to Jakarta about two years earlier.

Three days after Kevin and Denise had arrived in Jakarta, Janet told them that she had invited Hadad and his daughter to dinner that evening.

"I told you that when Elliott returns from his trip, I'd invite him for dinner—well, he's back a day early, so they'll be here at 5:30; I know he really wants to meet you," she told them. "The Hadads have an interesting but sad story that I know you'll want to hear."

Early that evening, Elliott Hadad arrived with his daughter Amelia, a very pretty 16-year-old; Elliott looked quite Western despite his name. Amelia's features had a hint of her Indonesian heritage. Hadad was very astute and immediately detected Denise's appraising look. He grinned at her and then took one of her hands in his, shaking Kevin's with his other hand.

"I'm really very pleased to finally get to meet you, Kevin, and you, Denise; Janet's always talking about you. And yes, Denise, I get that look a lot. People think I'm Arabic, or Indonesian, or whatever, from my name—and my accent too—but I'm mostly a Brit, actually. So don't be embarrassed at my catching your stare. The disconnect between my name and Western appearance just means that I've got a complex history; lots of us who work in foreign charities have histories similar to mine. And this charming person here"—he drew his daughter in front of him as she was shyly standing behind him—"is my wonderful daughter, Amelia. Amelia, meet Denise and Kevin. Janet is Kevin's honorary aunt," he grinned.

"Pleased," she nodded her head as she touched her hand to Kevin's and Denise's, then dropped her eyes.

Denise and Kevin glanced at each other and the nonverbal message passed between them: "*This is a troubled girl in pain...*"

Kevin glanced at Amelia and again felt a surge of compassion for her as he tried to conceal his concerned expression from the others.

"Say, folks," Janet broke in. "Let's go sit and chat; dinner will be ready in about fifteen minutes."

They walked out into a screened and covered courtyard filled with tropical plants and flowers.

"Oh my," Denise breathed. "so pretty."

"Thank you, my dear," Janet replied. "It's my hobby and very relaxing. And the plants don't talk back but they do appreciate the attention."

The others chuckled.

"So Denise, Kevin, tell us about your planned London venture," Janet began. "You've done a great job in keeping us up on your antics for the past year; thank heavens for videochat—but that time difference between us is the pits. Anyway, you didn't tell us much about your school plans—why go to London now?"

The two explained their academic plans and how the classes in London would fit in.

"So Elliott," Denise said after she had been thoroughly questioned, "you mentioned that you had a complex history; is it something you can share?"

"Oh, yes. Well, part of it depends on Amelia and it's terribly personal; if she's comfortable with her part, since it involves both of us."

Amelia looked at her father with a sad expression. "Oh, it's okay, Papa, I don't want to always keep hiding. That's why I like to do my acting classes and the plays, you know. So go ahead."

Denise sensed the emotions which underlaid Amelia's response and her heart melted. She moved over to Amelia and took her hand.

"Amelia... my, that's such a pretty name..." Then she leaned over and whispered in her ear, "I can see you're tense and troubled. It shows in your face and how you hold your body. Later we'll talk privately if you want but I want you to know that I'll try to help you, okay? I had bad things happen to me and learned from them and I want to help others. Can we talk later?"

Denise looked up at the others. "Sorry, I just wanted to mention something privately. Anyway, Amelia, you have a very pretty name."

Amelia gripped her hand firmly but giggled. "Thank you, but that's funny. Actually Amelia means 'beautiful' in Arabic..."

"Oh my, that *is* funny," Denise interjected.

"Yes, in Indonesia we take names from Arabic, Sanscrit, Javanese, and some other native languages as well," Janet added.

Amelia leaned over to Denise and whispered, "Thank you, that was amazing, how you know how I feel, and yes, let's talk later."

Hadad cleared his throat. "Well, I guess it's my turn then. So my folks are Brits, as I said, and I was born right here in Jakarta. I went to school here and also in England for a few years; my parents have a little home near Birmingham, but I graduated secondary school here and then went to university in Kuala Lumpur where I studied finance. That's where I met Kalila, Amelia's mum, she was Indonesian and was reading nursing; we met in her second year there. Kalila's father had died when she was a teen and she had to fight for getting her uni education against her conservative mother—that whole side of her family is very, ahh... traditional. She had been able to get a scholarship because nurses are always needed.

"After we completed our courses, I went to England for advanced schooling and got my doctorate and that's where Amelia was born, in London, actually. Kalila took a position with a hospital in London and that's how things remained until a few years ago when the story changed. Kalila's hospital had arranged a medical mission to Freetown, Sierra Leone; that was five years ago, and you remember about the Ebola outbreak then? Kalila became infected and they couldn't save her."

"Oh my god," Denise and Kevin sighed. "So sorry..." "That's terrible..."

"Thanks," he went on. "Then Janet recruited me—maybe a year or so later—and I moved Amelia here the following year; she was living with my folks back in England. I should have left her there with them..." he choked.

"Oh, Papa..." Amelia whispered. "Not your fault..."

"But I so missed her," he said, wiping tears from his eyes. "I put her in the AIS Indonesia School here; it's a good school. She was 13, almost 14. Okay if I continue your story, darling?" he asked

Amelia.

She nodded, her eyes shiny with her own unshed tears.

“I was stupid and not really aware of how pigheaded Kalila’s family was. Her father was enlightened, but not her mother or the rest of them. One day, one of Amelia’s aunts—that is, Kalila’s brother’s wife—forged my name to a note to pull Amelia out of school for a quote-religious celebration-unquote. The school office clerk let her go but when the headmaster’s secretary heard, she got suspicious, checked the note, and called me to verify it. While they were trying to reach me, the school did some checking and found out that the only religious ceremony going on then was a mass ceremony to perform *sunat perempuan*. That’s Indonesian—*sunat* means ‘to circumcise’ and the whole term refers to ‘female circumcision,’ which, as you might know, is a euphemism for female genital mutilation. Or FGM. Campaigns in the human rights field are trying to eradicate that awful practice.”

Kevin and Denise were listening with their attention riveted on Hadad. Denise shuddered and glanced at Amelia whose hands were clasped in her lap and she was looking down. Then she looked up as her father stopped speaking to dab at his eyes.

“Let me tell the next, Papa,” she said quietly.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes, I need to be able to talk about it.”

“If you’re sure...”

“Yes. Auntie took me to—it was an old school building; she said it was a coming-of-age ceremony that everyone does. But when I got into this room, there were kids, little girls of all ages, some crying and holding themselves in pain, some lying on the classroom desks with their privates all exposed and women holding them down, and there was crying and screams all around. I tried to run out but they caught me and held me struggling there for maybe an hour, I think. I kept looking at that clock on the wall. Auntie said we had to wait our turn and I was trying to get away but the woman holding me was too strong; I kept trying to kick her so they used a towel to tie my legs.

“Then they came for me and dragged me to a desk and stretched me out on it—it was a hard desk! Wooden with sharp edges! And they pulled up my school skirt and my undies down. I was yelling and kicking and trying to pull free but then two women held my legs apart so I couldn’t move. Then I felt a sharp stab into my private parts and maybe that gave me more energy ‘cuz I jerked real hard and pulled loose before this woman, she was holding a pair of little scissors, could jab me again. I kicked at her, hit her wrist, and she backed away; the two women were trying to push me down again—and that’s when I was grabbed by Papa! And two policemen grabbed the women who were trying to hold me,” she gasped, her tears flowing now.

Denise wrapped her in a hug.

“Yes, I wasn’t quite in time,” Hadad picked up the story. “I had learned where she was taken and got the police to go with me by claiming a kidnapping, which it really was, and I did rescue her, but she had apparently struggled fearsomely and that delayed their taking her to do the mutilation straightaway when she arrived because they thought her screams would so panic the other children who were much younger; that would give them a bigger problem with the rest of them. She was very much the oldest girl there. So they waited to take her until most of the others were done. Anyway, her genital area had been partially cut into when she wrested herself free; that woman wasn’t able to do more than make one sloppy incision, a stab with a scissors, and the wound was bleeding profusely. That’s when I pulled her off that bloody—and I mean bloody in both senses of the term—desk.”

Kevin shook his head in shock. “I thought that stuff only happened in Africa...”

“Oh, no,” Janet said. “It’s awful that it’s such a widespread custom. Yes, Africa is one major region where this barbaric practice takes place, but it’s common here too—you know that Indonesia is the most populous Islamic country in the world, right? Well, FGM is a misguided cultural practice which many Muslims perform despite its denouncement by progressive Muslim clerics. Despite that, many leading traditional Muslim clerics are becoming ever more insistent that it’s a sacred duty, no matter that the Qur’an doesn’t mention the practice and it’s actually outlawed by the governments in most Islamic countries. Not in Indonesia, however.”

“So it’s that big of a problem here?” Denise asked, dismayed.

“Quite,” Janet confirmed. “A major one. Our foundation, you know, works to provide medical and legal aid to our needy populations in Southeast Asia. So I’m very familiar with the FGM problem here. Listen: In the last health survey we did, our researchers found that between 85 to 100 percent of the households in Indonesia subjected their daughters to genital cutting but this was usually performed before the age of five, but ages up to teens are done too, like what happened to Amelia. And the practice has a high acceptance too; more than 90 percent of adults support continuing the practice.

“Our survey asked clerics why they support doing this and a common answer is that it’s necessary to control women’s sexual urges and that women must be chaste to preserve their beauty.”

Denise stared at her with an incredulous expression. “No!”

“You’re not convinced?” Janet said. “Then try responding coherently to this reason, mentioned by a woman who performs the mutilations. She said something to the effect that the cutting was helpful to girls’ health because it balances their emotions so they don’t get sexually over-stimulated.”

Denise and Kevin were listening, shaking their heads in disbelief.

“It gets worse—the reasons given by some other women were just as bad. One woman claimed that it helps girls to urinate more easily and reduces the bad smell,” Janet said with a disgusted

gesture. “But the take-home message that we try to pound into people is that female genital mutilation is absolutely not part of Muslim law.”

“That’s so true,” Hadad continued. “And Kalila escaped being mutilated as a youngster because her father was progressive and forbade it. I never would have brought Amelia back here if I realized...”

“Papa, it’s okay, not your fault,” Amelia said insistently.

“Well, we’re at the point where medicine has the ability to do microsurgery now,” Hadad went on. “So my folks were in touch with doctors in the hospital in Birmingham where they live...”

“Yeah, that’s where that Malala girl from Pakistan who was shot in the head was treated!” Amelia interjected.

“...but they don’t do neurological microsurgery there, instead they recommended a hospital in London where a procedure using computer-assisted robotic microscopes was developed. I can get Amelia in easily because she’s a Brit citizen and I’ll be paying privately. Only now we need to wait a year to do it,” Hadad concluded.

“Why’s that?” Denise asked.

“My parents were going to see to her care during the treatments, which would take place over six months. But they’ve just been assigned to a humanitarian project in Accra in Ghana for a year. I can’t go to London for that long now, either. Janet says I should go, but we’ve got this critical grant coming up that’s hugely important for the Foundation’s future. Amelia says she’s okay with waiting but I know her condition is painful. She’s had some treatments to try to help her pain but the docs here say that the cutting damaged an important nerve.”

Kevin came over to Denise, leaned over, and whispered in her ear; she nodded and he stood up.

“Listen: I have a proposal for you and want you to take it seriously and not assume that it’s a courteous offer I’m just making to be polite. Denise and I want to be Amelia’s guardians while we’re in London so she can get her treatments...”

Both Hadad and Janet began to object to Kevin’s proposal.

“...no, no, please wait; let me go on.” Kevin held up his hand. “I’ve done this guardian thing before, actually. Denise’s mom appointed me as Denise’s legal guardian when she got her new job and had to move hundreds of miles away. I mean this seriously. My parents thought I was sufficiently mature to emancipate me when I was only 16—at Amelia’s age, actually. And I was 17 when I was Denise’s guardian. I can do this and I want to do this. Okay, let’s hear your thoughts. Aunt Janet, why did you begin to protest?”

“Well, Kevin, I’m not questioning your maturity or commitment. But you have your own life plus a demanding academic program this year,” she pointed out.

“Good points; I won’t debate them because it would appear that I’m downplaying their

importance. And those are definitely significant considerations. But that's what life is like, isn't it, after all? It's meeting one's responsibilities. I'm used to taking on responsibility. I think I have the need to be challenged with significant responsibilities. It actually makes me work harder when I've committed to a major obligation. Besides, being the guardian for a high-school girl would be great practice for when I have kids of my own, don't you think?"

The group all laughed, the tension being broken somewhat.

"Elliott, what's keeping you from agreeing?" Kevin went on.

Hadad looked at Janet. "I see what you meant about Kevin. I don't think I could come up with a cogent argument to deny him anything!"

Denise giggled. "Yep. He absolutely has that effect on people. And I agree; Kevin and I need to do this. It's the right thing to do."

"Young man, I don't know what to say... Why would you do this... this incredible mercy... for someone you've only known for such a short time?"

"Elliott, you know that we all need to do this. Amelia needs it and so do you. Both Denise and I can feel Amelia's pain; we felt it as soon as we saw her. She's masking it well, but she's suffering and you are too. I know you're a good person, because Aunt Janet would never have given you this job otherwise. I want to do this for you both because you both need the help and, as Denise said, it's the right thing to do."

Hadad stood and pulled Kevin into an embrace and Amelia rose too and spread her arms around both men, tears streaking her cheeks.

"Kevin, thank you so much, I can't thank you enough," she whispered.

"Young man, I've never met anyone like you, although Janet says you're just like your father—not physically—she says you're better looking—but your helping instincts are identical," Hadad told him. "As Amelia said, we can't thank you enough. But we'll need to work out some details, including financial..."

"Sir? Wait. Funds aren't a problem, for living expenses, anyway. You do have the medical parts arranged? Although we have enough money to help there..."

"Hold on, hold on," Hadad interrupted. "Yes, I have good medical insurance and the National Health Plan in the U.K. will also help some of the costs. But I want to contribute to Amelia's living expenses too. Just as I was going to do with my parents."

"Okay, sir. We can work that out. And Denise can discuss with Amelia the girl things that she'll need while she's living with us."

"All right then; the timing shouldn't be a problem. My folks are leaving for Ghana on August 25," Elliott remarked. "You mentioned that you'd be in London before then and I'd arrange to have Amelia arrive in London before my folks leave. I know they would love to see their

granddaughter and meet you both. Their names are Malik and Saja Hadad. They'll be working in Ghana in Africa until sometime near the end of next May or as late as July 1. Is that okay?"

"That's perfectly fine and we wouldn't leave her alone," he winked at Hadad and glanced at Amelia, "unless we decide to adopt her and take her to America."

Amelia blushed and giggled. "Oooooohhh yeah..."

Denise chuckled, "Oh, instant family..."

"Quit ganging up on me," Hadad moaned. He clutched his chest in mock pain. "My heart can't take it."

"Okay, folks," Janet announced just then. "Dinner's ready."

After a very pleasant dinner, Denise mentioned that she wanted some private time to talk to Amelia, and Hadad and Kevin told her to go ahead; Hadad wanted to discuss the financial arrangements he wanted to make with Kevin and discuss the medical care Amelia had received to date and what her doctors had recommended. Janet stayed with them while the girls went back out to the garden courtyard.

"Oh, Denise, I don't have the words to say how much..." Amelia began.

"Shhhhhh, it's okay, seeing your grateful expression was thanks enough, honey," Denise said quietly, holding her hand.

"But how did you know... how could you tell I was hurting? And Kevin saw too, right away; I saw his expression and he looked almost like he was crying when he looked away."

"Sweetie, Kevin is an incredible, wonderful, sensitive person," Denise said soothingly. "He has such a caring soul and a very strong empathic sense, almost like a radar, he picks up people's feelings. In our high school, on his very first day there, he saw me in an awful situation and basically saved my life; I'll tell you that story later. Anyway, both he and I can feel the pain you're living with. It shows in your face and how you hold your body too. Can you tell me any more?"

"Yes, it's a gnawing pain from the cutting. My doctor said I got an infection 'cuz the cutting wasn't sterile—the woman didn't even clean my privates before she started. And I have adhesives..."

Denise interjected, "It's adhesions, I think, dear."

"Oh, right. There are scars there too. There's also scarring in my vagina, from the infection. But the worst is pain from where the cut was, 'cuz a nerve there was damaged. And at first the doctors said the pain would stop when the cut healed. It didn't; it got worse! One doctor said it was in my mind 'cuz of my scary experience. Papa had to work hard to find doctors who would believe me."

"Oh, you poor girl," Denise murmured. "I know just how you feel; I wasn't cut like you were, but

I was molested and injured there—bruised and a laceration too. Then Kevin helped me find someone who understood and knew how to treat me to stop the pain.”

“Oh Denise,” Amelia cried and grabbed her in an embrace. “Can you help me too like that? Oh please say yes...” she sobbed.

“We’ll try really hard, dear,” Denise held her hand soothingly. “I’m sure there are wonderful medical facilities in London. Kevin had serious pain in his privates too, you know, boy parts...” Amelia giggled. “...and he worked with some docs who figured it out, after a bunch had tried and failed. I’m certain the docs there can help you too. So it must be fate that brought us together—we all suffered the same kind of thing, actually.”

“Oh my...” Amelia looked at Denise intently. “Yes, it’ll be wonderful to have someone to talk with about how I feel... I so miss my mum ‘cuz we could talk about anything. Papa is very caring but he gets so embarrassed to talk about my... um... girl problems. Janet has been wonderful to me, but it’s not like family, I guess.”

“So how do you get by in school? Did the cutting cause any stigma?” Denise asked.

“No, not at all. Most of the kids are international or from the upper class—this isn’t something that’s ever discussed. But I don’t have to do the physical ed classes. Shame, ‘cuz I loved football and can’t do that now, it’s too rough. I love acting and drama, though, ‘cuz it lets me forget who I am—I become someone else, even when I’m learning parts, and can forget about my pains.”

“I see,” Denise said, smiling. “So besides your general pains, are there other problems too?”

“Yes,” Amelia looked down. “It’s embarrassing...”

“Hey, don’t be; it’s just us girls here.”

“Well, touching there is bad. Like wiping myself after peeing—it hurts. A lot. I can’t use a tampon and pads are irritating, they rub near the parts that were cut. The other girls talk about playing with their clitties and it being nice but for me it’s terrible.” Her tears had begun flowing again.

“Oh, sweetie. I’m so happy that you won’t have to wait another year for treatment, then,” Denise said as she took both of Amelia’s hands, brought them to her lips and kissed them.

Amelia threw herself into Denise’s arms and they embraced.

“I think I love you, Denise,” Amelia whispered. “Thank you so, so much.”

“Me too, Amelia. So let’s be honorary sisters, then, okay?” Denise suggested.

“Oh *YES!*” Amelia shouted and hugged her again.

Hadad poked his head out the door. “Everything okay, darling? I heard you shout.”

“Yeah, Papa, it’s very okay. Denise is my official big sister now.”

“Okay, I think?... umm...” he said, bemused. “Ahh... So I trust your talk went well then.”

“Yes, Papa, we shared our secrets and Denise is just wonderful; she understands everything. I’m so happy we met her and Kevin.”

Hadad smiled at Denise. “Hmmm, looks like you have a special talent, just like Kevin does. Two Pied Pipers, bewitching young teens. Janet told me what the two of you did in both your high schools with those kids you helped.”

“Oh, she didn’t!” Denise said, blushing. “I hope she kept it ‘G’-rated.”

“I’ll admit I was kind of shocked by all of that nonsense that was happening in the schools,” Hadad commented. “But I can see after meeting you two how you managed to bring virtually the entire U.S. government to its knees,” he chuckled. “Come on in now; we’ve discussed all we can about Amelia’s medical treatments without having her records here to review. Amelia, let’s do some planning for your trip to London, your schooling, and your stay with these two wizards. Janet’s getting her laptop out so we can explore London now, so let’s check out some likely schools.”

They did some preliminary research on the web, and over the next several days, they planned Amelia’s year in London.

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Several days later, Janet mentioned to Kevin that she had received a call from the U.S. Embassy. The staff had noticed from their reports that Kevin had arrived in the country.

“Kevin, looks like you’re quite the celebrity. Roger Vickers—you know, the ambassador to Indonesia—wants to know if you’d have time to stop by to meet him. He’s one of your biggest fans, you know, how you pulled off the destruction of an entire U.S. federal agency.”

“Ha! He kind of had a part in that too, since he got President Gerston involved and that got everyone’s attention,” Kevin commented. “That was where the downfall of the agency began, actually.”

Four days before Kevin and Denise were to leave for London, they finally were able to get to meet Vickers and his senior staff.

When they were ushered into the embassy’s reception hall, a tall, burly giant of a man detached himself from the group he was talking with and strode over to them.

“Welcome, welcome, Denise, Kevin!” he boomed. “I’m Roger Vickers and it’s a great honor to meet both of you. And particularly you, Kevin, to give you my condolences about the loss of your parents. Your mom Audrey was a fine, fine person and a terrible loss for you and for her country too. And your dad, so terrible.” Kevin acknowledged his comment. “Anyway, on a happier note, my girls wanted me to relay a message to you because they couldn’t in person but I only agreed to deliver the verbal part.”

He looked at Denise's puzzled expression and boomed a laugh. "The non-verbal part was to give Kevin hugs and kisses from them..."

Denise grinned, "Oh, my... Is that about what I think? They're teens, right?"

"Yes ma'am," he confirmed. "I'll be returning to the States next month—accepted a university presidency actually—and my family is already there now. Otherwise I wouldn't have been able to keep the girls away today. And being back in the States, if that damned Program was still operating, the girls would have been eligible. Kevin saw to its demise—you too, as I understand. Say, maybe I'll deliver my thanks to you as Kevin's proxy?" he grinned.

Kevin looked at Denise with a smile and tiny nod; she reached out to him, embraced him, and kissed him on the cheek, which he returned with a slight blush. Denise noticed it.

"Why, Mister Ambassador, I do believe you're blushing," she chided.

"It's not very often I get a chance to hug such a delightful person," he defended himself.

Kevin smiled broadly at him and took Denise's hand. "I think I can guess the verbal part then?" he prompted.

Vickers grinned. "Well, I know very well how modest you are... from my attempts to find out how you were involved with the federal Program agency, son, your tracks were so convoluted, it took three federal agencies to figure out who you were. And then I heard from Harry about your meeting with him... President Gerston, that is, about how you tried to disclaim everything and tried to convince him it was an entire committee of high schoolers who were behind everything..."

Kevin was trying to butt in.

"...no, Kevin, I do know the whole story now, including about your Marine friends too. I've got to come up with a way to harness your talents; your friends' too, so this isn't the last time you'll hear from me. Lots of folks are very interested to see where you land when you grow up." He laughed again. "So, Mr Modest Coris, my girls say you're better than a rock star; you saved those kidnapping victims from slavery plus many thousands of girls from humiliation and embarrassment. So instead of a rock star photo, they have—get this—a life-sized photo poster of you hanging on the wall of each of their rooms!"

Denise gasped, "Oh god, wearing clothes, I hope!"

Vickers boomed a laugh again. "Well, they *did* try to find a Program picture but my wife and I vetoed that! You're their rock star! Come now; let's meet the staff and get some lunch."

Kevin looked at Denise and he shrugged; she grabbed him by the ears and pulled him into a kiss. "You're *my* rock star," she whispered.

At lunch, the conversation turned to how Vickers knew the president.

"We were roommates in college for our last three years, sharing a tiny room in our frat house.

Harry was the nerdy one, always in the books, and I was the jock. Football, as you might guess from my build. We made an unlikely pair. Can I tell you a secret?” They nodded. “You know how the jocks get the girls and the nerds go dateless?” They nodded. “Well, with us it was the opposite. Girls flocked to Harry. He got *me* dates! In fact, he was the matchmaker in fixing me up with my future wife!”

They laughed.

Denise looked thoughtful. “Yes, I felt that way about him, a kind of charisma that drew me in. That’s good in a politician, actually.”

“So how did you become a diplomat, anyway? I’m very aware that you’re appointed by the president and not in the Foreign Service,” Kevin asked.

“Ah, it was a favor to Harry, actually. He needed a politically neutral ambassador appointee and my degrees are in political science, economics, and public policy. There were some important Pacific rim trade agreements that needed negotiating so he asked me to do this gig for him,” Vickers replied. “Actually, that gig got us out of the U.S. just when the Program came to the girls’ school, so they love Harry for getting them away from that too,” he chuckled, “*BUT* I have to tell him that *HE* didn’t get *HIS* picture on their walls.”

“Hmmm, somehow I don’t think he’d be all that devastated,” Denise smirked.

“Oh, say, before I forget,” Vickers said, changing the subject, “Your friend Warren Porter—the South Korean chargé—was posted to London last fall. He’s deputy chief there now. You probably heard about that, since I recall that your families were close friends; that means you’ll get to see them more while you’re at school there.”

“Oh yes, I’m looking forward to seeing them. We try to keep in touch by videochat but that’s tough to do with the time difference,” Kevin said.

Kevin spent the rest of his visit learning about several mutual acquaintances who had been serving in various embassies, getting updated about their current postings. Soon they took their leave with the promise to keep in touch.

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Two days before Kevin and Denise were to leave for London, Janet held a farewell party for the pair and invited everyone who knew the Corises, including Ambassador Vickers and several staff members from the embassy and some of the consular officers. About fifty people were able to come.

After dinner, several friends of the Corises rose to say a few words in Audrey’s and Paul’s memory and then Kevin took the microphone and went over to where Denise was seated and stood next to her.

“I want to thank all of you, friends whom I regard as more than just friends and some of you almost as my extended family—I grew up with many of you—for all of the wonderful things

you've said about my parents here, publically, and to me in private," Kevin began. "I will always treasure your friendship and I promise to keep in touch. I think all of you have met and become enchanted by my wonderful girlfriend, Denise Roberts, who has accompanied me in virtually all of my travels and tribulations since I last left Jakarta four long years ago. She has been with me in both body and spirit."

He took her left hand in his, dropped to his knee in front of her, and everyone gasped; Denise's other hand flew to her mouth as she stared at him, openmouthed.

"Denise, I want to share the rest of my life with you, darling. Will you marry me?"

"YES!" she exclaimed as the room broke into applause and cheers. "OH YES!"

Kevin had palmed a ring in his hand and quickly slipped it on her finger as she stood up and embraced him tightly.

"Kevin, I don't know how you hid that from me," Denise chided him. "I thought I could read you like a book, and here you go and surprise me like that. I had no idea," she finished as they were swarmed with well-wishers.

Amelia ran up to the couple with tears streaming from her eyes. "God, that was so beautiful. Better than the cinema. Kevin, if Denise is my big sister, that makes you my big brother, right?" she asked shyly.

Kevin hugged her. "Of course, sweetheart. It would be wonderful to finally have a sister, especially one as pretty as you."

Amelia blushed. "I'm so happy for you..." she whispered and remained at Denise's side, arm around her waist.

Hadad and Janet pushed their way into the group surrounding the engaged couple; both hugged the pair and expressed their congratulations. The rest of the evening was occupied by Denise and Kevin talking with their well-wishers as the guests gradually left the hall.

Hadad and Amelia left with the last guests as Hadad told Kevin he'd have a copy of Amelia's school and medical records ready the following afternoon, and her guardianship papers were all complete and had been registered properly at the British embassy for transmission to London. Amelia hugged the couple and then they left and Kevin and Denise helped Janet as they prepared to leave the hall themselves.

"My, that was a nice surprise you pulled on us," Janet commented. "You really did keep Denise in the dark. When did you have the time to get that gorgeous ring?" she asked, holding Denise's hand as she admired it.

Kevin smiled. "The web is wonderful, Aunt Janet. I found a picture of the ring I wanted for her and sent it to Chow Tai Fook at the mall. I recalled that they're one of the biggest jewelers around so I figured they could get something close and obviously they did. I picked it up last week on my way back from our Sukaraja clinic."

“And when do you want to have the big day?” Janet continued.

“Well, Denise and I have to decide that. I’m thinking right after we graduate—that seem okay, darling?”

“Mmmm? ...oh sorry, Kevin, I was lost in my thoughts.” She had been caressing the ring on her finger. “Yes, when we graduate; that would be nice then. OH! I have to call Mom! She’ll just freak!”

“Well, now’s a good time; it’s... um... 10:45 in the morning there now, you know,” Janet said, consulting her watch.

Kevin gave her his cell phone and she made the call; Janet and Kevin grinned at each other at her little squeals as she spoke to her mother. Then she came over.

“Can we go home and get on videochat now? Then we can all talk to Mom and I can show her the ring!”

Kevin texted their close friends Roger and Cynthia Denison to give them the news and soon received return congratulatory messages. They stayed up far into the night, videochatting with the Denisons and then a few other friends.

Soon their stay in Jakarta came to its end and the couple left for London.

### Chapter 3

Kevin's cell phone rang as he was sitting in their flat, looking over the textbooks he had purchased for his classes.

"Can you get that, please, honey? It must be on my nightstand!" he called.

Denise was in their bedroom. "Yeah, got it!"

He heard the murmur of her conversation; then Denise walked into the sitting room.

"It's Malik Hadad, they've checked in at the Bath Road Hotel at Heathrow. They want to meet Amelia's flight tomorrow with us," she said, handing Kevin the phone.

"Hello, Malik, yes, that would be great. And let's all have dinner together then. Your flight leaves the following day, right?" Kevin said. "Good; Amelia's shipment of her clothes and stuff came yesterday so she's all set. Elliott told us she'd only have a backpack and another small case so her customs should go quickly.... Okay, then.... Well, we'll meet you at the international arrivals lounge at 3:30.... Sure; 'bye then."

Kevin turned to Denise. "All set; let's do this with taxis—be easier. Amelia'll be tired. That was a long trip for us when we did it and she had that layover in Qatar too."

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The following afternoon, Kevin and Denise were waiting with the Hadads at the exit from customs.

"There she is!" Denise called.

"Where?" Saja looked at the crowd emerging from the corridor. "Oh my! Bab, yes, my goodness, cor blimey, how she's gorra grown up!"

Amelia saw the group and ran up to them, dropping her bags, and wrapping her arms around her grandmother.

"Nenek! I missed you so much!" she squealed and then grabbed Malik. "Hello, Petu, missed you too." She kissed him. "These are my new big sis and brother," she declared to them, grabbing Denise's and Kevin's hands and then hugging them both.

Kevin whispered to Denise, "*Nenek* and *petu*—it's actually *petulu*—are Indonesian, grandma and grandpa."

"I figured," she whispered back.

"Got all your bags, bab?" Malik asked Amelia and she nodded, smiling. "Well, bab, let's start our duck, then."

At dinner and later in the lounge of the Hadads' hotel, Amelia told her grandparents about her school activities, including the plays she had performed in, during her last school term. Of course

they knew all about her injuries and expressed their dismay about how difficult it was to try to stop the practice of FGM all over the world. And on more than one occasion they praised Kevin and Denise for stepping in as Amelia's guardians so that she could get her medical treatment.

They left the Hadads after about an hour's visit at the hotel, since Amelia was quite tired and the Hadads had an early flight. Amelia lovingly hugged her grandparents farewell and Kevin and Denise received their own emotional parting hugs from the older couple, who promised that they'd send their contact information when they arrived in Accra so that they all could keep in touch.

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Two days later, Denise and Kevin went with Amelia to her new school to take care of the final registration steps and for Amelia to buy her school uniform clothes and other supplies that the school's website said were needed. Since Amelia had previously been in a school in England, and uniforms were required in Indonesia too, this wasn't a surprise for her or Kevin, who grew up in countries where school uniforms were mandatory, but for Denise, who wasn't used to uniforms, the idea was strange. Especially when they went to the school store to get some of the uniform items and she noticed a note in the dress policy.

"Look, Kevin, look at this," she pointed and read it aloud, "'Girls are to wear white or light-coloured unpadded bras; our school's governors believe that coloured bras which are visible through pupils' blouses are offensive to a modest appearance. Also, white or light-coloured panties must be worn as well, and must have full fronts and backs. Boys are to wear black or navy boxer shorts or full briefs and black or grey socks.' I wonder, do they do briefs, bra, and panties checks here?" she asked, amazed.

"Oh, I really hope not," Amelia blushed. "I see that girls can wear pants here and I'm more comfortable with them than skirts. And I won't need the PE kit, right?"

"Oh yes—thanks, Amelia, I almost forgot about your PE exemption. Let's go back to the office and take care of that," Denise said.

They reentered the school office. "Excuse me," she asked the clerk, "we also need to get a PE exemption for Amelia."

"Well then, that'll require a doctor's note and the 'ed teacher will need to see ee," the clerk answered. "If you can meet now, I'll see if she's free."

"Yes, thank you."

About five minutes later, they were ushered into the office of Rosemary Pittsdon, the head teacher. She rose when they entered.

"A PE exemp'ion, miss," the clerk announced.

"Very good," Pittsdon replied, "and you are?" spoken to the three.

“I’m Denise Roberts. This is Kevin Coris and our ward, Amelia Hadad. She just arrived in London and we’re here getting her supplies.”

“Ah yes. Amelia. Our late admit. Yes, I recognize you, young lady; your acting on the clips you sent was excellent. I’m looking forward to your studies with us.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” Amelia said.

“You have a very good academic record as I recall, and yes, I also recall that you were to be here with guardians. But you are requesting a PE exemption? PE is an important part of your development, you know.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Amelia agreed. “But I was injured several years ago and PE activities are simply too painful; besides, it might worsen it.”

“We would require a medical certificate. Do you have one? We could exempt you for a short period until you obtain one if necessary.”

Denise spoke. “Amelia brought an up-to-date one with her when she arrived. Here’s a copy. I hope you can accept one from a hospital in Jakarta.”

“Hmmm, I see no reason why not,” Pittsdon said. “I see it says ‘traumatic groin injury.’”

“Yes ma’am,” Denise confirmed, “In fact that’s why Amelia is in London now, for treatment. In fact, we’ll periodically need to have her released from classes early to go for treatments, as I understand. This will be over the next six-month period, I was told.”

“We can certainly accommodate her medical treatments although Amelia will be responsible for her missed work.”

“Absolutely. She knows that, ma’am,” Denise acknowledged as Amelia nodded her head.

“Quite. Well then, young lady, this won’t mean that you get free time here,” Pittsdon smiled, “we shall expect that you take on a project during your PE time; one that won’t be physical but will teach you the importance of keeping physically active. I trust that this shall not present a problem?”

“Oh no, ma’am,” Amelia. “I used to love playing football. I can’t now, but there are still things I can do to keep active.”

“Well said, young lady. We’ll have you meet with our PE teachers then, to design a program for your special needs. Is that all you need, um... hah, I can’t use your surname; there are three different ones... anyway, is there anything else... Amelia, I see you raising your hand. Yes, dear.”

“Um, this is a little embarrassing but I need to know, ma’am,” she ventured. “Um, in the dress policy about undies...”

“Ha, ha,” Pittsdon laughed. “Yes, we hear that question all the time. No, we don’t have knickers inspections. We state those rules because we want to stress modesty in dress. We don’t want for

our pupils to call special attention to the way they're dressed and our governors decided that wearing modest underwear will set the tone for all clothing you wear. Does this reassure you?"

Amelia nodded vigorously. "Yes ma'am."

"Excellent. Thank you for coming in today; it was a pleasure meeting you, and Amelia, I'm really pleased you'll be with us. I'll be looking forward for when you have your stage performances."

They left the office and purchased the items Amelia needed, her school clothes and the recommended supplies.

On the way out, Amelia looked wistfully at the bike racks outside the building.

"I used to love riding, you know," she remarked. "I'd love to be able to ride to school instead of taking that bus. Maybe someday I'll be able to..." she trailed off as Denise slipped her arm around her waist.

"Let's hope for it, sweetie," Denise said. "Let's go home and drop off this stuff. Kevin has some errands to do now, so let's go to that big shopping mall—we need to get you a mobile phone and a laptop computer for you to use. And how about looking for some clothes at Morleys for everyday wear? You won't be in school always, right?"

"Oh yes! Thanks, Denise!" she exclaimed.

Later, as they were shopping in Morleys, Denise asked Amelia, "You mentioned that one of your therapists had you use whirlpools and you said that you like gentle swimming, sweetie. There's a health club near our flat that Kevin's checked out and we're going to join. They have a pool and spa there. Interested?"

"Oh sure! Um, but I didn't pack any swimsuits to bring."

"Well, we're in the store right now, and I'll bet the swimwear must be on sale; I hope there's still some stock. Let's look, okay?"

Soon they had picked out some cute suits and Amelia went into the fitting room to try them on. After a few minutes, she called Denise.

"Umm, Denise? Can you come in? I need help."

"Are you okay?"

"Oh sure, but I need your opinion," Amelia giggled.

Denise slipped into the room and looked at the girl, who was wiggling into a dark blue single-piece suit. She gasped. "Oh my!"

Amelia looked at her.

"Oh dear—your clothes hide your figure, dear. My goodness, you could be a fashion model."

A deep flush spread from Amelia's face down to her chest. Denise took in her youthful figure.

She had a perfect hourglass shape with high, firm breasts, a small C-cup, Denise thought, and a round perky derriere. Standing at about five feet, five inches, she radiated a nubile femininity.

“Denise! You’re embarrassing me,” she chided.

“Can’t help staring; you’re a vision of loveliness, honey.”

“Awww, thanks. Papa says I’m getting to look a lot like my mum and she was a stunner. Come on, tell me how this looks now!”

“Don’t you think it’s a bit tight? Look on top here, it’s pretty small for your chest, don’t you think?”

“Yessss, maybe... I must still be growing up there,” she mused. “Let me try this one, it’s a bit bigger, I think.”

Eventually they picked out three suits and left for home with their purchases.

After dinner that evening, Amelia was sitting with Kevin and Denise watching the news on the TV when a news story about Atlanta began to be aired. It was quickly apparent to the watchers that it held no interest for them, and then the news turned to sports. Denise waved her hand at the screen and Kevin took the remote and shut the TV, but Amelia’s expression had become thoughtful.

“Denise...?” she ventured.

“Yes, sweetie?”

“Um, you came from Atlanta... when you lived in America...?”

“Well, yes, but I grew up in a town near Raleigh in North Carolina, honey. Why do you ask?”

Amelia blushed. “Remember when we met? I asked you how you and Kevin knew there was something wrong with me. You said it was a sense you and Kevin had, or something, and you told me that he knew there was something wrong when he first met you and saved your life. You said that you’d tell me that story, but you never had the chance, I guess. Hearing about Atlanta reminded me.”

Kevin chuckled. “I suppose I should leave the two of you to share those girlie secrets...”

“Um, no, please, Kevin,” Amelia demurred. “I want to hear how you protected my big sister so you’ll protect me too, big brother,” she smiled at him.

“Okay, then. Some of the story can be pretty intense, so tell Denise if you get uncomfortable.”

“Oh really? Now I *absolutely* want to hear it!”

Denise chuckled ruefully. “Yeah. I might get a bit uncomfortable revisiting some of that history.”

“Remember how good that therapy was, sweetheart—um, it was ‘Prolonged Exposure,’ right?” Kevin asked.

“Oh my... I haven’t thought about that in years... yes, the reliving of the events was a major key, wasn’t it...?” she mused. “Oh!” she snapped out of her reverie, “Okay, Amelia, it’s a little complicated but let’s see. It happened when I was 13, the spring before I started high school. My mother’s boyfriend at the time, the creep, began trying to molest me and one day that summer he tried to rape me. I fought him but he scratched and bruised my privates when he tore off my panties and bruised my vulva when he tried to penetrate me. Also a sharp edge from his pants belt buckle gave me a deep cut in there. He was stopped when the police came; a neighbor had heard my screams.”

“Oh, oh,” Amelia shuddered, “that was my age when I got cut...”

“Are you okay, darling?” Denise asked.

“Yes, but how did Kevin save you? Weren’t the police the ones...”

“Oh, that was later. See, I had this trauma—the scratches from his nails were bad, but that deep laceration in my perineum was worse—they eventually healed but left me with some scarring and the area was painful for some time. I don’t remember how long, because the psychological scarring damaged me so much that when I touched myself in my crotch, I would get spasms and the pain would return.”

“Oh, Denise, no wonder you said you understood... nobody else has made me think they knew how I feel...” she sniffled as Denise embraced her.

“Still okay, sweetie?” Denise asked. Getting a little nod, she went on. “Soon we’ll be where Kevin comes in. I don’t know if you ever heard of a school program in America where the kids have to be naked.”

“Oh, I heard some joking about that but I thought it wasn’t serious—was it? It wasn’t a joke?”

“No, dear. It really happened. At the end of my sophomore year, that’s year ten, I was picked to be one of the pupils who were supposed to take their turn to be naked. Every week a bunch were chosen and they had to spend a week in school completely naked.”

Amelia’s face turned bright red and a look of horror spread across it. “NO! Eeww! Oh, that’s awful!”

“I agree, it was. Can I go on?” Denise asked. Amelia nodded again. “I had gotten a medical exemption letter, because of my history, but the school wouldn’t honor it. I refused to get undressed, so a teacher held me while another started to take off my clothes forcibly. I must have gone into shock, because the next thing I remembered was waking up in the hospital. I didn’t go back to school that term; there were only two weeks left, anyway. That summer I got a lot of counseling and my doc said if I were forced again, it could cause permanent psychological harm.”

“Oh, I can’t believe it! I can’t believe they could be so cruel—I could never do that. I was taught to be modest. Mum was a Muslim—she didn’t practice, but she said girls must keep their

modesty to be honorable,” Amelia breathed, her face was still quite red.

“Being naked—having your modesty stripped away—of course that’s bad, but it’s not the *really* bad part of the Program, honey,” Denise said. “The really bad part is that you have to let everyone touch your privates and you can be forced to masturbate while the others watch you. Sometimes they even allowed the boys to put their fingers into the girls’ vaginas.”

“Oh *NO!*” she shrieked. “How could they let that happen? OH—you had that pain in your privates and if you were touched there—no wonder you went into shock!”

“Yes—and this is where Kevin arrived. When school resumed for my junior year—year eleven, they picked me again on the first week, because I didn’t do the week in the spring. They were still ignoring my exemption. But Kevin had just started in my school—he actually had just arrived in America the previous week—and he was in the office registering, when they picked him to be in the naked group too. Then I got dragged into the principal’s office; Kevin was in there too, saw what was happening to me, and kind of took over and stopped the principal from forcing ANYONE to strip that day, including me—he even got the whole first week of the Program canceled, and then got them to change how they ran the Program.”

“Well, not really...” Kevin objected.

“Oh yes you did! Remember the stories of how bad the Program crap was during the spring before you came? And the awful things that that Abover thug had the teachers doing? You got the Guardians organized and made teachers follow the rules. And started the website. And found out about the kidnappers. And best of all, you saved my life—I think I might have killed myself, I was so, so depressed,” Denise choked, her eyes filling with tears.

Kevin reached out to Denise and both he and Amelia hugged her.

“So what happened then?” Amelia whispered, fascinated by the tale.

“Kevin is unreal; somehow he just makes things happen,” Denise collected herself and went on. “He got a lawyer and started to do things to tear down the Program and he got me a therapist who knew how to treat my own problem and he got the school to agree for us to do the Naked in School Program without us having to get naked! Can you imagine? Unreal! You know, the U.S. president gave him an award for the things he did.”

Kevin huffed impatiently, but Amelia’s eyes goggled as she looked at him.

“Yep, Amelia, he’s a national hero. The kids in our high school called him their super-hero, and that was even before the president’s award.”

“Okay, Denise, enough of that. Amelia, Denise also got an award from the president.”

“Oh my god,” Amelia breathed. “Oh my... no wonder Papa and Janet... oh my... they think you two are the best people in the world.”

“See, Denise? I hate this... I hate being stuck on a pedestal like that; I’m an ordinary person,

really, Amelia. I don't know why everything I do becomes such a big deal."

Denise snorted. "It's because you make things happen, darling. You take bad situations and make good things happen and that makes people around you feel good. Anyway, Amelia, Kevin also had his own medical problem and I want to see if I can get him embarrassed now," she giggled. "So tell Amelia about yourself now, my studly hero. Jeez, I haven't said that in years..." she giggled again.

Kevin shook his head. "Denise, I love your giggles. They make me all squirmy inside. Anyway, my story, really? It's not 'G'-rated, you know."

"Hey, Amelia's old enough," Denise stated flatly. "Actually, unless we give her a blindfold and earplugs, she's gonna learn plenty, sharing the flat with us this year..." Amelia turned bright red again and cupped her face in her hands. "...so you can tell her how we were able to overcome both of our medical problems. It'll show her that we *both* really know something of what she's experienced."

"Well, fine," Kevin sighed. "Amelia, dear, you must have had sex ed in school, right?" She nodded uncertainly. "So this won't be too graphic, I hope. You know that boys' penises have a covering on the head, the foreskin, right? If they hadn't gotten a circumcision, that is." Another nod. "Well, my foreskin was way too tight and when I hit puberty and my... um... part... grew a bit..."

"A lot..." Denise interjected, indicating a size with her hands, and giggled.

Amelia's jaw dropped and she stared at Kevin.

"Shit, Denise. You stop that. Well, boys get nocturnal erections, it's normal, not sexual, and this one time I got one and it got stuck erect. My foreskin kind of kept my penis filled with blood, the front part, anyway, and it was terribly painful, it's really a medical emergency if that happens. It was treated but it took a while for them to get to me and I was left with some kind of nerve damage..."

Amelia's hands were up at her face again.

"You ok, sweetie?" Kevin stopped to ask.

"Yes... I can't believe it; so you also know how it must feel for me..." she breathed.

Kevin took her hand. "Maybe. We each feel pain differently, but probably our pain experiences are kind of similar. Anyway, the damage caused me to have this incredible sensitivity to touching and if my penis moved too much, that hurt too, so I had to wear tight underwear and use a numbing cream. So obviously, I had my own medical reason to keep me out of the Program where I'd have to be naked and my penis would be handled by anyone who wanted and where I would be forced to have erections. Fortunately, I was able to find doctors who figured out what was wrong and I got treated. That's why Denise and I want to help you. We both could sense that you were in pain and Denise knows that I'm a sucker for people in need. Especially anyone as

pretty as you are,” he finished with a grin.

“Oh, Kevin, you’re so wonderful!” Amelia cried as she hugged him. “I’m so happy that we were brought together, like you and Denise were?” she said shyly. “Like the fates, we all had the same kind of problem. This is like a fairy tale but even better ‘cuz with me, it’s a handsome prince *and also* a beautiful princess come riding to my rescue!”

Kevin and Denise chortled at the imagery of a white horse carrying two riders to rescue damsel Amelia.

“Well, we sure hope we both don’t turn back into frogs when this is all over,” Kevin joked and they all laughed.

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On the weekend before classes began for everyone, Kevin had arranged to meet Jeremy at his *dojang* while Denise was to take Amelia to the health club so she could see the facilities.

As Kevin arrived at the *dojang*, a car pulled up and Jeremy hopped out with his bag.

“Hi, Kevin,” he called. “This’ll be great... I’ll introduce you to *Chungsah nim* Raymond and the people here. I hope you’ll like them and study here.”

“We’ll see... say, who dropped you off? I didn’t recognize her?”

He chuckled. “My security detail. State’s stepped up embassy security all over, recently. They drive us around in plain cars and watch us kids too. I’m gonna be driven to school now and not take the bus.”

Kevin had a vigorous workout during the next hour and a half and was very impressed by Jeremy. The instructors were interested to see some of the moves Kevin had picked up in the U.S. and Kevin saw some techniques which he wanted to practice. He was gratified to learn that his skills appeared to be securely at the fifth degree level when he got to spar with the *dojang*’s owner, Master Raymond, who assured him that if he studied there he could test for the sixth degree in mid spring.

After the workout, he was dressing with Jeremy.

“Glad Master Raymond said I could use a locker here to keep my *dobak* and other stuff. Say Jeremy, when do you think Denise and I can come visit again? Denise wants to talk some more to Naomi and we have a high school girl living with us who maybe you’d like to meet.”

“Gee, I don’t know... Dad is so busy—Mum too. There’s this G7 summit meeting in Brussels coming up in two weeks and the president and his wife will be there so the embassy is in an uproar over the planning needed in case Mr Gerston decides to come to London after the meeting. I’ll mention it and text you what they think.”

They were walking out the door.

“Hey, my ride’s here... maybe she could drop you off somewhere?” Jeremy said.

“No thanks, buddy, but thanks for the offer. Got a quick shopping assignment from Denise before I head home. See ya next time!”

## Chapter 4

On Monday, school started up for the three of them. Denise went with Amelia on her quick bus ride to school since her own Monday class started later. Denise wanted to be sure that Amelia felt secure in her trip there, the teen had such an endearing air of shyness and vulnerability, it seemed.

“Amelia, sweetie,” Denise said as they were seating themselves in the bus. “It seems to me that you’re quite shy. Yet you still went out for performing in dramas and plays and stuff. How does a shy person do that?”

Amelia shook her head slowly. “I don’t know, really. I think it’s ‘cuz I can become someone else and not have to be me. Then my pain and all doesn’t bother me as much and I can forget for a while.”

Alarm bells suddenly went off in Denise’s head; she realized that she herself had some of those feelings after her molestation... “*What did her shrink call it...?*” she thought, “*oh yeah, ‘dissociative disorder,’ that was it... but at least Amelia’s handling her reality avoidance in a constructive way. Oh my, I need to keep this in mind and maybe see if she might need some kind of therapy if she seems to start to really lose touch with reality... that almost happened to me...*”

She shook her head to clear it.

“Well, sweetie, you’ll get plenty of chances for acting here, it seems. I’ll bet you get the leading gal roles, too. Wonder what kind of guy your leading man will be, huh?” she joked.

“Oh yes, but I hope he’d be more grown up than some of the boys in my last school. All they wanted was to touch the girls ‘cuz they thought it was romantic. And the acting coach had to keep reminding them to look at who they were talking to and not at the audience,” she grinned. “Oh, look, our stop is next.”

They got out and walked the block to the school; Denise hugged her and told her to have a good day and reminded her that she and Kevin would be home about an hour after she got back from school. Then she hung back and watched Amelia make her way with the other kids into the building. It felt so strange.

*“Is this what it’s like to send your kid off to school for the first time?” she wondered. “Wow, it feels like Amelia is not just my honorary little sister; I almost feel like I’m her mom—we’ve made such a bond. What a super person she is, I really hope her treatments work...”*

Denise turned and left, departing for her first class in London.

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That evening, the three shared their day’s events. Kevin was very keen to hear how Amelia’s day went; Denise had returned home a half hour earlier but Amelia would only tell her that the day was “good,” wanting to have Kevin hear everything too.

“Okay, your ‘brother’s’ here now, so spill it,” Denise ordered, as Kevin put down the bags of carry-out food he had brought in with him.

Kevin looked up and smiled. “Oh, you saved a morsel of news for me? I thought that Denise would have squeezed it all out of you and I’d only get the dregs.”

“Oh, Kevin, you’re so funny...” Amelia hugged him. “No, I wanted you to hear and didn’t want to do it twice.”

“So give,” Denise growled.

“I like it there! The teachers are nice and I made a couple of friends too. I’m not the only one new there. There were two new girls—just got here from India—twins—and one from Nigeria; they like acting too. And my subjects are interesting and the maths teacher is so cool! He does funny overacting things when he’s explaining something. He said he has to, it’s in his contract since the school is a performing arts specialty school. So he can’t just teach maths, he has to perform it.”

“So did they have a panties check?” Kevin grinned.

“Oh, Kevin, you’re too much,” Amelia smirked.

“Yeah, Kevin thinks he’s a comedian. He was like that in high school too, and we had to keep putting him in his place,” Denise mock-scowled at him.

“I think the humor was to lighten all that serious stuff that kept happening,” Kevin said soberly. “Gallows humor, waiting for the other shoe to drop,” he sighed.

“So true,” Denise confirmed. “Anything else? What about PE? How will you be doing your PE project?”

“That should work out good, I think. I have the notes in my bag. Since I can do some physical things, I’ll be doing some exercise and writing reports. And you said I can use the health club you took me to if I want. Let’s see what I remember; I just need to do twelve hours this term and do it in five different activities. I can do some at the school and some at the club. Like swimming and using some of the weight machines. And on Saturday we saw that cool tai chi class at the club—I can get some videos of that on line and learn some postures. Walking on the school track or treadmill—oh yes, there was the elliptical leg thing at the club, too. I can go there after school, right? Good.

“Then I need to turn in reports that explain what I did, amount of time spent on each, the physical benefits they have, the sports that those different exercises help in, and how popular they are among people in general, so I can do some of that research in school. And they said I don’t need a PE kit even if I do the walking and tai chi at school, just to wear pants and tee shirt or other comfortable clothes.”

“Well, that sounds really good then,” Kevin said. “Keeping up your muscle tone is very important and was one of the keys to my treatment too. But please wait until we have your first appointment before you do any stretching involving your groin muscles, okay? There might be

moves you shouldn't do at first."

"Oh, I didn't think of that." Amelia said. "Do you think that I should do any of those things then?"

Kevin thought for a bit. "Well, swimming and walking are fine, but not running. If you use weight machines, maybe we should speak to one of the trainers at the club to see which ones would be best, to stay away from stretching the groin muscles. I know a little about tai chi; if you do the basic moves slowly, that shouldn't be any problem either. But wait on that elliptical trainer machine 'cause that can stress the groin and buttocks, okay? Same thing with the stair-stepper they have and the leg presses too. And if your pain level increases, let up on the intensity and you should be good."

"So then I can do this for my class? Oh good, 'cuz I need to do a contract thing with you and the teacher so you can sign for the things I do outside of school. I have a form to put this onto and I sign it and then you do."

They went on talking about the subject classes Amelia was taking and then Denise looked at Kevin.

"So, report on your day, sir," she ordered.

Amelia snickered. "Yeah, let's grill *him* now."

"So, after I took over the school and replaced all the profs with my cronies..." he began before their hooting drowned him out. "No, huh?" He looked crestfallen.

"Dumb comedian," Denise muttered. "You dork." She winked at Amelia.

Kevin grinned at them. "Not much to say. But wow, those classes will sure be intense! They've got really sharp people teaching and the students are way more focused than at Avery, that's for sure. This isn't going to be a cakewalk, but we knew that. I've already got two research papers assigned and this was only day one. I'm sure you don't care for the details and I'm not sure I could explain them myself, yet," he chuckled. "Now it's Denise's turn. How's the commuter school working?"

"Won't know about commuting till tomorrow," Denise said. "Monday's at UIL only. Tuesdays and Thursdays I have classes at both. So yeah, it's like you said. Intense. We found out what we'll be covering and I think I'm gonna be pretty busy too. But the classes sound fabulous and I'll enjoy them a lot, I think. I've got two new classes tomorrow at the ed school."

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The following day continued to be quite chilly, the unusual London heat spell had broken over a week earlier and suddenly temperatures were now unseasonably low. It was overcast, rain threatened, and overnight temperatures had dropped to 53 degrees. Kevin had to translate the weather report's 12 degrees to Fahrenheit for Denise; both he and Amelia were familiar with Celsius units. Everyone left for school early; Denise and Kevin traveled together and split up

when Kevin had to change trains while Denise continued on to her new classes at the education school.

Her first class was statistics, and she felt fairly certain that the subject wouldn't be any problem at all; this was more of a research class, applied statistics, than a theoretical one. Then, as she was on her way to her psych class in a nearby building, clenching her jacket against the chilling wind, she noticed a crying girl standing on a bench—absolutely stark naked except for her shoes and socks. Shivering—surrounded by three boys. They were pawing at her crotch and she was begging them to stop.

Startled, she ran over, pushed the boys apart, and threw her jacket over the girl, whose skin was tinted bluish and pulled taut with goose bumps.

“Hey, you can't do that,” one boy called. “I didn't have my turn!”

Ignoring him, Denise pulled the girl off the bench, grabbed her pack, and hustled her into the nearby building.

“What the hell is going on,” she demanded of the girl.

“Nekkid in school—we gotta do it...” she gasped, her jaw chattering with the cold, fear, and shock.

“What? That's only in high schools! It's not here too, is it?”

“Bloody yeah, it is. It's only just begun for us teacher trainees...” the girl replied, her eyes filled with tears.

“Listen! I have to get to class—you get right home and dress immediately or you'll catch pneumonia or the flu. Do it, I'm not kidding! When are you free—can you meet me at... um... 3:50 later today? I have ideas about killing this nudity crap in its tracks. I have a class soon at UIL but can get back here later. Meet me at the Union café, 3:50?”

She agreed, still shivering as she pulled Denise's jacket tighter.

“I'm Denise Roberts. You are?”

“Sharon Jones.”

“Okay—see you 3:50 then!” she called as she ran off, “return my jacket later!”

Denise made it to her class just before the instructor arrived, and found a seat, her pulse pounding in her temples.

“*Holy shit,*” she thought, “*I can't get away from this crap!*”

The instructor began going over the material that would be covered that term and then he looked at the people in the class.

“Now, I'd like each of you to tell us your name and if you've taken any other kind of psych

course and what it was about, so we'll all know everyone's general background."

Members of the class began introducing themselves and when Denise finished her turn, the instructor paused.

"Hmmm, yes, Miss Roberts, I have a note for you to see Dean Phillips after class today; his note says your schedule appears to be free then. He's in room 322 in the Admin Building."

Denise nodded, wondering what this was about.

Since she had two hours before she had to be at her UIL class, when her psych class was over, she went to Phillips' office. His secretary showed her in, then she took a seat in the room herself, her face settling into a sour expression. Denise gave her a puzzled look.

The dean spoke, "Ah, it's good to meet you finally, Miss Roberts. You were not at the required orientation of the entering teacher education class yesterday morning."

"Orientation? No sir, I met with one of your advisors about ten days ago and she specifically told me that I did not need to attend any orientation. That's when I completed my registration paperwork, and she told me that my two classes were confirmed. She said nothing about any other things I had to do when classes started—just to attend the classes I registered for."

Phillips looked at the secretary, who commented, "You had me review her file, Dr Phillips. A copy of the orientation letter that the new admits were sent isn't in Miss Roberts' file; actually none of the entering teacher-ed student instructions were sent to her, apparently."

"Sir, may I ask if there's a problem—and why is Mrs..." she glanced at the woman.

"Jaimeson," she offered.

"Mrs Jaimeson is at our meeting, why?" Denise asked. "Um, one second, please."

She palmed her mobile phone and activated its voice recording function. Kevin had taught her well.

Phillips spoke, "She's here as an observer. Our school's legal staff requires an observer to attend meetings like this one."

"And what is the purpose of such a meeting if the lawyers have to tell you how to conduct them?" Denise asked mildly.

Mrs Jaimeson shifted in her seat, looking most uncomfortable.

"Miss Roberts, you missed the introductory orientation of the teacher education course where we covered the responsibilities of the students in this university. One of the new student responsibilities is given in this booklet..."

He passed her a copy of the booklet she had last seen at the Porters' home, the one Jeremy had shown her with the naked teens on the cover.

“I’ve seen this booklet before, at a friend’s house,” Denise said uncertainly. “It’s the high school Naked in School Program. OH! There was a naked girl outside.”

“Yes, Miss Rogers, and you were randomly selected as a participant to start yesterday, but you were absent, leaving us with less than the full quota of required participants. This is a Program violation and means that you will be required to participate beginning now, until Friday next week at 10 pm, two weeks because you missed the start. Now I must insist that you remove your clothes,” he said, and the older woman blushed deeply.

“Ah, I see why your lawyers wanted you to have a witness,” Denise said coldly.

Then she collected herself. Thoughts raced through her head, all coalescing in an instant, and she immediately resolved what to do first.

“*Center yourself!*” she thought.

She allowed her body and mind to drop into that “space” she had worked so hard with Kevin to establish when she was learning her meditative “centering” skills for her *taekwondo* lessons.

“*Now don’t lose your temper,*” she told herself. “*And what did Kevin do with Fletcher?*”

Her mind raced back to when she first met Kevin. “Always negotiate from a position of strength,” was Kevin’s mantra. She would be strong! Kevin had taught her that by projecting a sense of overwhelming confidence, she could get control of this conversation.

“*Okay, now,*” she decided, as only a second or two had passed and Phillips was opening his mouth to speak again, “*time to take control here.*”

Denise stood up, distracting Phillips, and pointed her finger at him.

“Okay, sir. Here’s my response. First, you should know that that girl I saw outside was freezing! Are you aware how cold it’s been outside the past two days? Forcing the kids into being naked and outside when it’s so cold is not only irresponsible, it’s incredibly abusive! And likely illegal too! And...” She looked at her watch. “Okay, I have less than an hour before I must leave here for my next class. It’s at UIL, by the way, several tube stops away. Regardless of that, there’s no way that I’ll undress under *any* circumstances. Now, can you please explain exactly why you expect *me* to participate in your obscene circus?”

Jaimeson tried to stifle a smile while Phillips had begun to turn red.

“I say! You are rather cheeky, young lady. I don’t have to explain anything. If you don’t undress, then you shall be failed in your classes here,” he admonished her.

“All right, I’ll rephrase the question. Please give me the courtesy of telling me the authority you have to ask me to get undressed,” Denise pressed him as she resumed her seat.

“Well then, I suppose that’s a reasonable question. The uni part of the Naked in School Program—I’ll just call it the ‘Program’—is in a government-required curriculum module; it’s part of the education familiarization training related to the Human Sexuality Promotion Act. All

enrollees in courses of study where graduates will be eligible to earn teaching licensure are now required to participate in the uni version of the Program. For the past two years, the Program was run as a pilot in a few schools outside London with greatly mixed results. Research by the Department for Education showed that most of the failures of the Program in the pilot schools were a result of the total lack of training and understanding on the part of the instructional staff. The teachers had no idea of the pressures and challenges that the pupils faced in the Program.

“The major recommendation that arose from the government study, which was completed this past spring, was that all future teachers shall be required go through the Program whilst in their teacher training to allow them to understand its effects on the pupils that they’ll be teaching in their future careers. All of this country’s teachers need to learn how to prepare our pupils for their participating in the Program. The Program was designed to be a major social growth initiative for pupils but it’s an experience which could potentially be traumatic for the children, and it’ll be each teacher who studies here who’ll be responsible for guiding them in dealing with their experience. Unless you have the experience of the challenges your pupils face, you won’t have the ability to provide this guidance. Do you follow so far?”

Denise looked at him steely-eyed. “I could shoot enough holes through that argument so that it wouldn’t hold a thimbleful of water, sir. You’re saying that some kind of government study commission came up with this recommendation, based on a pilot run in a couple of schools. Okay, is there more?”

“Yes there is,” he went on, “for your own part in this requirement. Here are our Program participation rules in brief. You must remain naked at all times, but you are permitted to dress if you go off campus. Your records show that you’re not living in the uni’s residence halls so we’ve made arrangements for a room here for you to stay until next week; you will need to provide your financial information to be charged for the room and board. The booklet I gave you describes activities called Reasonable Requests, these are requests from others to examine and fondle your body generally speaking but may involve other actions which you must submit to as well. You must permit those Requests or you will not successfully pass your courses here. The loose sheet inside the booklet gives the times and places you must allow the Requests, but you’ll see that it’s generally anywhere on campus between 9 am and 11 pm every day. You must use male restroom facilities everywhere and male showers in the uni residences and gymnasium.

“You must remain on campus for the weekend and be available in public places outside your residence room for no less than eight hours each day to allow Requests to be made of you, and during the times you are in your residence quarters, your door must remain open until 11 pm each day to allow residents of your hall to have access to you. And your time in the Program will end the following Friday at 10 pm since you didn’t complete the required first day. The booklet provides all of the details of the Program rules. Now I expect you to comply with my request to disrobe.”

Denise gathered her thoughts. “Okay, now I have a few comments I need to make and I’d appreciate not being interrupted, just as I didn’t interrupt you, sir. First, and this isn’t really

important to my response to your request, but I'll just mention it for the background it provides. I'm an American citizen and have experienced the Program in my own high school, so I know that the benefits, which you claim are so highly touted, are fiction. They are totally nonexistent. Much more important is the fact that I'm not part of your teacher's training program; I'm not taking classes leading to teacher certification. I have only two classes, one in research statistics and one in childhood psychology, both of which happen to be in the ed school, but these are advanced courses and aren't part of your core teacher-training program.

"Next is about the requirements and details of how you set up running the Program here. You said this is college-Program idiocy is to prepare teachers for teenagers' nudity in your secondary schools by requiring your teacher-ed students to spend a week naked on an *urban* college campus, for God's sake. This campus is located within a major city and its buildings are spread out over a dozen blocks; all of the school's buildings are on streets and walkways which are general public areas. I saw a few older men passing through outside and gawking at that poor naked girl outside. And think of the safety issues your naked girls will face walking around on city streets!

"All of this... no, sir, please don't interrupt... ah, there's absolutely no relationship between your 'naked in college' and the high school Program—the high school kids are naked in a protected environment, generally—high schools are restricted-access buildings not accessible to the public, the kids have almost continuous supervision, and they are dressed after classes to go home. They aren't required to travel home naked, spend the weekend naked, and don't have to allow random people into their bedrooms to fondle them, the way you say your version of the program allows. The crackbrained version that you want your teacher trainees to experience has virtually no relationship to what the high school students will experience, so this harebrained idea of yours is totally invalid."

"Young lady..." Phillips began.

"Sorry sir; I'm not done yet. Next comes the issue of my participating. I'm taking pre-med classes at UIL five days a week and I'm due there for class in 40 minutes now. I'm also the guardian of a high-school girl and have home responsibilities to her and my fiancé as well, plus I have responsibilities that I can only take care of on the weekends. Actually, I will be on this campus only once more this week, on Thursday morning; my only classes on this campus are on Tuesday and Thursday mornings."

Denise stood up, walked in front of Phillips' desk, and pointed her finger at him again.

"And finally, I will warn you about the legal and contractual issues you're violating. Your demand for me to participate in non-class teacher-training activities—which are unrelated to the two classes I'm enrolled in, as I pointed out—was not mentioned in my registration materials nor was this requirement anywhere else made known to me. I registered with the understanding, and confirmed with your college's advisor, that the two courses I enrolled in were my sole responsibility in exchange for my tuition payment. You've just threatened that I won't pass those classes. That, sir, is the definition of a contract violation. I'm also not enrolled to receive a degree

from here; my degree will be from Avery University in the U.S., not here. I certainly could charge this university with contract violation, but I have a better idea.”

Phillips was sputtering with indignation and his face had turned red. “Young *LADY*...” he began again.

“Wait!” Denise commanded. “All right then. Are you willing to swear out a statement and have it witnessed that you are demanding that I strip myself naked in your office and that if I refuse to do so, you will fail me in the two courses that I enrolled in? Will you agree to putting such a statement in writing, signing it, and having it witnessed?”

“May I speak now? I’ve never, *ever* been spoken to by a student in such a manner, Miss Roberts; I find you extremely rude and impertinent. But yes, I’d be willing to put my requirements in writing, if it would persuade you to comply.”

“Good; please do, because I’ll take that statement directly to the nearest police station and have you charged with both extortion and felonious sexual assault.”

“What! I have a witness that I never touched you...”

“You are extorting by threatening to withhold something of value, course grades, by stating that I must perform a sexual act to be allowed to continue in a course I paid for. Forced stripping is a sexual act. By attempting to coerce me to perform a sexual act against my will, that’s defined as a sexual assault; touching isn’t required. I’m sure that your courts would agree that using extortion to force a person to strip off their clothes is a sexual crime. Courts in the States have decided that; so they probably would here too. And since your law creating the Program only mentions the nudity requirement for pupils in high school, from what I was told, that law won’t protect you from my charge of extortion and assault. Apparently you’re unaware that a charge of assault does not require contact; assault is the promise of causing harm to a victim, and that harm is your threat of forcing me to disrobe. I believe American law is based on British law, so I’m quite familiar with how ‘assault’ is legally defined. I assure you your demand for me to strip constitutes an assault under the law. Do you still want to sign such a statement, sir?”

“Ah... perhaps I should consult with the uni’s legal office...” he said weakly, taken aback.

His secretary was now smiling broadly.

“Sir? Just how invested in this whole nudity idea are you? Do you personally believe it’s a good educational idea? Off the record, of course,” Denise prompted.

“Well, officially I have to support any program the government requires, but privately I’m less than thrilled about the notoriety and reception that this initiative has caused. We’ve lost almost a half of our new teacher-ed class...” he mused. “So far. They changed majors, apparently. And I’ve heard that even more students are planning to drop education.”

“So your nudity rule will virtually wipe out your entire class. Think about that. I have just a few more minutes left before I really have to run,” Denise remarked. “Here’s what I think about your

new government rules. My conversation with your advisor last week makes me virtually certain that the new rules you're trying to follow have no basis in the existing law. She told me that the government office which inspects schools and curricula only recently notified you about their stupid study and that your school was scrambling to comply with the new rules they were imposing. But I'm certain that the requirement to run the Program in universities is not part of the law that authorized the Naked in School Program or else the university component of teacher training would have been set up several years ago, back when the Program began. Is my interpretation correct?"

Phillips nodded, saying, "That's essentially what happened. And..."

"Not finished. So I think that the requirement for the Program in teacher-training schools is actually an administrative suggestion. I'm certain it's not in the law itself. Another thought about teaching the Program just occurred to me. About 50 to 60 percent of British schools don't appear to have the Program, from what I noticed when I was registering my ward in her high school last week. You have lots of single-sex schools here too and I doubt they can run the Program there either. So the whole premise of having to train teachers for dealing with an anomaly like guiding high-school kids through a naked week is losing traction very quickly, don't you think? What I think is I might just do here in London what I helped do in the States: kill the Program."

Phillips sat up straight. "Did you say *you* killed the Program there?"

"Well, I was involved in a group that arranged its demise. One of the primary architects of its dismemberment was actually my fiancé. That's from whom I learned how to deal with overweening bureaucracy like I'm seeing here; sorry for being disparaging, but I don't think very highly of the morons who came up with the idea for the Program. Now I'm done here, but I fully expect that you will immediately drop your request that I participate. Remember the consequences if you don't. You must excuse me; I don't want to be late for my next class over at UIL."

Denise left a bewildered university dean and a grinning secretary behind as she dashed out, deactivating her voice recording.

She texted Kevin as she rode the tube to UIL, "*NIS dragon loose in teachers college, need white knight to slay dragon at 3:50 ed school union café, can u come?*"

Just before she arrived at her classroom, her cell rang; it was Kevin. "Darling, what the hell happened?"

"Ha! They tried to put me in the Program at the ed school but I pulled your act—no kung fu stuff though—and gave that dean a lecture about stupid social programs. Yeah, they're doing a fucked-up version of the Program there. But I rescued a nude girl from the cold; lent her my jacket, actually, so I'm a little chilled. I'm meeting her at 3:50 and I think you're free then; can you come and talk with her?"

"Crazy shit. Um, sure. I'm what, ten minutes from there, sure. Hey, loved the dragon metaphor,

made me think of what Amelia said.”

“Yep, I did too, that’s why I texted that. Wonderful! Hey, gotta go, class is starting. Love ya!”

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Denise started up the steps to the Union at 3:40 and then saw Kevin running up toward her. They embraced when he reached her.

“Oh, god, Kevin, thanks for coming!”

“Oh, sweetie, you’re trembling...”

“Yeah, delayed reaction. It took hours to hit, but that scene in Fletcher’s office with that Abover goon dragging me in—that keeps popping into my head now. I had a visceral reaction to seeing that poor girl—her name’s Sharon Jones by the way—shivering in the cold and getting gang-groped. And I’m still a little chilly too. Damn, it’s still friggin’ cold.”

“So you went to help her. That’s my girl.” He kissed her. “Where’s the café?”

“First floor in back, I think. In the States this would be the second floor. Downstairs is the ‘ground floor.’”

“Yeah, that stuff threw me for a day,” Kevin grinned.

They walked into the café and saw a small group at a table in the corner and immediately knew where Sharon was. About half of the group were naked, but Sharon wasn’t; she was wearing a loose sweatshirt and baggy sweatpants.

“Ohmygod!” Sharon shouted. “Look! She’s here!”

The others turned as Kevin and Denise walked up.

Sharon rushed over to them and grabbed Denise’s hand. “As soon as you bolted, it hit me where I recognized your name! I heard it during orientation for the Program...and thanks a bunch! I made sure to let all the other Program folks know what you did and told them to get here ASAP. I hope that’s alright...”

Another girl was looking at Denise. “Oi, Denise Roberts? Roight, you was the lass they called for the bleedin’ Program but didn’t show.”

Denise told them she wasn’t at orientation because she wasn’t in the teacher-training program.

“And I had a lo-o-o-ong session with the dean earlier today to discuss that fact but he tried to get me to strip off anyway. To fight him back, I thought of my fiancé Kevin here and drew my moral support from him,” Denise took his hand. “Kevin and I, plus a team of other high schoolers—who then became college kids, got the Program shut down in the States.”

There was a chorus of ooohs and aaaahs.

She grinned evilly. “So I thought maybe we could bring the American Revolution back here to

the British Isles and free you all from the naked tyranny of your government.”

Everyone howled with laughter at that.

“Seriously, maybe we can brainstorm this thing to try to kill it off right here and now. We’ll tell you some of the tactics we used to protect the naked kids and perhaps they will work, but on a whole campus, because it’s so different from a single building, that some things we did won’t... um... I guess the word is ‘scale.’ This is a much bigger place and there are your dorms involved too, and loads of kids who aren’t gonna be teachers and who’d never ever have to be naked themselves—they would have no mercy on you guys,” she finished. “So let’s sit and we’ll go over some of my ideas first and you can let me know if they sound feasible.”

Everyone nodded agreement.

“Okay, so the first thing I noticed was poor Sharon freezing her butt off,” Denise began.

“Yeah, it was brass monkeys out there this morning!” one of the naked guys said. “One o’ the lads in the Prog’s proper poorly in his room now; he was out a fair bit yest’day an’ got himself a chill or summat.”

The others agreed that they couldn’t stand the cold and even indoors, the rooms were quite drafty and chilly. That’s why a few of them had decided that they could easily take the risk of getting dressed despite the nudity rule.

“Och aye, ma pals noticed there’s naebody tae see us if we dinnae go oot wi’oot claes near the erb buildings,” one guy claimed.

Denise smiled at the group. “So here’s my first idea. I glanced at the Program booklet the dean gave me and it talks about ‘safety equipment’—the school here is using the high school rules because the government doesn’t have any university rules at all, but let’s hold that idea, it’s another anti-Program point—so your safety is the first issue. Let me read what it says: ‘The Program does NOT expect participants to risk their health or safety. Appropriate safety equipment may be worn if required under certain circumstances...’ Got that? Your health. Freezing your ass off—hey, it’s called a ‘bum’ here, right?—freezing bums off is definitely not healthy. So our first anti-Program tactic is everyone should go to the student health clinic and get a prescription for... *clothing!*”

Everyone began cheering and pounding the tables hearing that.

“Yeah, the ed school authorities can’t nay-say your doing that; they can’t override a medical diagnosis, and I’ll bet the docs would be delighted to require that you mustn’t be naked outdoors or in chilly buildings, right?”

More cheering and laughter.

Kevin leaned over to her, whispering, “Good one, darling... sure you really need me?”

She grinned at him and turned back to the group.

“Hell,” Denise continued, “I saw a few years ago, in an international sports mag, a story covering a naked volleyball tournament at a nudist resort and the weather was very chilly, just like now, in fact. When the reporters and photographer arrived to cover the games, the resort organizers were all wearing clothes. The reporter asked why, since it was a nudist event, and the guy answered, ‘We might be nudists but we’re not stupid!’”

Another round of appreciative shouts and table banging ensued.

Denise tried to calm everyone down when a few stragglers came rushing in and joined the group.

“What did we miss?” one girl panted as she joined the others.

“Yeah, I heard that there was an anti-Program thing kicking off,” a boy chimed in as he came close and a girl coming up behind him called, “Oi, I heard that too!”

In hushed voices some of the group brought the latecomers up to date; they couldn’t restrain their delighted reactions to what they heard.

“Okay, guys, listen up; there’s lots more to cover!” Denise called. “The next thing is, if you’re forced to be naked somehow during Request hours, try to have a friend with you who can set you an innocuous Request task to keep you busy. You can decline a Request if you’re busy doing someone else’s.”

There was another round of cheers at that comment.

“Now let me let an expert give you another one of the anti-Program things we did. Kevin here worked this thing out with a lawyer so we know it’s bulletproof. Kevin, tell them about the word definitions.”

Kevin stood. “Hi, guys. Denise is right, definitions of the terms in the booklet; that’s a great anti-Program weapon. Some of what I’ll tell you now will need you to do some research—you’ll need to check out the law underlying the Program here. It’s very likely, since this Program booklet seems awfully similar to our old Yankee one, that the folks here didn’t really bother to make sure that everything in the Brit version of the Program booklet matches the law that was passed here for the Program. So you might find something in the booklet rules you have to follow that isn’t anywhere in the law. If you find that, then they can’t make you do those things. Maybe the rule forcing you to be naked in your dorms isn’t part of the law, for example. Maybe the law just mentions that it applies to secondary schools.

“Anyway, definitions of the terms in the booklet are important and we found that most of the terms in our Program booklet were not defined anywhere. But the school Program officials in the States told us how *they* wanted them to be defined. But legally they couldn’t do that since under all law codes, as my attorney friend told me, a term used in a law, or a regulation, or a Program rule must be defined in that regulation or else its definition is what’s found in any ordinary dictionary. They can’t make up their own definitions or even select which definition to use if there’s more than one. Then you’re free to use the definition you choose to suit your own reading of the rule.

“So let’s take the idea about wearing clothes as safety equipment. They probably will tell you that the only ‘appropriate’ safety equipment is listed on that page in your booklet, but ‘appropriate’ isn’t defined anywhere in the Program booklet, so its meaning comes from the dictionary, it’s something like ‘suitable or proper in the circumstances.’ If your ass is freezing off, clothing is quite appropriate, or proper, in those circumstances, for your safety, no?”

Laughter and cheers.

“Then they may try to say that only the few items in the list on that page is what ‘appropriate’ is supposed to mean. They missed two little words: ‘for example.’ Someone with a smart phone tell me how ‘example’ is defined, please.”

After a brief pause, one of the girls called, “A thing characteristic of its kind or illustrating a general rule.”

There was laughter and a number of comments were offered, amplifying the statement.

Kevin went on, “Right. That list in the booklet includes only some possible items of safety equipment and the word ‘example’ means that the list is not an exclusive one. See what I mean by definitions? You can do the same things with the meaning of ‘safety’ and ‘equipment’ and any other word or term you want to bend to your advantage. You can pick apart that entire booklet, use it as your own tool to fight them back and don’t let them force you into believing it says something that it doesn’t. But I think Denise had one of the best ideas, clothing as safety equipment to protect your health.”

“Thanks, honey,” Denise squeezed his hand. “Now if people demand for you to take off your clothes—if somehow they even know you’re supposed to be in the Program—then just dress in a number of layers and tell them that there’s no time for you to go somewhere warm, undress, do their Request, and dress again. But that won’t help when you’re in a warm place, though, because you’d need to be undressed. So stay away from warm places; it’s only a few days. Find errands off campus. They don’t seem to have people watching you. Make it hard for them. And above all, girls, travel together and never be alone while you’re naked—even with a boy or boys you know...”

“Oi, that’s true,” one of the girls called, “In one o’ the pilot schools, a Program gal was raped by three boys she knowed.”

“Thank you,” Denise acknowledged her. “The final thing I want to mention is about the high-school booklet they’re using. That’s because the Program is for high schools. Only high schools. Guess what? The whole idea of doing this in universities may be a bureaucratic invention and it’s most likely not based on the law itself. I heard there’s an Ofster committee or something...”

“Ofsted!” a few voices called.

“...yeah, government education standards inspectors, right?”

“Yes!”

“...that told the university that they need to do the Naked in School Program at this university to meet secondary school curriculum standards. I’m sure that requirement isn’t in the original law; it’s an interpretation and extension of how they’re viewing their responsibilities and no one can make you give up your privacy rights by government fiat. This is how you can kill off this bloody Program. Did I use ‘bloody’ properly?” Denise asked.

“YES!”

She went on, “So now the ball’s in your—oops, my bad...” Guffaws from the group. “Um. The next steps are in your hands. Go on the offensive. Tie them up with word games. Get the health service docs to back you. Challenge how they’re interpreting the law. Use the criminal laws too—like those laws covering sexual assaults and being forced to strip is certainly an assault. If you do all that, I think by the end of this week or next at the latest, if you spread the word, this whole bloody naked idea will disappear.”

There was a burst of applause and the group surrounded Denise, thanking her; Kevin stood back with a proud smile, watching her.

As the group began to disperse, Sharon came up to Denise and shyly handed back her jacket, then hugged her fiercely.

“That was blindin’ brilliant! I can’t thank you enough!” she cried. “It was so bloody awful. I skived off the first day and didn’t have nuffink to eat—couldn’t face the thought of going to the mess. Me flatmate hooked me up with some grub. And the blokes just wouldn’t keep their effin’ hands off me—wouldn’t stop pawing my body...” A tear started to roll down her cheek.

Denise comforted her. “It’s gonna be okay now, Sharon. You can help by arming yourself by knowing the rules. I saw in the rules that you need to write a journal—just put down your ordinary activities as you do them but don’t say anything that implies that you weren’t naked. Hey, if you work at what I told you, I’m sure this whole thing will be over fairly soon.”

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When Denise and Kevin were on the train home, Denise leaned into Kevin. She was still trembling a bit, a delayed reaction after her performance with the students.

Kevin said reassuringly, stroking her back, “Damn, Denise, you were friggin’ awesome there, you know? That was an amazing performance.”

“God. I’m so glad it’s over. I hope I never see another naked person again...”

“Um. Does that mean you’re moving out of our bedroom? I sure hope not...” Kevin moaned.

“You dork!” She punched his arm. “You know what I meant!”

“Just checking,” he murmured as they kissed.

Later that evening Denise played the recording of her meeting with Phillips.

“Shit, honey,” Kevin breathed, looking at her admiringly. “You did some job on him.”

“I had the world’s expert in persuasion techniques show me how to do it, sweetie,” she responded. “You always told me that you negotiate from a position of strength. So I thought of all the things you used against Fletcher and the others and didn’t give Phillips an opening.”

“Bet he never knew what hit him,” Kevin mused and wrapped her in an embrace.

## Chapter 5

A week passed quietly; Amelia had gotten her doctor's appointment scheduled for the coming Friday afternoon. One evening midweek, as the three were discussing how their days went, Amelia mentioned that the school had a new head teacher, a Mr Hanford.

"Miss Pittsdon left the school to move away 'cuz her husband was transferred to Scotland," Amelia said. "The new head isn't very friendly."

"In what way?" Kevin asked.

"He's making new rules and won't discuss them with pupils to give reasons. He made rules about where we can hang out after lunch that don't make sense. He told the teachers he wants the pupils to stand when they speak in class. Oh, yeah, someone in our school was writing a blog about current political topics and Mr Hanford, I think he figured out who it was, ordered them to stop blogging, he said it was being rude to the authorities."

"Hmm, he sounds like a real martinet, honey," Denise said. "I guess you should try not to attract his attention."

"It'll be hard 'cuz he's sitting in on some of our drama meetings. He's making suggestions and I think the teacher's getting annoyed."

"Oh, that's not good. Say, do you know what kind of stuff that kid is blogging about?" Kevin asked. "I wonder how radical a high schooler needs to be to be censored."

Amelia grabbed her phone. "Sarya knows. Her dad's on the borough council and she said he was interested in the blog articles being posted. I'll text her."

Soon they had the web address of the blog. Apparently the student, who was blogging under the name "The Realist," hadn't stopped writing.

"Oh, look at today's," Amelia said. "It's a story about something called an honor killing. An uncle stabbed his niece. Ah, the blog says here that the naked program you guys talk about is in the school where she went. It says that maybe she was forced to be in the nude program and she was killed 'cuz of that reason. Kevin, I know about those honor killings and that's awful for a relative to kill their brother's child!"

"Yes, it's an extremely warped view of honor," Denise agreed.

"Oh, my!" Amelia exclaimed.

"What?" the others responded.

"I clicked back to Monday's," Amelia replied. "Oh, it's awful... it says 'Lucy Domers, 15, of Wurthing Hills borough, was found in woodlands behind Pilburke School after vanishing from lessons on Friday morning. She was naked and had been repeatedly raped. She was a participant in the controversial Naked in School Program her school runs.' It goes on with some more details. Hmmm, looks like there are other articles about that naked stuff but also ones about

human rights violations and government excesses. Oh, here's one where a family was put out of their public housing for complaining about an abusive neighbor. Let's see, it says the neighbor had a conviction for smashing a window in the family's flat, he had been given a restraining order to keep him away from the family, he also disturbed them by playing very loud music into the night, things like that, for over a year. The father kept complaining to the council authority about him and this says that they were evicted for being chronic complainers!"

"Sounds like this kid is doing a public service," Denise mused. "So your head teacher is wanting the blog stopped?"

"Yeah, that's what I heard."

Kevin began paging through the blog archives.

"It looks like it frequently picks up items about the Naked in School Program, Denise. There are some posts which report private messages to him or her from kids in the Program who tell him about problems in their school. This kid is doing something like what we did with our website; looks like the government here isn't censoring this like the U.S. did. It looks like the general theme is more human rights abuse than specifically the Program. I hope he or she can keep it going. Say... any word on naked goings-on in college?"

"It seems to be gone. I haven't seen anyone naked since that first day. Oh, someone in one of my classes mentioned that she heard that some kids' parents are planning to go to court to get an order to be sure that their students aren't penalized for not participating and will be able to get certified when they graduate," Denise replied. "But ending it totally would probably be kind of complicated; I suppose the uni would have to challenge the authority of the government curriculum inspector department to overturn the rule that the college must run it."

"But it sounds like you dealt it a mortal blow anyway; that was so cool, sweetheart."

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It was time for Amelia's first appointment for the examination of her genital injury and her father had made arrangements with the Neurology Department at UIL Hospital, where recent advances in repair of neurological tissues had been made, to see her.

Denise had accompanied Amelia in the examination and then the doctor met with them and Kevin; Kevin had called Elliott Hadad on his phone; he was on the line for the consultation. Kevin gave the phone to Amelia to hold.

Dr Areyth Singh was one of the physicians who had developed the neurological repair techniques. He entered the office and greeted Kevin.

"I'm pleased to meet you, and understand Amelia's father is present by phone? Correct? Hello sir; can you hear?"

"Yes, thank you," Hadad answered.

“Excellent. I’ve examined Amelia. She has fairly extensive scarring in her pudendal area and numerous adhesions around her clitoris; also, the incision from her partial FGM healed improperly but that problem is not the most important one; it can be fixed, we think. As you know, Miss Roberts, Dr Weymoth from our gynecology service consulted in the exam and I just spoke to her to discuss how we should proceed. First, I think I have good news for you, Amelia.”

She relaxed visibly and Denise squeezed her hand.

“The nerve injury, as you probably know, is the source of your pain, but also the pain is causing muscle spasms throughout your pelvis and this is triggering a whole cascade of problems—each of which is contributing its own share of pain. The nerve near the wound is almost completely intact and much of the problem is caused by compression and restriction of movement caused by the scarring and adhesions. All of these areas of scar tissue are repairable; they were caused by the infection you had after your injury, Amelia.

“I’m going to explain why you’ve been in such pain now, Amelia, so you’ll know that we’re not minimizing it like many doctors seem to do and say it’s a result of psychological trauma. It’s not in your mind at all; the pain is real, and this is why it hurts so badly. First, I think you have what we call a ‘neurinoma,’ it’s an injury caused when a nerve is cut or trapped in scar tissue. I believe this occurred with the dorsal nerve of the clitoris. You have both of those conditions, adhesions and neurinoma, and as a result, the surrounding area has become hypersensitive and significantly painful.

“We also noticed some other major scarring and these are keloid scars that resulted from the slow and incomplete healing of the wound and the production of excess scar tissue. And you also had, from a review of your records, structures called dermoid cysts—these are pockets of epithelium—basically the skin—that formed during the wound’s healing. That area became swollen and infected. Your doctors back in Indonesia treated the cysts, but after the area healed, it left other scarring and adhesions. Fortunately you’re young and healthy and the underlying tissues are strong, so the treatment of those issues will almost certainly be successful.

“Now here is the course of treatment we recommend. Before we can work on the nerve itself, we’ll have to break up the scar tissue that’s formed. This needs to be done a little at a time because it involves non-invasive massage and a new development in a cold laser device to reach deeper tissues. Amelia, this releasing massage is fairly uncomfortable for the patient and takes place over a period of time, but as the tissues become more flexible and the internal adhesions are released, your general pain should lessen. Are you with me so far?”

“Yes...” she whispered. “But it can get better? It hurt awfully where you were pressing me at first.”

“Do you think you could stand having that done a few times more if each time it isn’t as bad as the last? With it getting a little better each time?”

Amelia closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “If it helps, then yes.”

“That’s good, because when I pressed there, I could feel the scar tissue next to the nerve move a little, meaning it pulled away from the nerve a bit. Doing that relieves the pressure slowly and we have to do that gradually to allow normal healing between treatments. That’s the kind of therapy I intend, pressing and rolling the tissues to break up the scar tissue, to break up the keloids and make the skin around the nerve more flexible, which also improves the blood supply there. I won’t be doing these treatments myself as we have therapy experts in that field at the hospital. Your vagina also has an area of scarring but Dr Weymoth told me that treating that is routine and not very painful—there is discomfort, she says—I wouldn’t know, not having those parts...”

The others chuckled.

“...but she says the kind of scarring and adhesions you have there is not uncommon. We would see you weekly for your treatments and each would be for a half hour to 45 minutes; we don’t want to tax your pain tolerance more than necessary—how do you feel now, Amelia?”

“Tingly and throbbing.”

“Any sharp pain or is it dull?”

“It’s a dull throbbing. And something like an itch.”

“Actually that’s a good sign; parts of the nerve are starting to pass impulses. So if you can tolerate maybe five big jolts like I gave you in a half hour mixed in with gentle rolling over the scarred areas, I think you should make good progress. You’ll need to use a cold pack on the area after treatments and when you get home today because we want to promote blood circulation but don’t want swelling, Okay? Think you can handle that?”

“Oh, yes, if it helps me get better!”

“I think there’s an excellent likelihood that you’ll be close to being pain free by the time treatment is complete, miss. Oh yes. Your chart from Jakarta shows that you aren’t on any birth control meds. Is that still true?”

Amelia blushed. “Yes... it’s not like I can do that...”

“No, no,” Singh said, “I’m not implying anything. Some girls need the hormones to regulate their menses. In your treatment, we want to avoid adding any hormones to your system, so no contraceptive pills or shots for you, young lady. Until we know that your healing is complete. Okay? Are there any other questions, Amelia? Miss Roberts? Yes, Amelia?”

“Um... I don’t have gym ‘cuz of this problem but there are exercises I want to do.”

“Well, tell me what they are. I might have your answer but our therapist might be better to ask.”

“It’s using an elliptical thing and... what were the others, Kevin?”

“Machines like an elliptical trainer, a stair-stepper or adductor/abductor device, or leg presses, things like that.”

“Ah, okay,” Dr Singh said. “I’d avoid those. We’re trying to loosen the tissues in the pudendal area and those exercises strengthen the muscles there. I’d avoid doing exercises using machines like those for at least a year after therapy is over, too. But walking on a treadmill is okay. I’m not sure about biking, so ask the therapist when you come in next. Is there anything else?”

Denise looked uncertain.

“Ah, Miss Roberts, don’t be shy...”

“I’m not sure if it’s my place to ask this, but, um... I was sexually molested as a young teen and had injuries causing trauma and scarring to my female parts, too. It took a lot of therapy—mostly psych but some physical treatments too—to let me have normal sexual function. Um... will Amelia have... ah... normal feelings... normal sensation... will she be able to feel arousal like normal?”

“Oh dear, I should have addressed that. I think too clinically at times. When we finally repair the damaged nerve, I’m virtually certain that Amelia will have normal feelings or close to them. I’ve treated a few FGM victims to date, girls with far worse mutilations, and have been able to restore at least some sensory function with significantly reduced pain, so in Amelia’s case I think the prognosis is mostly good. You know, we can’t be 100 percent sure, but I believe this case will be successful.” Singh turned and spoke to the phone. “Mr Hadad, are you satisfied with what I’ve covered concerning your daughter?”

“Oh yes, doctor. You’ve answered everything I could think of; thank you very much.”

“Okay, then, thank you all,” Singh said. “I’ll show you to where you can check out and make your next appointments.” He walked them out to the next office. “Have a good day,” he said as he shook hands and left.

“That’s such good news,” Hadad said to his daughter by phone. “This was a good visit but we need to ring off now. Tell the others ‘bye. Love you, dear.”

“Yes, Papa, love you too.” She turned to Kevin. “Here’s your mobile back. Thanks, Kevin. Papa says goodbye to you guys. Oh, I’m so happy!”

“Yeah, let’s go celebrate at a nice restaurant,” Kevin said. “Then we’ll get you home and ice you down.”

Amelia shot him a disgusted look. “Yuck, Kevin...”

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The following week, Denise entered her stats class at the ed school and the professor told her to see her after class. When the class ended, she went to the front of the room.

“Miss Roberts,” she said, “Dean Phillips asked me to give you this,” passing over an envelope.

Denise read the letter as she walked to her next class. It was an informal request for her to see the dean at her earliest chance; in it he also told her that she was correct in her assertion that her

enrollment in classes in the ed school did not make her a member of their teacher-training program and apologized for their earlier error. She called his office to see about available appointment times and learned that he could see her after her next class.

When she arrived at the ed school's offices, Mrs Jaimeson ushered her into Phillips' office and smiled at her.

"I don't have to stay now, dearie," she winked. "And thank you for your courage and standing up for yourself like you did," she whispered as she left.

Phillips stood up and indicated that Denise should be seated.

"Miss Roberts, thanks for coming. I hope that this meeting will be much more amicable than our last one, where I'm willing to admit I was sorely bested by your eloquence in your defense. First, I will confirm that indeed, you aren't enrolled in our teacher-training program. And second, your course grades will not be affected by programs external to your two classes. I could have disposed of those matters with a simple letter to you expressing those facts. But I wanted to discuss a matter with you which has me burning with curiosity."

Denise looked at him with a puzzled expression. "Okay, sir...?"

"Well..." Phillips folded his hands in front of him and looked down at them, then up at her. "Last time you mentioned, amongst a lot of other alarming things, that you were involved somehow in having the Program terminated in American schools."

"That's true, yes..." Denise agreed.

"So it may not come as a surprise, judging from your... um... was it a threat? to kill the Program here... well, what I'm trying to say is that you've done something with our students—your name keeps popping up—well, after the first two days and for the past two weeks, not a single student will participate in our Program. Two weeks ago, the students we named to participate at our first Monday morning meeting were all prepared with letters from Health Services which forbade them from being naked in any public areas where the temperature was under 25 degrees."

Denise did a quick mental calculation: "*Ooo, sweet: 77 degrees!*"

He went on, "And some of them also challenged sections of the Program pamphlet, trying to show that the rules were not enforceable. Yesterday, not one student came to reception as ordered to begin their participation week. Then in the past seven days, our administration has begun to get letters from solicitors who are threatening lawsuits if the students' grades are adversely affected by their not participating in the Program. It seems that you met with a group of students and counseled them, according to the rumors. Are those rumors true?"

Denise tried to hide her grin at this news. "Yes, it's true. I simply told the group who showed up at the Union what we had done at our schools in the States. Everyone was very appreciative of hearing about that, in fact."

"I'm sure they were," he said wryly. "I took the liberty of contacting your American university,

Avery, and learned some very illuminating facts. A Denise Roberts was listed as a contributor and co-author in a major education study done at Avery and a local secondary school and a series of papers were subsequently published expanding that study; a Denise Roberts was the primary author on one such paper. Those studies involved the Naked in School Program in the States. The background information of the study covered how that Program was forced to shut down. That same Denise Roberts, it seems, was a student at that secondary school involved in the study when the Program was terminated there. Am I correct in assuming your um... threat... to me was not an empty one and was based on things you actually had done?"

Denise now smiled openly. "It wasn't an empty threat, sir. Those things were done by my friends and me; yes, we were the people who got the Program stopped. What you do in your country is no business of mine, sir, but when you involved me in it, I simply responded in the most appropriate way. Notwithstanding the fact that there's no social or educational benefit to the Program, I couldn't bear to see how little regard your school and government officials had for the health and safety of the kids who were forced into your college version of the Program."

"Hmpf. This, well... rebellion... has caused a major problem for us with Ofsted," Phillips went on. "And apparently at all of the other ed schools too, because the word spread quickly about how the students here aren't participating. We've had to challenge the Department for Education on their demands and our solicitors have now asked them to produce the legal justifications for their curriculum rulings. I hope you're satisfied that you've thrown our education system into some disarray, young lady. We will endeavor to keep you far away from any other political issues about education policy while you're studying here, you can be sure," he finished with a smile. "Well, thanks for satisfying my curiosity."

Denise left the dean's office with a big smile. "*Mission accomplished. Kevin will be fascinated when he hears about this,*" she mused.

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The following week was Amelia's autumn school break and the following week passed uneventfully; then Kevin got a call from Warren Porter.

"Kevin, do you have dress-up clothes? ... Good. And Denise? ... Fine. I'm calling because I'd like you to come to a little gathering at the chancery residence on Thursday evening and I hope you can make it."

"Okay, Warren, Denise and I are free then, so sure."

"Excellent. The dress is semi-formal, suit and dress, but nothing overly fancy. Ah, bring your passports; embassy security, you know. I'll send a car to fetch you at 5 pm. Will that time work? It can be as late as 5:30."

"Ah, 5 o'clock is good."

"Perfect. See you Thursday then."

Thursday evening came and Kevin and Denise were picked up by Porter's limo and brought to the ambassador's residence where they were checked in by two security people, who notified Porter that his guests had arrived.

"Hi, guys," Porter said as he came up to them. "We'll be meeting our group in the drawing room. There are some folks here who knew your parents, Kevin, so they wanted to see you—you might even remember some of them. Then we'll have dinner."

"Lead on, sir, this should be interesting, then," Kevin said, and shot a reassuring glance at Denise, who seemed a bit uncertain. "You okay?" he whispered.

"Oh... sure, I thought you might be uncomfortable, you know, talking about your folks," she whispered back.

"They're always with me as a loving memory, dear. I'm fine."

They entered the room and Kevin saw several people whom he did recognize; Porter led them around, making introductions. They were chatting for about fifteen minutes when Porter was pulled aside. He returned to them a minute later and made a hand signal; the other guests moved to one side of the room.

Porter grinned at Kevin and Denise. "This was a setup and surprise for you two. One of your biggest fans is here and wanted to meet you... and... ahh... here he is..."

Porter turned to the door and President Gerston stepped into the room, trailed by a man wearing an enormous grin.

Denise gasped when she recognized the president while Kevin smiled uncertainly. Gerston walked up to them and took Denise's hand, kissed it, then grasped Kevin's in a firm shake.

"My, it's great to see you two again, and in such different circumstances!" Gerston exclaimed. "When I learned you were in London, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to get to see you. How have you been these few years? And my hearty congratulations to you on your engagement, too."

"Sir? You knew we were here... how...?" Kevin trailed off.

"Ah, now that's quite a tale, right, Charlie?" Gerston asked the grinning man standing next to him; Kevin and Denise were so fixated on Gerston that they saw him for the first time.

"Kevin, Denise, this is Charles Wixom, our ambassador to Great Britain and all that; Charlie, these are Denise Rogers and Kevin Coris. Obviously you know about their background, HA, HA, that scene in Brussels was memorable. I just loved it," Gerston laughed and Wixom shook his head, chuckling softly.

Just then, two women came in and walked up to the group.

Gerston repeated the introductions, this time naming his spouse, Rita, and the ambassador's wife, Marjory. Kevin and Denise were watching Gerston with bemused expressions while Porter was smirking at them knowingly.

“Denise, Kevin, let me greet the other guests briefly,” Gerston said. “Then we’ll have a little time to talk.”

They nodded, and Gerston and Wixom, with their spouses, began to make the rounds of the others in the room.

Kevin turned to Porter. “Set up is right! That was so nasty! You couldn’t give us any warning?”

“Hell, Kevin. Actually that was the president’s idea. He said if you knew he wanted to see you, you’d be on the first flight back to the States. He told me how he had to work his agencies hard to first find out who you were, and after they did that, he had to send the Secret Service, FBI, federal marshals, and God knows who else—out to convince you to go to the White House,” Porter chuckled.

“However did he know we were here in London?” Denise said, still partially in shock.

“That’s also his story to tell and, heh, heh, Denise, you’re part of that too... ah, here they come.”

Denise shot Porter a look of dismay but then tried to assume a smile as the dignitaries rejoined them. Then Barbara Porter came into the room and walked over to them.

“Hi, sorry I missed everyone’s introductions; hello, Mr President and Mrs Gerston. A minor family issue needed attention. Anyway, staff tells me that cocktails are ready,” Barbara said.

They walked out to the reception hall while Rita Gerston gushed over Denise’s ring.

“Harry told me what a delightful young woman you were, Denise,” she said. “It’s wonderful that you and Kevin are still doing great things as a couple and... oops, I need to let Harry tell you the rest...” she finished lamely.

Denise looked at Kevin and they both shrugged.

“Well now,” Gerston said when they were settled in the reception hall. “You asked how I knew you were here? Would you believe that we’ve kept track of your whereabouts? No, don’t worry; I’m teasing. This is such a great story... Anyway, I was in Brussels for that summit conference; you might have heard about it since we were rehashing some economic difficulties involving the U.S. and the E.U. Anyway, I was speaking with the PM—the British prime minister—in a sidebar about how to deal with one thorny issue. The PM sighed, and then she said the problem we were wrestling with should be much simpler to solve than the sticky domestic crisis that her government was currently handling. I asked her if it was a serious crisis and she kind of shrugged and said it was a weird, stupid one but very politically charged, over—get this—teaching naked kids!

“I thought that she was being funny but she was serious. She said that her education department was trying to suppress a rebellion in their teaching colleges...”

Denise’s hand went to her mouth and she looked like she was in shock.

“... and then Warren here laughed and asked the PM if she knew who was responsible for the

uproar. I think Warren suspected who was involved.”

Gerston looked at him and Warren just nodded, grinning.

“So the PM called over an aide, who made a few calls while we discussed a few other matters, then he came back. He said their sources claimed that it appeared to have been originated by a U.S. student in a college in London whose name was Denise Roberts and her friend or fiancé, whose name they thought was Kevin something!” Gerston laughed.

Kevin and Denise sat back in their seats in shock while the others roared in laughter.

Gerston went on, “The PM complained to me that we were exporting our rebellion to the U.K., ha ha; she said that their entire teaching-training program was disrupted for their teaching their students about that stupid naked program that Denise and Kevin trashed in the U.S. I told her that I knew all about you two; I didn’t know that you were over here, but I warned her that if they didn’t treat you properly, you’d take over everything and soon the U.K. would be an American colony! HA HA!” he laughed again.

“So what did you actually do to roil yet another major government?” Gerston asked, still chuckling. “I gather it was mainly Denise this time?”

“Um, sir, I guess so,” Denise replied. “I had no idea my suggestions would have such a wide-reaching effect... The government had decided to bring the Naked in School Program to their teaching colleges here. I was enrolled in one and they tried to put me into it, so I met with some of the involved students and told them about some things they could do to oppose it. When I saw a girl standing naked outdoors, freezing cold and getting groped, I had to help her.”

“Of *course* you did. And then Kevin got involved too,” Gerston prompted, chuckling.

“Well, sir, I came to support Denise. She had some great ideas,” Kevin demurred.

Gerston smiled at him. “Indeed she did. They were wonderful. Folks, according to the PM’s aide, Denise told those college kids to get prescriptions for *clothing* from their health services as protective equipment, HA HA. She told them how to twist and challenge the rules and got their officials tied up in procedural knots. And Kevin was the legal ‘expert’ who told the kids how they should interpret the laws and regulations so they couldn’t be used to require their nudity. Sounds like Kevin did a bit more than just supporting Denise, don’t you think? Anyway, you two, I wanted to thank you for giving me a memorable time at what was becoming a boring summit conference. And there’s another significant matter to mention, Kevin. Roger Vickers tells me that his kids have posters of you hanging in their rooms. Of you and not me. Even though it was me who got them spirited them out of the country so they avoided being put into the Program in their school. So apparently you’re more important than me. Why do you think that might be? HA HA! Now let’s talk about some less controversial matters.”

Of course everyone wanted to know what that poster business was about. After the poster matter was disposed of and dinner was over, Kevin and Denise bade farewell to the president and his wife and were ready to be returned home.

Barbara took them aside, smiling at Denise. “Denise, dear, you should talk to Jeremy about what you did to organize your uni Program opposition; he’s become really interested in combating social problems and the Naked in School Program is one of them. That’s why I was late before; I was dealing with a problem that his outspokenness is causing. It appears that he’s annoyed a number of important people with some of the things he’s been writing about. Anyway, that was fun this evening. You two have really impressed Mr Gerston, you know. I’m surprised he didn’t ask you to work on his reelection campaign too!”

They all laughed and arranged for another family gathering in several weeks; then Kevin and Denise took their leave.

## Chapter 6

That Saturday, Kevin met Jeremy at the *dojang* for their weekly training.

“Say, Jeremy,” Kevin said as he pulled on his *dobak*, your mom mentioned that you’ve gotten involved with writing about social problems.”

“Oh yeah, I am,” he replied. “I think that governments and even religions have too much control over how people can treat each other, like when we were talking about honor killing—that’s a religious idea gone haywire, and also the Naked in School Program, which is a crazy government idea out of control too.”

“So you’ve gone and poked a stick into a beehive?” Kevin grinned. “I hear your opinions have annoyed some people.”

“Yeah, at my school is one place. I’ve been putting my thoughts on my Facepage and writing opinion stuff, and now I just started collecting horror stories from kids in the Program this year. That’s upset some people and wow, I even hear from people who say they’re kids’ parents and what I post is scary for them to read. Some say they’re trying to keep their kids out of having to do the Program.”

“Hey, we gotta get to work now, class is starting. Talk later?” Kevin interrupted.

“Sure.” They went into the training room.

After class was over and they were dressing, Kevin mentioned that Jeremy’s mom had suggested that he talk to Denise about what she had done with mobilizing the teacher-training students.

“That’s a super idea. When can we do that?”

“You have time now? Let me see if Denise is around.” He called her while Jeremy called his mom.

Kevin called. “Denise, can Jeremy come over now?... She’s at the club?... How’s she feeling? ... That bad, huh... Yeah, using the whirlpool was a great idea... No problem, she doesn’t have to be home; Jeremy wants to talk about the dragon-slaying you did... ha ha... Okay, be there soon.” He turned to Jeremy. “Okay?”

“Mum says it’s okay if Denise can,” he reported.

“It’s good then, let’s go. Your um... bodyguard... okay with me?”

Jeremy laughed. “Sure. Dad gave Security your and Denise’s info and photos and they’ve vetted you, sure. They probably have a whole file on you too. You were with the president, right? So you passed the security checks, no problem.”

Kevin rode with Jeremy while the embassy security person drove. “Jeremy, do you think you’ll get to learn to drive soon?” Kevin asked as they arrived at his flat.

“Gee, I hope so,” he replied. “Although I don’t need it with my executive car service, but when I

start dating I don't really want a chauffeur, you know." They grinned at each other.

"Denise, we're here," Kevin announced as they came into the flat.

"Be right there. Snack's on the table; you must be thirsty too, right? In the fridge."

Kevin got some drinks from the refrigerator and Denise came in and hugged them both.

"Jeremy was telling me that he's doing an anti-Program website," Kevin told her with a wink.

"So I heard," she said. "Jeremy, do you know about the one that the U.S. kids used? It's inactive now since the Program in the U.S. has changed so much, but we know how to reach the archive."

"I heard about it but it doesn't come up in searches," Jeremy said.

"Well, it might, but it might be pretty far down the listings because no one visits it anymore," Kevin said as he started up his laptop's browser.

They spent a while looking over some of the old anti-Program site's blog pages.

"Cool; there are some great ideas here that I can write about! You think I can use them?" Jeremy asked, excited.

"I'm sure that no one involved with that site will stop you," Denise grinned. "Anyway, your mom suggested I tell you what happened in my college a couple of weeks ago."

After she related the story, Jeremy was even more excited.

"Man, what great ideas. You two are the coolest ever! Even the president thinks so! I can't wait to use some of this stuff in my posts and I really love how you turned the 'safety equipment' into clothes! Hey, what time is it? Oh jeez, I gotta go now. Can we get together again so I can show you what I've been doing?"

"Sure," Kevin said as Jeremy ran out to the waiting car.

"We didn't get his Facepage address," Denise mentioned after Jeremy left.

"Yeah, I'll text him to ask." Kevin replied.

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On Monday, Amelia arrived in school early; it was chilly outside so she went to the commons area outside the lunchroom to wait for classes to begin. Her treatment session on Friday had been particularly intense; her pelvic area was still very sore and sensitive. She saw one of her new acquaintances, a girl named Darra Sekibo, sitting in a row of chairs and eased herself gingerly into the seat next to her.

Her friend looked at her with concern. "Are you hurt?" she asked.

Amelia looked at her. "Pretty sore. I had some therapy Friday for an old injury. It was gross. I'm still achy there. I had to stand on the bus! The bouncing hurt."

“Ooooo... What happened? Your bottom got hurt? In privates? Um, I know how that must feel because I was hurt in my privates when I was younger in a religious rite.”

“Oh my,” Amelia exclaimed, “You mean you were cut in your privates?”

“Errr, yes, that’s so... I was um... eight,” Darra said softly. “I don’t remember that much about it except that it hurt a lot.”

Amelia went on. “You came from Nigeria, you told me. Are you a Muslim?”

She nodded. “Huh uh.”

“Are there a lot of Muslims there?”

“Oh yes, I think maybe half the Nigerian people are Muslim,” Darra answered.

“I wanted to ask—I thought people in Africa had very dark skin but your skin is pretty light,” Amelia commented.

“I’m a Hausa and most of us have light skin. Actually there are a number of ethnic groups in West Africa that have light-skinned members, like the Igbos—about half of them are very light. But you said you had old injury to your bottom—umm, Amelia, your name is Hadad; isn’t that Arabic? Are you a Muslim too? Is... oh dear... is that why you’re sore?”

“Oh Darra, it’s complicated... my mum’s extended family’s Muslim but my papa and I don’t practice. My mum was Muslim and her family was very observant but she wasn’t. And yes, my injury was getting cut in my fanny a few years ago; my auntie kind of kidnapped me...”

She very briefly related her tale, culminating with her current medical treatments. Just as Darra began to ask her further questions, the first bell rang.

“Amelia, let’s talk more at lunch, okay?” Darra said as they left for their rooms.

When lunch period began, Amelia got her food and looked for Darra; she found her with a few other girls at a table in a corner. Amelia had seen those girls around the school but had never spoken to any of them. When she joined them, Darra went to her.

“I got us a mostly private table,” she indicated its isolation. “My friends here—I don’t think you met them yet—are also Muslim and they were all cut too,” she whispered. Louder, she continued, “This is Estelle, Mariama, Tisa, and Fayola. And this is Amelia.”

The four girls greeted Amelia shyly; Mariama and Fayola were wearing hijabs.

Then Darra spoke to the group. “Before school started today Amelia and I talked about being cut—*isa aru* my people call it—and she told me that she was cut only three years ago.”

The others gasped and told Amelia that they were younger than eight and two were babies when they had the FGM procedure done to them.

Darra went on. “In Nigeria FGM is banned now. I’m sure it must continue in places, but I heard

that many imams agreed it isn't part of the Islamic laws. And my mum told me when *isa aru* was done to me, there were a lot of girls done at that same time. And she told me that she had heard that until pretty recently, something like 20 percent of the girls from my little province died afterward!"

Mariama spoke in agreement. "Yes, I heard that too from my villages. I'm from Côte d'Ivoire and a Voltaïque. I was cut when I was two, I think. I came from the north. They didn't use sanitary conditions and rubbed ashes and herbs on the cuts after and many kids were poor and malnourished. When they got infected, lots died."

Fayola offered more information. "I also heard that babies born to girls who were cut have a greater chance of dying after birth." The others nodded that they had heard that fact.

Then they began to discuss some of the medical problems they had experienced. They all had some scarring and keloid formation. Darra said her cutting was only of her clitoral prepuce and it turned out that none of the girls had had the most radical form of FGM which included the excision of the clitoris, removal of all of the vulval lips, and sewing up of the remaining area, leaving only a small opening for the passage of urine and menstrual flow.

"Ugh," Estelle commented. "I heard they do that in Somalia!"

Darra said, "Not only there; other places too, my mum says. Amelia, what are your doctors doing for you now?"

Amelia told them how they were working on breaking up her scar tissue and then trying to repair the damaged nerves.

"And it really hurts!" she exclaimed. "They have to press deep into my skin there and rub it around..." the others winced, "...and then I'm sore for a few days after. But it's helping, I can feel it. They also warned me I have to keep myself very clean or I'll get a urinary infection."

"Oh yes!" Darra said. "That's a constant problem I have, I get them lots and I do keep myself clean there, but it keeps happening."

The other girls said they had repeated infections too. And then they compared how much sensitivity they had and most girls, while not experiencing intense pain, said that the feelings in their vulvas was mostly discomfort and could even be painful when the area was rubbed.

Tisa grimaced. "In PE, Carley, that blonde girl in year eleven with the big titties, was giggling to her friends about getting herself off by tickling her fanny," she said. "I can't imagine what it would feel like to have that kind of feeling from there. It hurts if I press there when I wash myself."

"You know, we should try to do something," Amelia ventured. "Like a blog? Write about how awful that cutting is to happen to girls? There are five of us here and there must be more girls at our school who are cut 'cuz so many come from Africa and the Middle East too. Maybe we can have girls tell us their stories and we can put them on the web and if enough people see them,

they'll see how bad it is for girls and maybe make the practice against the law."

"That's a really good idea, Amelia," Darra said. "But I only know how to post on Facepage. We'll also need help if we have a blog. Those look hard to do."

Estelle smiled. "Maybe I can get help. My uncle knows about those things, I think. I'll ask him how to make a blog for us."

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That evening at home, Kevin told Denise that Jeremy had given him his Facepage address.

"He's made it open to everyone, not like a personal page, Denise. Ha, like a music group, I guess. He's got links to news items on school problems that could be related to the Program here, see? Wow, there isn't anything like the censorship we had when the Program was in the States."

"Oh look, Kevin—here's a link to that blog that Amelia mentioned," Denise pointed. "In the recommended sites. Where it says 'Visit the human rights and dignity blog by The Realist.' Click there, sweetie."

Kevin did. The blog opened and the current article was titled, "The Program: Human Rights Abuses Coming to a School Near You." There was an introductory paragraph which discussed various government-sanctioned torture methods—or what some governments called "enhanced interrogation techniques"—like sleep deprivation, binding the victim into contorted positions, water-boarding, and exposure to prolonged extreme cold and heat. It then mentioned how most people believed all forms of torture, no matter the justification, to be morally repugnant.

The blog article continued, "We've all heard of these acts of abuse from media reports and know that they have been perpetrated on people, usually with the justification that the information the torturers seek is supposed to save lives. But the public is totally unaware of the abuses, actually they are tortures, committed on our own children in our own schools every day, by the people who we have entrusted to protect them. The following is a first-hand account of such a human rights crime, written just this week by a girl in year eleven in a school 30 kilometers north of London."

Yesterday I learned I was in the [Naked in School] Program and today I had to be a subject in Health class. The teacher saw me come into class naked and decided to cover sexual response, even though the lessons didn't cover that until later this year.

She told me to lay down on the front table so the class could see between my legs. I'll write down what she said as best as I can recall.

"Class, you know that pupils in the Program have to allow Reasonable Requests, but in class lessons, teachers can exceed the limits of what the pupils normally must permit. I think the only limit we have is that we can't force a pupil to have sexual intercourse."

I was totally shocked; I'm a virgin.

“The most effective way of obtaining sexual arousal in boys and girls is by oral sex and since we have a subject to practice on, this is a perfect time for everyone to learn how to do it with a girl.”

I tried to jump up but she was holding my shoulders down. Then she asked for a volunteer to go first and I saw almost every boy in the class raise their hand—even some of the girls did too!

She called a boy up and he began pushing his fingers into my crotch to open my lips and I cried in pain.

“Not so rough,” the teacher warned him. “You want to be gentle. Remember, your goal is to give her an orgasm. We want everyone to see what it’s like to do that.”

I shuddered. Did she mean that she was going to have EVERYONE in the class try to make me come? I’ll be a total mess! How will I be able to walk to my next lesson? Anyway, I felt icky from the first boy’s having his tongue in my fanny; it was disgusting and his fumbings did nothing for me. I also felt nothing but revulsion with the next few boys too, except now I was getting sore. The teacher was sounding annoyed, probably because I wasn’t getting aroused, and sent the sixth boy back to his seat. How could I feel aroused if all I felt was pain and disgust? Then she alarmed me with her next comment.

“Our subject seems unresponsive, so perhaps she needs manual stimulation too. Sometimes stroking one or two fingers into a girl’s vagina helps their arousal.”

I twisted around and yelled, “I’m a virgin! You can’t put anything in me!”

She had two boys come up to hold me down and called another boy up.

“Try licking her clitoris while you slide your finger in her vagina.”

He put his finger there and pushed. I was dry and it hurt. I screamed!

“Oh, is she too dry?” the teacher asked. “Lick your finger and try again.”

I yelled for him to stop, but he shoved two fingers in and the pain was awful and I must have passed out because next I knew I was in the nurse’s office with a bloody pad over my fanny. And my poor hymen was torn to shreds.

Of course I will have to face more of this abuse tomorrow since I was told I have to stay in the Program in spite of the abuse. My parents are livid but there’s nothing they can do. I think that the Health class wasn’t a demonstration of sex, it was a demonstration of torture.

“Oh crap, Kevin, it’s just like we saw on our old website,” Denise groaned. “Abusive teachers were almost always the biggest problem.”

“Yeah. There are more stories like this one in the blog’s archives,” Kevin observed. “Whoever this blogger is—wow, I think it must be a solo project. Hey, didn’t Amelia say she heard

someone in her school was the Realist blogger? Maybe she knows something.”

“She’s studying at a friend’s place till... oh, that must be her now...”

“Hi, I’m home!” Amelia called as she opened the door.

“Hi there! Amelia, honey, does anyone know who writes that ‘Realist’ blog?” Denise asked.

“Hi Denise, no; I haven’t heard, but that stuff posted on it is really scary. The kids in those schools must be terrified of the Program.”

“It’s very bad when the teachers use the Program as an excuse to mistreat or humiliate the kids like some of these stories tell about,” Denise said. “I know of cases where some kids liked the Program and I’ve even spoken to some of them, but since those kids aren’t outraged or hurt by what they experienced, most don’t write anything about it like the Realist does.”

Kevin looked at Denise. “Say, sweetie, looks like they don’t censor Facepage here. I wonder if kids tell of any good experiences on their personal pages. But I wonder how we’d find any instances if someone isn’t in their group of followers.”

“I can put up a question on a couple of music groups’ pages, ones that high school kids follow,” suggested Amelia. “Even if they take it down, the word might spread and we’d see if anyone answers.”

“Good thinking, honey, but do you want to use your own Facepage persona for that?” Kevin asked.

“Oops... um... no; that’s not such a good idea then...”

“Well, we could set up an anonymous page—that’s not really legal and we could get trouble if it got traced. Ah, I know. Let’s use one of the shell companies we used to register our anti-Program website. Those empty offices are still paid for, Denise. I think I have the records for the names and addresses on my laptop. Let’s see... yes I do. Okay, we can set up a new account with this name and address. Next, Amelia, don’t connect to the new account on Facepage with your usual browser. Your internet address is probably saved in the Facepage logs and could be traced back to us. We’ll set you up with the Tor browser—always connect with Tor and no one can trace your connection back to you.”

“How does that work?” Amelia asked.

“It uses relays—several different computers that the connection hops through—and hides the message and destination in encrypted layers so each relay can’t be traced back. It’s pretty complicated but it works well and my activist friends swear by it,” Kevin explained.

“Um, I should tell you this, I guess,” Amelia said, “I’ve been talking with a group of girls at school. They all had the FGM done to them when they were a lot younger than me...”

Denise looked at her in alarm. “Are they okay now? Do they need medical care?”

“Oh, no, Denise. They all do have problems but we looked their problems up on line and looks like they aren’t unusual for FGM victims. No one has their pain as bad as mine but they get urinary infections and only have pain when their, um, fannies? are rubbed.”

“Fannies?” Denise asked. “Their buttocks?”

Amelia giggled, “No, silly. That’s a rude word for... you know, between the legs—vulva, or um... pussy, that’s it. I know that some of the girls—not the ones who were cut—were saying in PE that they can rub their fannies to make it felt really good but none of us feels anything there but pain. Anyway. We wanted to write about how awful that FGM practice is and how it’s an awful health risk for girls. We want to do a blog about it.”

“What a wonderful idea, sweetie,” Denise exclaimed. “Can you work on that and not have it interfere with your schoolwork?”

“Yeah... I think so. Right now we’re not sure just how to start.”

“I have an idea. I’m sure there are women’s organizations who are fighting the practice. Let’s ask at the hospital on Friday if they have any information for someone to contact. I’m sure they’d love to have your voices added to their fight against FGM. And that brings up your treatment on Friday. How do you feel now, sweetie?”

Amelia shuddered. “Still hurts but I’ll get over it. That was really bad—I hope next time isn’t like that!”

“Well, they must have found something there, honey. I heard from Dr Singh’s office today and they want you to meet with him this Friday to talk about your treatment. They said not to worry, they think it’s probably good news.”

Amelia had tensed up at Denise’s first words but visibly relaxed at “good news.”

“Ooohh, I sure hope it’s good news...” she sighed.

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On Friday, Kevin and Denise accompanied Amelia to her neurology appointment with Dr Singh.

After Singh greeted them, he pulled a sheet out of a folder he was carrying and passed it to Amelia, who glanced at it and looked at him questioningly. “My surgery is soon?”

Singh smiled at her. “It’s actually good that it’s this soon, Amelia. You’ve made better than expected progress. That’s the surgical information sheet we give to our patients for microsurgery. I gave it to you so you could see that the incision you need is tiny, and that means rapid healing. When you had that very bad reaction to the last treatment, I’m sure you recall how painful that was, the therapist felt something right on or next to the little nerve at your injury, so she had to press in harder to see how large it was. Your earlier therapy broke up the scar tissue around it enough that she could feel it move a bit; it’s a little nodule that’s buried in the scar tissue but we know all about what causes such things. One possibility is that it’s a granuloma, that’s a lump of

coarse tissue that the body makes in response to either infection, inflammation, or a foreign substance.

“Another very likely possibility for the nodule is a traumatic neuroma; that sounds bad but it’s not. Let me explain what that is. It’s a kind of nerve injury that can happen as a result of surgery, and your genital cutting there could certainly have caused one to develop—neuromas usually are formed at the ends of nerve fibers after they’re injured. Then if something goes wrong during the healing process, the nerve sometimes regenerates improperly. We see neuromas form most commonly near a scar, either close to the skin surface or sometimes deeper. They can often be very painful and this could actually be the primary source of your continued pain.

“We don’t know which of those you have but it doesn’t matter since they’re both treated the same; we make a little incision, then carefully separate the growth from the surrounding healthy tissues, and finally we repair any damaged nerve fibers using a robotically controlled microscope.

“Okay, I’ve given you all lots of information; is everything clear? Any questions? Yes, Amelia?”

“Yes, sir. How long is the operation and do I have to stay?” she asked.

“Only an hour or two for the repair, depending on how much nerve involvement we find. We’ll keep you overnight simply to make sure you have adequate pain relief because sometimes the body produces all kinds of pain signals following this kind of surgery and sending you home with a narcotic pill just won’t do for the first 24 hours. You should be fine for sedentary activities on the third day, and you’ll need to keep the area clean and protected from pressure—wear loose-fitting undies—till I see you for the post-op visit a week to ten days following. Using a menstrual pad might be good, too.

“And that brings me to the next part. We can schedule the surgical part of the treatment of the scarring in your vagina at the same time. That’s a very routine procedure and there isn’t all that much work needed. I see from your chart that we can avoid your menses if we schedule a week from this coming Wednesday. Your periods are very regular so you should be over your period by that Saturday or Sunday at the latest. But I’d like to get this done soon, like on that Wednesday, so we don’t lose much time in your continued sensory therapy. Will this work, Miss Roberts, Mr Coris?”

Denise glanced at Kevin who nodded. “Dr Singh, everything you said sounds clear to us and we’d have no problem with that date. Is that okay, Amelia?” she asked.

She nodded, and then asked, “Dr Singh, if it’s that neuro... thing, does that mean that when you take it out, the pain will stop?”

Singh tented his fingers and leaned back. “You know, dear, that we can’t make blanket promises, right? We’re only physicians, not seers. But based on my experience in treating neuroma cases, I think that there’s a very strong possibility that this might be the source of much of your pain. There’s still scarring there that needs treatment and could be a source of pain, too. That’s why the therapy will continue following the surgery. But if I were a betting man, I’d say that this is the

major reason you're in that kind of pain. I hope that's a reassuring opinion."

"Yes, sir; thank you," Amelia said shyly. "And will the part in my... vagina... um... hurt a lot?"

"I won't be doing that part, dear," he told her. "Dr Jeffries—you met her—is the gynecologist who's consulting. She told me that you'll feel, ah, 'uncomfortable,' as she put it, for a day or two. I'm sure that you'll feel discomfort from the aftermath of the microsurgery more than what her procedure will cause. But in any case, don't get overly anxious about pain; pain can be well controlled for the first day or two post-op and actually shouldn't be much greater than the pain you experience every day. Is that what you mean?"

Amelia nodded. "Thank you."

Singh nodded. "Good. Okay, then, let me show you to the surgical scheduling nurse to confirm the time and get you your pre-op instructions. And you can go to your therapy session next week; they'll do some pre-op scanning to better locate that possible granuloma or neuroma."

Soon the group left for home carrying a sheaf of papers and prescriptions.

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Back at school the following week, Amelia met with her friends to discuss their blogging project.

After they settled at their table with their lunches, she began, "When I went for my last appointment, I spoke to a nurse. She told me that the United Nations and the um... World Health Organization and others all have anti-FGM programs. She gave me some flyers from Unicef, here," she passed them over, "and said since we're kids, these might be the best materials to begin with. She also suggested that we decide about the topics we want to write about, so I made a list of stuff I thought of."

She put a paper on the table and Darra picked it up.

"Okay," Darra said, "this looks like a really good place to start. Let me read it: 'number one, talking about organizations doing educating about preventing the practice; two, list of countries where it's practiced; three, number of girls affected by the practice; four, countries making laws against it as a medical or human rights issue; and five, international groups trying to get other countries to ban the practice.' Amelia, we should also write about what happens to girls, right? Like the different kinds of health problems it causes—complications, short and long term."

"That's right, I should have thought of that," Amelia said. "After all, it's what brought us together. Hey, maybe even have personal experiences if we can get people to tell us."

Fayola shyly reached for the paper and looked at it. "My mum says she regrets now having it done to me. She told me that she's heard that there's no religious law in Islam that requires doing it, too. Maybe that can be something to write too?"

Darra grinned at her. "Brilliant! Sure, let's split up these topics and pick who gets which one and will write something about them, okay?"

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Later that day, Amelia was speaking to Denise about her meeting with her five friends.

“So we split up the topics, Denise, and I decided to take the one about the laws and international groups. That’s ‘cuz of Kevin,” she giggled, “he’s into the laws and stuff and knows all the diplomats too. I’m gonna get him to help me lots.”

“Didn’t you want to write about the health effects, though?” Denise asked.

“At first I thought so, but my cutting wasn’t like the other girls’ FGM; Papa got it got stopped before anything was cut off me. Maybe my struggling made that first cut worse. The other girls had their cutting done with their mothers and grandmothers there and comforted them, they told me. Besides, they know other girls and can get them to tell their stories too.”

“Okay, sweetie,” Denise said. “I’m sure Kevin will be happy to help.”

“Denise, I just remembered,” Amelia said, reaching into her backpack. “They gave out these letters today. They said that they should be opened by our parents only. Oh, here’s Kevin.”

“Hi, guys, what’s up?” Kevin asked as he came in.

“Denise just offered your legal help to me,” Amelia giggled. “I need to write up something on anti-FGM laws for our blog and you know all about diplomatic stuff.”

“Hmm, well, I’m not so sure what I know goes into those areas, but I’m sure we can figure out where to get the facts you need,” Kevin smiled.

“Kevin, listen to this,” Denise said. “Amelia brought this letter home. It says that the government’s Department for Education has ruled that Amelia’s school is subject to running the Naked in School Program.”

“What!” both Amelia and Kevin exclaimed.

“Apparently because the school’s pupils get government tuition subsidies. The letter says that Amelia’s school is something like the specialty state-funded schools that they call, let’s see... ‘City Technology Colleges.’ Those are secondary schools that specialize in technology subjects, and there are only three of them in the whole country. Amelia’s school is a little different. It’s a specialty school like the others but it’s in arts and performance subjects. Also, it’s not a state school, it’s a tuition-based independent school. But because it’s a specialty that the government is interested in supporting, they provide a small subsidy—they call it a bursary—to offset some of each pupil’s tuition to support arts education. Now the government has decided that the subsidy they provide makes the school subject to running the Program. The letter says that the school’s governors will meet to discuss this and will meet Monday evening. They invite parents to speak at the meeting.”

“Oh no! I couldn’t do that...” Amelia moaned, eyes tearing. “I heard about what happens in those schools...”

“No fear, honey,” Kevin said, embracing her. “We won’t let anything happen to you and we’ll definitely be at that governors’ meeting. Denise, is there anything else in the letter?”

“Only that there will be reps from the Lambeth-London Borough Council and the Common Council of the City of London at the meeting too. Um, let’s see; there’s an info page. Those are the local authorities responsible for administration of state-funded schools; the London Common Council approved the Program for London state schools but the local councils had to approve it too. Because Amelia’s school is a special case, it’s a specialty school that draws pupils from a wide area, and since it’s independent, the educational authorities don’t have administrative authority over her school. So it looks like everyone is just feeling their way around here. We really do need to make our voice heard, honey.”

Kevin looked thoughtful. “Does it say who gets the final word on whether the school has to have the Program?”

“No, it doesn’t, Kevin. But the school is that ‘independent’ kind and it’s run by a local board, not by a borough council like the state schools are. The stationery lists the school’s governors—I guess they would be the ones who decide.”

Kevin took the letter and looked it over. “Hmmm, I see different governor titles. Staff, parent, co-opted, associate... well, the first two seem clear but what’s a co-opted governor?”

“I’ll bet we can look it up,” Denise said as she pulled the laptop to her. A minute later, she looked up. “They’re community representatives—say, that’s like American school board members. I wonder if they’re elected or appointed, this is the government site and it doesn’t say.”

“Well, three of the nine are parent governors,” Kevin mused. “That’s good since it gives parents a reasonable board representation. I have an idea; maybe we can use that meeting to our advantage.”

“Uh oh,” Denise chuckled. “You got that evil look in your eyes. Watch out, Norwich Academy!”

Amelia had been listening anxiously, now she spoke, her voice full of trepidation. “Are you sure you can keep me from having to do that Program? They make kids masturbate and force them to allow other kids to grope them in their privates. I couldn’t bear it if...” she dissolved into tears.

Denise held her. “Sweetie, we’ll try to keep you out of it. And if you met five other girls who were cut in your school and they all have pain in their privates like that, I don’t see how this stupid idea could ever be suggested here. This isn’t something we ever came across in the U.S., Kevin.”

Kevin blinked. “Huh. Yeah. No idea why, either. The U.S. has plenty of immigrant groups and I’m sure there must have been girls who were cut. Maybe they found ways to avoid the Program—home school or religious school. I wonder.”

“Well, for the research on our blog on FGM, maybe we’ll find how many girls in America there are with FGM,” Amelia said softly as Denise stroked her hair gently. “And you said you’d help

me with the laws about it, Kevin. Can we do that after I finish my homework?"

"Sure, sweetie," Kevin said.

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Next day at school, all the students were buzzing with the news about the threat of the Program coming to the school. The teachers had difficulty keeping order in their classes as the students wanted more information; finally, there was so much class disruption that the head teacher was forced to announce that no decision had been made by the school governors as yet.

Amelia met with her friends at lunch to plan their blog; yesterday she and Kevin had located a lot of information on the Internet about laws banning FGM in a number of countries, plus a United Nations convention and a treaty on the rights of the child and one from the European Union. Although the international treaties didn't specifically mention FGM, the practice could be considered a human rights violation and was thus banned by those treaties. But instead of their blog work, most of the girls' discussion was about the threat of the Program.

"I would just die," Mariama moaned. "I have permission to wear a modest PE kit too."

"Me too," said Fayola.

"How is it different?" Amelia asked. "I don't go to gym so I haven't seen those."

Fayola answered, "Oh, right, you wouldn't know, then. We traditional Muslim girls have to cover our hair, arms, and legs, so our kits are loose and long-sleeved. And we wear the hijab with it too."

"What about showers?" Amelia persisted.

"Oh, we get an excusal note saying light exercise only and no showers," Mariama put in.

Amelia pressed on, "Does that mean you never go swimming then? When I lived in Indonesia, the Muslim kids in my school did go swimming; the girls wore modest one-piece suits but their arms and legs were bare."

Fayola giggled. "Yes, you should see my swim costume then. Such high fashion! It's very modest and covers me all up—it even has a hoodie and a skirt but it's comfortable to wear in the water." She laughed. "Some people actually call it a burkini!"

Mariama groaned. "If I'm not allowed to show my bare arms and legs in public, how could I take all my clothes off? I would rather die than do that."

"Yeah, and at another school where Muslim girls were forced to be starkers, I heard a girl was killed by her family too," Tisa wailed.

All the girls groaned.

"My guardians are gonna do something to try to keep the Program away, I think," Amelia said hopefully. "I just pray that they can do it, too."

The others echoed that wish and then began to discuss their blog again. Estelle's uncle had helped her to set up the blog and showed her how to post articles on it.

"It's not that difficult," she told the others. "It's a lot like putting stuff on Facepage. And each one of us can add their own articles. Can you come to the library after classes? I can show you on a computer in the library."

Darra looked thoughtful. "Say, how do we let people know about our blog? When it's ready, I mean."

"Oh, good point," Amelia said. "Well, how about if I ask my nurse at my next therapy session if she knows how we could publicize it?"

The girls all agreed that was a good suggestion.

Then, after school, the teens gathered and began to enter their articles in the blog. Amelia had written up a description of the anti-FGM laws adopted by various countries so she copied the files from her cloud-storage hosting account and added them to the blog. Then she decided that she wanted to add quotes of selections from the human rights provisions of the U.N. treaties and include a discussion of how those provisions could be used by country organizers to persuade those countries to adopt anti-FGM laws, but doing that would take more time to research. She would do that later, at home, and discuss her idea with Kevin.

By the end of the week, the blog was developing nicely, and at her therapy session on Friday, Amelia's nurse gave her a list of organizations she could contact which might publicize the blog on their web sites.

## Chapter 7

Monday evening arrived and Kevin and Denise went to the school for the governors' meeting. School officials expected a large group attending and set the meeting up in the auditorium. The auditorium was packed, almost completely filled with parents; close to three-quarters of the parents had shown up.

The head teacher, Mr Hanford, opened the meeting.

“Good evening, parents, thank you for coming. I'm not surprised at the large turnout and we would have had a larger turnout except for the people who had to work this evening; my office had rather a few calls during the past week asking if the meeting could be held during the day instead. Unfortunately we could not do that. As a result, we've received many letters from parents who were unable to attend, expressing their view on their children's participation in the program I'll be discussing here.

“As we wrote in our letter to you last week, the Department for Education has informed us that our school is subject to the Human Sexuality Promotion Act, a law passed by both Houses of Parliament several years ago, since our school receives government subsidies directly in the form of bursaries based on pupil enrollment to offset the full cost of our school fees. As the law mandates, both the Lambeth Borough Council and the London Common Council have required Program participation in state-funded schools they administer, but as an independent school, we've been exempt until this recent ruling. The act that established the Program is silent about what amount of government financial support triggers a school being considered to be a state-funded one, but less than 10 percent of our funding is from state sources.

“Our governors have made their preliminary decision; the borough and city councils, whose representatives are with us this evening, have both indicated that if our governors decline to adopt the Program curriculum, our bursary support could be ended and many of our families will no longer be able to send their children here. So we are being placed in a sticky situation and have made a difficult decision. Before we get to that, let me turn the podium over to our chair of governors, Dr Byron Abberle.”

That official came to the podium and began to discuss the deliberations of the governors, and because of the threat of losing the subsidy, the governors found themselves virtually forced into agreeing to have the Program begin at the school. As soon as he said that, there was a huge outcry from the audience with people clamoring to be heard. It took several minutes for Abberle to restore order.

“Please, we've made provision for parents to speak here soon,” he finally made himself heard as order began to be restored. “But since we really can't expect to have you all spend the entire night here, your governors would greatly appreciate your keeping comments constructive and brief. Before we open public comment, the governors would like to determine your level of support—probably opposition would be the better term—for the Program. We think we've identified four fundamental reasons for approval or opposition to public nudity for our pupils.

These can be generally categorized into social, moral, cultural, and religious reasons. But I suppose that those four can be loosely grouped into two major areas: religious and moral; and cultural and social. Now, by a showing of hands, how many of you are opposed to the Program for religious and moral reasons?"

After a quick estimate and consulting with the others on the stage, he announced, "We reckon the count shows that about two-thirds of the parents are opposed. Now let's bring up the other reason, social and cultural, and please, if you indicated your opposition in our first count, don't raise your hand now."

He looked over the audience. "I reckon this amounts to perhaps a quarter, almost a third, of the group. Our counting this way is only an approximation, but it tells us that some 90 to 95 percent of you parents oppose the Program. Now we have another question. An essential key to the success of the Program's achieving its stated goals is if the pupils' parents encourage and support their child and ensure that they participate fully. When the Program begins, how many of you will support both your child and our school to help them satisfactorily complete their participation? Show of hands, please."

A few hands were tentatively raised but were quickly snatched down when it became apparent that virtually no one else seemed to support this issue.

Then a voice rang out: "How many parents will be aagin' their kids' gettin' involved?"

Virtually every hand in the audience was raised and chants of "Hear, hear!" rang out.

Abberle looked out at all of the waving hands and shrugged. He turned to the group seated to his right. "My colleagues from the London Common Council and the Lambeth Council, please take note of these responses from our parents.

"Now the comments we received by mail predominantly stated parents' opposition based on religious practice and most cited Islamic law but a fair number mentioned Christian doctrine as well. In all cases, the reasons cited were based on modesty, and writers pointed out that children of most cultures are taught to be modest in behavior as well as dress. There was one single comment that was a common element in all the letters we received and that was cultural acceptance. Virtually all of the letters brought up that issue; they pointed out that one of the principles of our British society is the acceptance of all citizens regardless of cultural or religious background. Many letters stated that a major stated educational goal of our society is to instill in our young adults a healthy attitude toward people of all cultures. In other words, we strive to teach our children to respect people of all religions and cultures. Forcing public nudity on children whose upbringing taught them otherwise is destructive to cultural, religious, and family values. That's what we gleaned from reviewing parents' letters.

"Now let me introduce Dr Myron Hubert, the National Program representative for the London Common Council, who wanted to address precisely that topic, modesty and multiculturalism, because this is a common criticism of the Program. Dr. Hubert?"

He came to the podium. “Thank you, Dr Abberle and Head Teacher Hanford. Indeed, it is the very idea of modesty in children, especially excessive modesty amongst them and amongst certain cultural groups, which gave rise to the development of the Naked in School Program. Too many of our youth grow into adulthood with their experiences of healthy interactions between cultures, religions, and genders severely impaired by the insularism their cultures impose on them. This gives rise to misunderstanding, discrimination, and persecution of people not a member of one’s group, and in the case of genders, to sexual assault and violence.

“The Program was specifically intended to remove the mystery of what human sexuality entails in all of its manifestations and to banish the modesty which various conservative cultures impose on their children. The Program is specifically designed so that those who participate in it will be trained to lose their modesty and will thus be better able to function in our modern society, especially for members of those cultural groups who maintain insular barriers which isolate them from the general population. It is the indoctrination of modesty in children which the Program is expressly designed to dispel. This is the position of London’s Education Authority, which I represent.”

His comments produced a swelling of booing and hooting. When the audience quieted, Hubert continued.

“As government representatives on the Education Authority, we respect the customs of all cultures and religions, but the practice of religion is a private matter. When religious customs clash with the goals of society as practiced in public, then the rules and regulations of the public take precedence. An example is the custom of multiple marriage which is permitted in certain cultures and religions but is not allowed in the United Kingdom. This is a matter of public policy.

“The purpose of the Program is defined in the Human Sexuality Promotion Act and is printed in the booklets which are provided to all pupils and their parents. Let me read the purpose as it’s stated in the Program booklet and is addressed to the pupil participant. I quote: ‘The Program has been carefully designed to help you become more comfortable with your body and your sexuality, to treat others in natural balance as both individual people and sexual beings, to learn to harness your natural energies, and to behave in a more mature and morally conscious manner. By becoming more comfortable with your body and sexuality, it is hoped that your sexual tensions will be in general diminished but more focused when appropriate. This is your opportunity for rapid personal growth.’

“That is what the Program is all about. The Program is actually a component of the state secondary-school curriculum, and just as members of all religions and sects are expected to follow the government-approved curriculum, it’s expected that this curriculum module will be followed as well. Thank you for your attention.”

He returned to his seat as many audience members rose and clamored for attention. Abberle returned to the podium and called for quiet. Then he addressed the gathering again.

“Now we’ll take public comment, but please, if your only comment is to state your opposition to

the Program or to repeat something that a prior speaker has said, we ask that you restrain yourself. The fact of your opposition is abundantly clear; we are looking for constructive suggestions to assist our governors in deciding their best course of action. There are microphones set up in the aisles for you to use and we sincerely request that you be orderly. We also beg you to be considerate of those waiting to speak and be brief.”

A line of people formed at each microphone and most comments basically covered religious modesty practices; people claimed that just as the government had no right to dictate a Muslim’s diet, they had no right to dictate his or her dress—and this fact was recognized in school dress codes permitting Islamic garb. Examples illustrating this argument were quickly exhausted, inducing many potential speakers, waiting in the lines for their turn, to return to their seats. Then, as a lull developed in parents rising to comment, one of the governors came up to the podium.

“Excuse me,” she said, “I’d like to interject a comment here now that there’s somewhat of a lull while people are returning to their seats. I’m Marsha Luddington, a parent governor, and would like to invite Mr Kevin Coris to address us. Mr Coris contacted me last week and told me that he can speak to some issues which I’m certain no one has considered to this point. In fact, it appears that he is, for want of a better term, somewhat of an ‘expert’ in the Program.”

A hush fell over the room. Kevin stood and walked to the nearest aisle microphone but Luddington motioned for him to come to the podium. He climbed the steps and went to each person on the stage to greet them personally. Most looked at him quizzically but he simply smiled at them and told them that he was honored to meet them and to be asked to speak. Then he went to the podium.

“I’m truly honored to be asked to speak here and I thank Mrs Luddington for the opportunity. I’m afraid to have to dispel her characterization about my being an ‘expert’ on the Program; I’m actually a Yank and doing a year’s study here in London at one of your excellent universities. But I’ve had extensive experience with the Program in high schools in the States and have first-hand knowledge of all of its problems and shortcomings. I’m guessing that except for my fiancée, I’m the only person in this room who has actually been a Program participant. Am I correct?”

There was a rush of whispers which washed over the room and it grew totally quiet again.

“I guess I am, then,” he went on. “So I suppose for this room, I’m the best ‘expert’ available, right?” Laughter. “I contacted Mrs Luddington last week and told her that while I was aware that the governors would be compelled to accede to government pressure because of their threatened financial extortion, there were measures which the school and indeed, parents, could take if they couldn’t delay the start of the Program until a legal challenge could be mounted to exempt the school. Now I’m going to go into some controversial matters and would appreciate not being asked to stop speaking until I’m finished. Everything I will mention will be completely legal and will actually follow the school’s policies as I’ve learned from reading its charter and bylaws. If any of our distinguished panel has a question or rebuttal, please make a note of it and we’ll address those comments when I’m done. Mr Hanford, Dr Abberle, can I have your assurance of no interruptions? And even better, could the governors adopt a motion to allow me to speak as

part of the record?”

Abberle looked amazed and opened his mouth for a retort but Luddington spoke quickly, “I so move!”

“Seconded,” another governor called.

Abberle closed his mouth. “Hmm, most irregular... young man, I...” he began.

“Sir, either call for discussion or ask if they are ready for the question,” Kevin prompted quietly.

He looked at Kevin and shook his head. “Indeed? Most extraordinary...” he muttered. Aloud, he said, “Right then. Any discussion?” he called. “No one? Do you need the question to be put again? No? Those in favor say aye.”

“Aye.”

“Opposed, the same? None opposed; the motion is adopted. Mr Coris, proceed, please.”

“Thank you, governors,” Kevin said. “First, I understand that you really can’t delay in beginning the Program while you look for grounds to challenge the government, so to minimize student terror and psychological pain, try calling for volunteers first. Don’t co-opt unwilling children. I’m sure in a performing arts school, there’d be some students who might have exhibitionistic traits.”

That comment resulted in some reluctant titters from the audience.

“Next is the use of force for disrobing students. I asked my London attorney—ah, it’s solicitor in England—to review the Program law and he told me that nowhere does it allow—or even suggest—that it’s permissible to use force to remove a child’s clothes. He told me that the use of force to strip anyone, particularly a child, is a felony. So this recommendation is for you parents: encourage your children that if they are selected, that they don’t comply. Tell them that you support their refusal to participate, as you told us earlier when you said, by show of hands, that you’d actively oppose the Program and would support your children in their refusing to participate.”

“I say there...” Hubert began.

“Sir, please, no interruptions?” Kevin interjected. “The Program rules also speak about using human subjects for classroom demonstrations. I’ve seen how this becomes a terrible abuse of the teachers’ power and is an enormous humiliation for the student. There is absolutely no educational purpose that can’t be better achieved by using training aids. Tell your child not to participate in demonstrations either.

“The only threat that the school has in forcing participation seems to be if the school refuses to submit their coursework or exams or both to the Ofqual exam board—this may be the wrong way of saying it, but I’m just a Yank and not familiar with you complex system. If a student has already taken the year eleven GCSEs and received their scores, there’s not much that can be done to him at that point, since you folks don’t have a formal quantitative graduation requirement the

way that the U.S. system does.

“You should know that the law simply states that pupil participation in the Program is required, but the law is silent about what happens if participation is refused. Obviously the law’s authors assumed that if the children were asked to strip, they’d willingly comply. But what happens if they don’t? Threaten pupils by claiming that the school will not certify their secondary school completion? I don’t know enough to even guess how a school could punish non-compliance. The law doesn’t mention withholding grade reports and records of class completions. I’ve learned that a number of you parents are in legal professions and you should be able to find out how you can get grades released if that becomes an issue.

“I’ve looked into post-secondary school options too and found that your children can leave school at the age of 16 after taking their GCSEs and then do an apprenticeship or traineeship, if they choose that route. They can also work part time and take classes part time at age 16. This means that if pupils complete school early, before year eleven, refusal to participate in the Program would trigger no penalties, would it?

“And what about those who refuse and want to go to university? What happens if somehow a student’s coursework isn’t certified by the school or the Education Ministry? I’ve looked into what might happen in those cases. I’ve checked with a number of major universities in the U.K. and in other western European countries where British children typically attend college, and the admissions offices I contacted all agreed that they would accept the results of their standard entrance exams together with the sixth-form grades. I told them about the Program starting here and they all were familiar with it—thought it was absurd, actually—and will not honor the idea of the British government’s withholding the records of a student’s earned education. So in France, they will use the baccalauréat général; in Germany, the Abiturzeugnis. These are just two examples. I learned that the Belgium and Netherlands colleges will admit British students if their score on their college’s matriculation examination is in the 80th percentile or greater or if they meet an average of 65th percentile in the International Baccalaureate exam. So the threat of any adverse academic consequences for not participating is a fairly empty one.

“You parents should be secure in the knowledge that your child can safely refuse to participate since there are no legal or academic sanctions available—none mandated by the law—to force them to do it. Norwich Academy may be forced to have the Program, but nothing in the wording in the law forces the students to participate. The law itself provides no academic sanctions, but it’s the fright over the threats from the Education Ministry that there will be academic consequences that’s coercing parents to tell their unwilling children that they have to participate.

“What are other ways that the school can require the kids to get naked? Let me say again that it’s absolutely not by using physical force. You should know that if the school uses any physical force to compel the students, that would actually constitute an assault and battery by the school officials against the child. Under no stretch of the imagination would British law allow physical force to be used with children and that means that the criminal code applies if physical force is used—or even threatened—against them. Could the school expel non-complying pupils? I

believe the state has a duty to educate its kids so that's an unlikely sanction. In short, there's nothing that the school can do to force participation.

"All right, then. I've covered the legal matters that apply to Norwich adopting the Program to run in this school. Now here is some essential academic information for both you parents and school officials. In a scholarly research study conducted at Avery University in the States, a study in which I, along with my fiancée, participated, we conclusively showed that there was a ten-point reduction in median grade-point averages, for the same schools, prior to the start of the Program as compared to grades after the Program was running. That's equivalent to a full letter grade in the U.S., so what was a 'B' average became a 'C' average after the Program began. I've given a copy of that study to Mrs Luddington. That was a peer-reviewed research paper published in a well-known education journal.

"Next, this is advice for you governors. The Education Authority says you have to run the Program. You can run the Program, meeting your legal responsibilities; just do it with everyone clothed."

The audience began laughing.

"Simulate nudity and the other activities that are mentioned in the law."

The laughing got louder and people began applauding.

"If you can't legally force students to participate by being naked, that might be your only recourse, after all. That suggestion is only partly in jest; in my case, I am forbidding my ward to participate for medical and psychological reasons. I suggest that you parents consider your own options and take my advice. Now I'll take any questions or a rebuttal. I think you had a question, Dr Hubert."

"Not a question... I'm totally outraged by your impudence, sir, you make a mockery of a legislative act prepared by education experts and passed by both houses of Parliament. None of what you suggested is legal by any stretch of the imagination. We can certainly force students to remove their clothes and to participate fully; if they don't, no university in the U.K.—I can't speak for the rest of Europe—will admit a student who hasn't participated. Parents, don't pay any attention to Mr Coris' comments, he has no idea of our system; he's told us that he's a Yank."

"Is that all, Dr Hubert? Good. You should have checked with an attor... solicitor—at least one who knows his or her stuff. Obviously you haven't, because you're sorely misinformed. I can document absolutely everything I said here this evening. I can provide names of the university admissions officers I consulted, if you ask me. As for the use of force, I assure you that assault, battery, or both on a child is a crime; tell your legal people that they should read Section 58 of the Children Act of 2004, as just one example, before they give out any more misinformation. I'm done *my* homework; obviously you and your legal people haven't, sir.

"Now, tell me: do you have any documented facts which support any interpretation that specifically states that the Program act *requires* individual students to participate? That act is

completely addressed to *schools* and discusses what the *schools* must do. Schools can only coerce participation by telling them that unspecified bad things will happen to them. But a whole cottage industry sprung up, called the ‘National Program Committee,’ which issued that Program booklet—by the way, it’s mostly plagiarized from the U.S. one—and some of the parts of the U.K. Program booklet are not actually supported by the U.K. act. They’re in the U.S. version of the Program law, though. Sloppy work. Think about that, sir.”

The audience was listening raptly at the exchange and broke out in applause again.

“And about my being a Yankee; sure, I’m proud of it. I’m also proud to have received my education internationally, in schools in Indonesia, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and Thailand, in addition to the States and now here in London. I might not be familiar with British law but by golly, I know how to find people who do know it, and when my ward is being threatened by her government and school system, by golly, I know how to protect her too. Thanks for hearing me out; back to you, Dr Abberle.”

Cheering broke out in the audience now and Kevin noticed that several of the school’s governors were smiling, Mrs Luddington included.

Abberle took the podium again. “Are there any further questions for Mr Coris? Or for the governors? Yes, ma’am?”

A woman in a hijab spoke from a microphone in one aisle. “Sir, please could you tell if Muslim exemptions being given? We no allow our girls the humility this cause; is so, so wrong to do this.”

“Ma’am, we’re all so new to this that I can’t answer that question now,” Abberle replied. “The special exemption decisions are made by the National Program Committee and we would have to apply for a ruling. That’s all I can say on that topic now.”

A man took her place. “When will this Program rot begin now?”

Abberle looked at Hanford. “Head teacher, it’s next Monday, correct? We can’t delay the LEA any more, from what I gather.”

“Yes, Monday,” Hanford agreed.

“Well, no bloody way will my daughter be allowed,” the man continued. “I think your Monday attendance will be thin... Say, are you going to take that eloquent young man’s advice and get volunteers?”

Hanford replied, “The names are supposed to be chosen at random...”

The man interrupted, “...but is that in the sodding law? Do what he suggested, why don’t you!”

“Yes!” cried a number of people.

“And do it with clothes!” called another.

Denise came up to an aisle microphone. “I’m Denise, Mr Coris’ fiancée, and was in the Program

in the States, as he told you. I was so affected by the experience that I later led a Program rebellion in my high school using the slogan, ‘Just say NO!’ and none of the students in the school participated. Tell that to your kids.”

There were cheers and applause at that.

Hanford called for order. “We have many of our pupils represented by parents and guardians here. See if your child would be willing to volunteer and then call the office to let me know. We’ll also announce this in classes tomorrow. And please, please, ask your children to be orderly in school. Parents telling children not to obey instructions in school can result in serious behavior problems, so we urge you not to tell your children to ever refuse legitimate instructions.”

Few people were paying attention now; most were talking among themselves or heading for the exits. Many began crowding the stage wanting to talk to Kevin, who was speaking to several governors. He found that the three parent governors were entirely supportive of his comments and planned to lobby the staff governors, who were teachers in the school, to get the other teachers to be as liberal as possible in their enforcing Program rules to prevent humiliating the kids.

When Kevin went to leave the stage, a number of parents latched onto him.

“Hey mate, you were corkin’ brilliant!” one man said, pumping Kevin’s hand. “But you should know that my mates, who have kids in a school with the Program, were telling me about those blighters at his local Education Authority—that bloke who you put down so good is from the LEA. They don’t like to be told what to do, so you gotta look out for them. If you know about Ofsted... you do? Okay, like Ofsted does, the local EA sends inspectors to schools for curriculum checks. I bloody hope that they don’t bother us here!”

When Kevin and Denise returned home, Amelia was quivering with anxiety. “What’s gonna happen in school?” were her first words as soon as they began to open the door to the flat.

She rushed into Denise’s arms. “Are they doing the Program?”

Kevin took her hand. “Afraid so, darling, but we told them that we are forbidding you to participate if they select you,” he told her.

“But I read in that blog that in other schools that kids were forced...” she began.

“Yes, I know,” Kevin replied, “but I have an idea for a way for you to alert me if you need help. There’s a Bluetooth personal emergency alert device I recently read about that you wear and when you push the button it sends an alert with your GPS location from your mobile. I’ll get you one tomorrow and we’ll set it up. I can also lend you my miniature mobile; you can wear it on a necklace; a close friend’s dad helped develop it but they aren’t being sold yet. One of those little mobiles saved her from a kidnapping, actually. Then if you’re threatened, you can get help quickly.”

“But honey, you should know that Kevin warned the school officials that using physical force

was against the law, right, Kevin? Tell her what happened at the meeting and what you said,” Denise remarked.

Kevin looked at Amelia and smiled. “Yeah. So it looks like Monday’s the start date. Something like 95 percent or more of the parents at the meeting were opposed to the Program and it looks like most will tell their kids not to participate, like we did with you. I suggested that the head teacher ask for kids to volunteer...” Amelia snorted. “...so they’ll be asking in school tomorrow for volunteers. I gave them all sorts of reasons for not having the Program but the school is being forced—blackmailed, no, extorted, actually—by the government. I think that what they might do is have some kind of toned-down version of it, but we’ll have to see. And I did tell them specifically that forcibly stripping a child is a crime.”

“Can I stay home Monday?” Amelia pleaded. “I’m so scared. Even if I don’t have to do it, I couldn’t stand having to see other kids suffer by being pressured into doing it.”

“I’m afraid not, sweetie,” Denise said soothingly. “Everything will probably be okay and you’ll have that alert gadget.”

“Denise, I have an idea,” Kevin exclaimed. “Amelia, the Denisons, they were our college housemates, did this in their high school,” he told her. “They organized the students so they’d work together to protect each other. They didn’t let anything bad happen to kids in the Program by shielding them—not using force, but by surrounding the Program kids. But those kids were mostly from military families and knew how to organize. If you can talk to your classmates, maybe you guys can come up with an idea to make it work in your school.”

“Kevin... I’m not... I don’t think I can organize... or talk about stuff like that...” Amelia began.

Denise got a glint in her eye. “But maybe we can do something better than asking Amelia to try to organize... Remember what the Marines said, sweetie, that the best defense is a good offense? Instead of asking Amelia to try to organize, why don’t we try something along the lines of that switched student newspaper article?”

“Way cool idea, darling; sure, that’s much better,” Kevin enthused.

Amelia looked at Kevin, then Denise, with a puzzled expression. “I hate it when Denise gets that look,” she moaned. “Trouble always follows...”

The others laughed.

Amelia looked at Denise warily. “What switched article, Denise?” she quizzed.

“You remember I told you about the high school we went to in Atlanta? That’s where we met the Denisons, our Marine family friends.”

“Sure. The ones who helped kill the Program there.”

“Right,” Denise continued. “When Kevin and I started school in Atlanta, the school had the Program, and the two of us got involved in helping the kids to resist. I called the resistance

movement the ‘Just Say No’ campaign. Then one of our friends suggested hijacking the student newspaper to put an anti-Program article in it. So I think that for here, we could write up a page of some anti-Program suggestions and maybe you could somehow sneak them into school where the kids can find them.”

“Okay, maybe... but... I don’t know... oh, okay,” Amelia said uncertainly. “Well... There are six classrooms that are open in my wing before anyone goes to them in the morning so maybe I can leave copies there. I don’t wanna get caught... I need to see what’s happening tomorrow; maybe with kids all talking about the Program meeting last night, I’ll have a chance to do it. Ooohh, I used to love going to school. Now it scares me...”

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The next day, Amelia went to school with the flyers Denise and Kevin wrote up and printed and brought a letter to the school from Kevin requesting that she be exempt from the Program for medical reasons; the letter promising that a medical statement would be provided the following week. And as Amelia anticipated, the students arriving at school were abuzz with the news of the Program meeting and about its planned starting on the following Monday. With all of the turmoil in the hallways, she was able to go to her classroom wing unnoticed and surreptitiously dropped off copies of the handout, leaving a stack on the desks near the rooms’ doors. After she dropped off copies in the last room in the wing, she walked over to a group of kids in the hall and joined their conversation; they were all talking about how their parents were going to inform the head teacher that they wouldn’t participate in the Program.

The first bell rang and the kids began to drift off to their classrooms.

“Did you hear they’re gonna ask for volunteers to be naked?” one girl asked another as they followed Amelia into their classroom.

“Yeah, like that’ll happen, right?” the other girl replied.

Amelia went to her seat and the boy sitting behind her began telling her about what his parents heard the previous evening.

“Yeah, my guardians were there and they told me about what happened,” she responded.

“Oi,” a boy called from near the door. “There’s a stack of handouts here. Wow!” he exclaimed as he looked at one. “Cor... This is brilliant!”

“Oi, gimme one!” another boy called to him as the teacher entered; copies of the handout began getting passed from person to person.

There was a hubbub as the teens quickly scanned the sheets. The teacher picked up a copy.

“Oh, my,” she said, “who brought these?” she asked.

No one replied. She turned to the boy who had found them. “Arthur, did you bring them in?”

“No, miss, they were on that desk when I came in,” he answered, pointing. “I picked one up; I

thought they were handouts from the school.”

The page heading read, “Naked Program at Norwich Academy: Just Say No.” Then under that, “How not to get naked. Ideas heard at the Norwich Governors’ Meeting on Monday.” The page basically contained suggestions for resisting the participation in the Program. First, it advised not to take part in the Program at all, to simply refuse to take one’s clothes off. Next, it suggested, if somehow a person did have to become naked, that other students could help him or her by shielding them from being harassed, such as preventing them from having to do any objectionable Reasonable Requests. The page suggested that everyone should refuse to take part in humiliating classroom demos, pointing out that except for classes which taught specifically about the human body, there was no need whatsoever for a subject to be naked in a classroom demonstration. Students were advised to simply ignore the Program’s opposite-sex rule about restroom use or locker rooms because that rule was only about humiliation and presented a real safety problem for girls.

The next section had information about the threat any academic-based punishment and listed the options students had even if the school somehow refused to certify the completion of secondary school. Finally, it mentioned that at Monday’s meeting, someone told about a study in American schools which showed that the Program caused student grades to drop by a large amount. The flyer suggested that participating could result in overall grades too low for university admission. The page’s final words were: “It’s absolutely clear that participating in the Program results in no benefit of any kind for you, neither social, psychological, nor educational.”

News of the flyers rapidly swept the school and at first, only a cursory attempt was made by the staff to find its source; soon the head teacher learned of the flyers but by then, attempts to confiscate copies were futile because kids had copied them with their phone cameras and emailed the copies to friends. By lunchtime, a large number of students had been quizzed about the identity of the flyer’s author but none had any idea who it was. In fact, many students claimed that they would have been proud to have written it and brought it to the school.

Amelia wasn’t in school on Wednesday, her surgery day, or Thursday, but by Friday she felt better and Denise arranged for a cab to take her to school. At school, she quickly found that she hadn’t missed much; during the week classroom instruction had suffered greatly since everyone’s thoughts were fixated on the events that next Monday would bring.

She was still moving somewhat slowly and tentatively at lunch period when she met her blogging friends and they became very concerned when they saw how carefully she was moving.

“Yeah, I’m tired and hurting. You remember, I told you I was having surgery Wednesday,” Amelia explained. “They found something under my skin down there that was rubbing on my nerves and took it out. And then did this microsurgery stuff on a little nerve there that was damaged. When it heals, it’s supposed to feel much better, they think. I hope so...”

“You go sit,” Darra told her. “We’ll get you your lunch.”

“Oh, thanks!” Amelia said gratefully.

When the girls returned, they asked for more details about Amelia's surgery.

Amelia grimaced. "It was worse than they thought it would be, actually. My doc said it was either a grainy lump or something, I can't remember the word, or a neural lump—neura... o... ma? Neuroma! Yeah, he thought a neuroma was what I had. Turned out it was both things! Ugh!"

The girls listened with a kind of fascinated disgust.

Amelia went on, "Apparently when I got cut, something got into the wound. They thought it might've been some threads of cotton—my panties got torn when I struggled to get loose—but when Papa had me treated for the cutting right afterwards, my doc here told me that the wound wasn't cleaned completely. A lot of scarring formed around whatever was left inside and also a neuroma thingy grew on the nerve there. So my incision had to be bigger than they thought. Otherwise everything else went okay."

"How is it now?" Fayola whispered in fascination.

"Very tender. It's throbbing, too, not a bad pain, but way different from what I had before. And every so often I get a sharp jabbing pain from there. But my doc seemed very happy when he checked me when I left the hospital. He said everything went very well and I hav'ta protect that area and not do anything to disturb the dressings." She giggled. "You really don't wanna know what I need to do to pee to keep the dressings dry... it was doing that or using a catheter for a week or so."

"What?" several exclaimed.

"Um, I have a kind of funnel thingie I hold against myself there and pee through it. It's like a boy's cock in a way," she snickered. "Not very comfortable using it, though."

"Eeww," they all shuddered in sympathy.

"So tell me what I missed these two days," Amelia asked.

The girls told her what they had heard from many kids about their not participating in the Program if they got picked.

"Yeah," Mariama said, "lots of kids brought in parents' notes saying that their kid can't do the Program, I brought in one too."

All the other girls nodded; they had brought in letters too.

Tisa pulled out a well-worn copy of the flyer that Amelia had planted in some of the classrooms on Tuesday.

"I got a copy of this," she said, showing it, "and I think everyone in the school's seen one by now. We're all in the 'Just Say No' movement."

Amelia had to fight to keep herself from grinning.

## Chapter 8

The scene at Norwich Academy the following Monday morning was quite different from any other morning. The arriving students were all subdued, walking into the building and keeping mostly to themselves. Occasionally a few kids gathered to exchange some hasty comments but broke up just as quickly. Amelia, still moving fairly carefully, went to the office and handed in a note from the hospital that stated that she was not to engage in any strenuous activity or one where her surgical area could become exposed to injury.

After the children were settled in their first classroom and the final bell rang, their teacher announced that in five minutes, after attendance was taken, they would all leave for the auditorium where the head teacher would explain how the Program would be run. A sigh ran through the classroom.

Soon the school was gathered in the auditorium. Mr Hanford went to the podium.

“Greetings. I know you’re not looking forward to this new development at our school,” he began.

The students murmured an affirming “Yes sir.”

“We need to introduce this Naked in School Program here. Look at the Program this way. Norwich Academy is a performing arts school in addition to its other specialties, and we’d like you all to think of the Program as part of your learning about performance arts. I’m sure you’re well aware of how much nudity exists in plays and cinema so we’d like you to view your participation as a performance here at school.”

Now the audience grumbled loud cries of objection.

He went on, “Yes, I know you’re not convinced, but we need to put the best face on a situation which is really beyond the control of our school. Now you may have noticed some unfamiliar people in the room and here on the stage. Since this is the first time that the Program is being introduced into an independent school, the local Education Authority—that’s the group of officials which oversees the state schools—has provided us with a few security people who are familiar with the Program from other schools in the borough. And also up here on the stage is Mr Simon Whiston, who is a local representative for the National Program Committee.”

There was some subdued hissing.

“Please stop that and be polite,” Hanford warned. “Now you all received a copy of the National Program Committee’s pupil booklet, the Program booklet, last week. All the rules for the Program are in it. As well, while you’re participating in the Program, complete nudity is required during school hours and also if you’re attending or participating at any school-sponsored activities during your week. As the rules say, any attempt to hide or cover up, like using your rucksack or for girls, doing something like using your hair to cover your chest, is a Program violation and violations can result in your being required to repeat for another week.

“The Program is supposed to teach you to overcome your modesty and become familiar with the

bodies of both sexes and to accept your own body and its sexuality. That's why there's a Program rule called 'Reasonable Requests.' Any pupil is permitted to touch or fondle the sexual organs of a Program participant, as long as the participant isn't physically harmed—but pupils will not be allowed to put a foreign object into any body cavity of another pupil. In most cases, the Program participant can decide what he or she thinks is 'reasonable,' but untoward refusals are considered a Program violation, so you're urged to allow most Requests or suffer unwanted consequences.

“The next topic I have to cover is called 'Relief.' Because of the heightened sexual pressure which the naked pupils will experience, especially if they've been fondled, they will be given an opportunity to masturbate to orgasm with or without assistance of another pupil during the beginning of any class. This must be done where the class can see the participant as it's another teaching component of the Program. And the Program was also made part of the teaching curriculum and it requires teachers to use Program students for any necessary teaching demonstration, including things like being a model for sex studies in biology or as a figure model in art or photography.

“Let me remind you again that refusing Reasonable Requests and not participating in classroom demonstrations are Program violations, and some violations can extend one's Program participation time by days or weeks.

“Finally, boy and girl participants must use the locker rooms, showers, and rest room facilities of the opposite sex during their Program week. Children who are in sports or performing arts will participate in those activities naked as well. We expect that you will be familiar with all of the Program rules as spelled out in your Program booklet, so be sure to read it to know what your responsibilities are. Not following a rule because you're not familiar with it, isn't an excuse. An inadvertent violation must be treated the same as an intentional violation, won't it.

“After we're done here and before you return to classes, all girls in the school will need to see the nurse to get the contraceptive injection that the Program requires. This will be done in the gym, by classes, and every girl will receive the shot today. Now, we asked for volunteers for the first Program group but no one came forward, so pupils were selected randomly to start today. Before we call these pupils, I'll make a last call. Does anyone want to volunteer and have your week done with now? No one? All right then. We've selected four pupils each from the tens and elevens and both the lower and upper sixth form; that's sixteen pupils, and we'll continue doing this until everyone has participated. When your name is called, please come up to the stage. First, from the tens...”

He read four names. There were a few gasps, but no one stood. Hanford looked at the audience.

“I read four names. Please come up here.”

A voice rang out, “Just say NO!”

A boy stood and called, “I'm not participating! I'm not going up there!”

Several others shouted, “Me too!” “I'm not doing it!”

Hanford looked at the teachers who were seated on the aisles. “Teachers, please identify these pupils as I read their names from all four class years...”

He read the entire list of names as the teachers pointed to the children called; four of the children named were not in the room. The teachers coaxed several of the children out of their seats and up to the stage, but most refused to budge.

Then Mr Whiston came to the podium and spoke quietly to Hanford. “After I see’d that flyer from last week, I reckon’d this. Yow’ll need to get your teachers to bring ‘em to the stage, by any means necessary if they ‘ave to.”

“I can’t do that,” Hanford whispered back. “We can’t use force; a law was cited to our governors that makes using force a criminal offense. The governors directed me not to use force.”

Whiston retorted, “The Program ovre’rides any of them laws.”

“I’m not going to tell my teachers to do that and risk being arrested,” Hanford replied.

Whiston scowled. “Alroit then, I’ll tell the secoority blokes.” He turned to the microphone. “Secoority, bring them kids who’ve refused up to the stage.”

There was a series of minor tussles with a few of the boys and after several minutes, there were twelve children who had been brought to the stage but then seven of them ran backstage and disappeared, then three more snuck off while the security men ran backstage to find the seven. Chaos ensued; the three security men couldn’t keep up with the children trying to evade them and the teachers were trying to keep the children quiet. Meanwhile, many children in the audience were chanting, “Just say no!” over and over. In the commotion, about a third of the children managed to slip out of the auditorium while Hanford and the teachers were trying to restore order.

Whiston called the security men to stop and Hanford gradually restored order to the room.

Whiston looked at the small group of four pupils left cowering on stage; they were too frightened to resist. “Secoority, please bring three more bairns up ere and keep ‘oldin’ ‘em,” he said, “and you lot, you will listen or I assure you the consequences will be proper rough. If you dun’t do as yer told, we’ll ‘ave ya nicked and banged up; you’ll proper ‘ate that, I’m sure.”

The security men began a flurry of activity and started trying to grab children who were near the aisles. Suddenly a man grabbed Amelia’s arm.

“Come with me, missy,” the man growled at her.

“NO! I have a medical excuse!” she screamed.

“No matter, there’s no excuses,” he said as he pulled her along.

Amelia activated the alert button Kevin had given her and her mini-phone beeped quietly, but the man began holding both of her hands, keeping her from using the voice function.

While Amelia was being virtually carried onto the stage, the other two security people were dragging two other children, a year eleven boy and a year ten girl onto the stage. She was wearing a hijab.

“Strip ‘em now,” Whiston told the men. “Go do that girl first,” he said, pointing at the struggling, terrified year-ten girl, “I’ll keep hod owd this wench.”

He took Amelia’s arms while the two men yanked off the hijab to the girl’s shrieks and started to pull off her clothes while she kept screaming. She crossed her legs, attempting to prevent her panties from being pulled off, but the man grabbed its gusset and yanked, tearing it, and then ripped her panties the rest of the way off her. Now she was naked and was forced into a chair where one man continued to hold her while the other came back to hold Amelia, letting Whiston return to the podium.

“The Program teaches yow pupils about shedding yow modesty, so we’ll now ask this girl to show us how she mastabates,” he announced. Turning to the girl, he ordered, “Rub yow fanny, bab. Yow need to let the lads do that for Reasonable Requests, yow do.”

“I can’t,” she wailed. “I’m cut there!”

“What do yow mean, yow can’t? Cut where?” Whiston asked.

He told the man holding her to spread her legs and show her where to stroke herself. The man grabbed her hand and moved it toward her vulva and just as it got close, she jerked her hand out of his and his fingers jammed into her crotch. She screamed in pain.

“What the bloody hell?” the man pulled back, looking closely at her vulva. “What’s wrong with your...”

A boy in the audience, who had been standing in the middle of his row at the back of the auditorium, had been shouting, along with the others, to stop hurting the girl as he was trying to push his way out of his aisle. He hadn’t been able to make much progress in getting around the jumping, screaming kids who were blocking his way while the girl on the stage was being abused.

One of the teachers called, “Stop right now! She must have had her sex parts cut in that ritual genital operation they do! You just hurt her badly!”

“Alroit, let ‘er goo an’ lend a ‘and with this other lass instead,” Whiston called and the man who had stripped the first girl joined the man who was holding Amelia, while two girls who were still on the stage went to the naked, hysterical girl and were trying to comfort her.

Amelia screamed at the two men as they began pulling her clothes off, “No! Stop, stop! No! I’ve just had surgery in my privates—someone please help!”

From the audience two of her friends called, “Stop, stop, you’ll hurt her!” and two boys who were still on the stage, their initial shock gone from witnessing the first girl’s stripping, rushed over and tried to pull the men away, but Whiston grabbed them and pushed them off the stage.

Meanwhile, the boy in the audience, who had been trying to leave his seating aisle, had finally pushed his way out and was now leaping up the stage stairs while shouting, "That's enough, get away from her, you bloody perverts!"

He rushed up and grabbed the shoulder of the man holding onto Amelia's arms and pulled him back. The man let her go, turned, and angrily lashed out at the boy with an actual closed-fist punch, apparently intended to do damage. Instead, the boy ducked the haymaker, twisted around, bent over at his waist, and struck out with his foot, hitting the man square in his gut. The man yelled in shock and pain as he flew back away from Amelia, fell onto his back, and slid across the floor, writhing in pain.

Meanwhile, Amelia, who was now wearing only her bra and panties, had been freed from the grasp of her first assailant. She was now fully facing the man who was still trying to tear her panties off; she took a half step back away from him while trying to pull his hands off of her. He let go of her panties and straightened up; then he tried to grab her shoulders but she shoved him back and with a swift motion, kned him in the groin. He gasped and collapsed, clutching himself, and curled into a ball on the floor.

With two men down now, the third security person, who had been occupied with trying to restrain a struggling boy, let that boy go and rushed at the boy who had come to Amelia's aid. The adult attempted to grab the boy's arm but instead was taken in a shoulder throw and found himself flying across the stage and crashing into a chair.

The stage was in an absolute turmoil now. Amelia, carrying her torn clothes, hobbled off toward the left wing, supported by her two friends who had run up to help her, while two other girls half-carried the sobbing, naked girl with her clothes to the back-stage area. While they were leaving the stage, Whiston himself went after the boy who had incapacitated two of the other adults. When he tried to grab him, he suffered a crushing hip throw that landed him on top of several chairs. He slid to the floor, groaning and out of action.

Just then, three police officers appeared, coming on a run through the auditorium doors.

"What's all this, now?" one shouted, climbing up the stage steps. "We got a call about an assault here."

The boy, who was bending over one of his victims and checking him for any major injuries, turned to the officer.

"These four down men assaulted a number of children here, two of them sexually. I stopped three from causing further injuries to any more girls. They've already badly injured two girls here and two boys were pushed off the stage; they might be hurt too. These berks aren't seriously injured but probably will need some medical care."

"What the bloody hell?" another officer shouted. "You claim it was a sexual assault?"

"Yes sir," the boy said, indicating the four men who were gradually beginning to recover. "These berks assaulted a whole bunch of children here. Here comes the head teacher now, he'll sort

you.”

While the boy was talking, Hanford, who had been involved in trying to calm several hysterical children and one distraught teacher, had rushed over.

“Officer, I’m Clarence Hanford, the head teacher. We were holding a Naked in School assembly...”

“Augh! That bloody nonsense!” an officer grunted.

“...I tried to tell them—those people from the LEA—not to force the children, it’s against the law...”

The boy interrupted, “Section 58 of the Children Act of 2004, actually.”

Hanford and the officers all stopped and looked at him.

“Very good, Jeremy, and how do you know that, and judo too?” Hanford asked.

“Sir, I know you read that law and human rights blog, you’re always after my mum to get me to stop doing it. And it’s not judo; I know *taekwondo*.” Jeremy said.

The first officer interrupted, “Sod it! We have to see about injuries? Did you say there were injuries to children?”

Jeremy tried to see where the girls went and noticed the group in the wings comforting each other; the two stripped girls were now in clothes again but the fronts of both of their blouses appeared to be torn.

“Over there, it would seem,” he pointed to the wings. “And check those boys in the front row; they might be injured too. Looks like they’re in pain.”

“Jason, get some bracelets on those four blokes before they’ve recovered now and we’ll sort them later,” the first officer ordered. “The girls over there are really crying. Tom, maybe we should call to get Jennie over here?” he asked the other officer. “And a detective.”

“I’ll call. Jennie wasn’t far away when this call came. I do have medics on the way too.” He keyed his mic and spoke into it. A dozen seconds later his radio squawked back; he replied and then said, “She’ll be here soon.”

Meanwhile, the first officer had turned to Hanford. “Okay sir, let’s get sorted here now. I’m PC Jones. We’ll need more investigators so we’ll get a detective to follow up, but I need to get some statements right now. But first, I’d better check on those girls. Tom, stay here with the head teacher and this boy; get their statements.”

He went to the wings where the girls were trying to calm down the sobbing girl; she was sitting in a chair and Amelia was squatting next to her, holding her and talking softly into her ear and she was nodding, tears streaming down her face. The other girls were rubbing her back.

Jones came up to the little group. “Excuse me, ladies. I’m PC Jones. Was anyone injured here?”

Amelia looked up as the girl started crying anew. “Hana was jabbed in her privates,” she whispered. “It really hurt her badly, she can’t walk, but I don’t think she can deal with a man now...”

The constable named ‘Jason’ called to Jones and he looked up. Jason pointed toward the auditorium floor and Jones saw a woman officer coming down the aisle. Jones waved to her and she came running up to the stage.

“Ah, good timing, Jennie. This girl, Hana, was possibly assaulted and injured in her groin. Could you see if she needs medical attention?” To Amelia, he said, “PC Bartlett can talk to your friend. Miss Hana?” he took her hand. “Can you talk to PC Bartlett?”

Hana looked up.

Amelia hugged her. “It’s okay now, Hana, you’re safe. Talk to the lady officer.”

Tisa interrupted, “Amelia, weren’t you hurt too? They were really manhandling you there and they did get your pants pulled off.”

Bartlett looked at her sharply. “Oh! Are you hurt too?”

“It’s okay, Hana needs help first,” Amelia said, holding her torn blouse together with one hand. “They pulled down my pants, tore off my top, and then tried to tear off my panties but a boy stopped them.”

Suddenly they were distracted by Kevin, who burst through the auditorium doors and came running up to the stage, calling Amelia’s name.

“Amelia? Are you okay?” he shouted. He ran over and embraced her as Jason followed him.

Jones looked at the confusion and shook his head. “We *really* need to get this bloody mess sorted... Jason, please check on the call for a detective and ambulance, and ask for another unit. And tell those four berks to shut up; we’re not letting them loose until we know what happened. Tom,” he called to the third officer who was talking to Hanford and Jeremy; he had asked them to stay away from the girls so they could get separate statements, “I want to talk to those two you’re with. And you, sir,” to Kevin, “just who are you?”

“I’m Amelia’s guardian. I called the police about this assault in progress here. Amelia alerted me that she was in trouble. I have the audio from her phone that was recorded during the assault,” Kevin explained.

Then Jones moved aside and Kevin could see the three people standing near the podium, there was a police officer talking with two people; then the two people turned toward Kevin, watching PC Jones walking toward them, and Kevin recognized Hanford and Jeremy.

“Jeremy? Jeremy Porter?” Kevin called out. “What are you doing here?”

Jeremy looked over at Kevin. “Kevin? This is my school! What are *YOU* doing here?”

Hanford glanced at Kevin and suddenly recognized him. “Mr Coris? What the *hell* are you doing here...?”

Jones rolled his eyes. “Shit,” he muttered, “What a sodding mess... I see we’re in for a lot of explaining.” Aloud, “All right, I *still* need to get some statements...” he broke off as he saw Amelia running toward Jeremy.

She ran up to him and hugged him.

“OH! It was you! You were the one who saved me from that creature! Thank-you-thank-you!” She pulled back and looked at Jeremy again. “OH! I’ve seen you! You’re in some of my classes!” she cried. “And your name’s Jeremy! And you know Kevin... Are you the Jeremy who Kevin and Denise are always talking about... and I never connected the names and didn’t remember your last name and never knew you went to school here and....”

“Shhhh,” Jeremy stopped her running on. “Yeah—you must be the Amelia who my folks said lived with Kevin? Wow. This is unbelievable.”

“Oh god, I can’t believe this. Denise said she wanted me to meet you... ohmygod, look at me!” She tried to cover her half-exposed chest, pulling the torn blouse closed tighter. She hugged him again. “You really did save me...” Tears began flowing.

“You’re okay now, Amelia. I couldn’t stand seeing what those perverts were doing to you girls. But hey, that was one mean kick you gave that berk, girl!”

“But you... you took three men and just... two of them are huge! And you just threw them like nothing...” Amelia went on.

Meanwhile Kevin had hurried up and was listening, happy to see that Amelia didn’t appear to be seriously frightened or hurt. “So you saved my honorary sister, Jeremy. If she got herself jabbed in her privates it would have caused her permanent damage. She just had surgery there last week. Amelia, are you okay? Maybe we should let Dr Singh check you.”

Jones turned to Amelia. “Miss, you sure you’re okay? Did one of them hurt you?”

Amelia looked around at him. “No, Jeremy stopped that guy before he stuck his fingers into my crotch like they did to Hana. But I was dragged around the room and then my legs got pulled apart. That’s when Jeremy stopped him,” she said through her tears.

Kevin turned Amelia toward him and whispered in her ear, “Darling, are you really all right? You’ve gotten a bad shock and a reaction to it might hit you in a few minutes.”

“If you’re with me, I’ll cope,” she whispered back, wiping her tears with the back of her hand. “I have Jeremy with me too,” she said as she reached out to Jeremy, who looked at her and put a protective arm around her shoulder. She leaned into his chest.

The other police and medics began arriving; they put Hana on a gurney and left with Bartlett. A man in a rumpled suit walked up to the group. “Hi, Jonesy. Fill me in on what you’ve got here.

Folks, I'm DC Conners."

Jones told him the few facts he had heard. "Mostly we were trying to get things settled down. This gent..." he pointed to Kevin "...says he has an audio recording of what happened."

"Okay, then. Jonesy, do you think we need to get independent witness statements?" Conners asked.

"Not from this group, sir. They've all been talking about what happened amongst themselves so there's no point now. Plenty of other potential witnesses for unbiased statements. I think getting an accurate chronology now will be better. You can corroborate the facts with the other interviews later."

"Sounds good; is there a quiet place? This area is really in a turmoil."

Teachers had been rushing around dealing with upset children; a few were still in tears on the stage and Hanford had been passing out directions to his staff. Jones called over several officers and asked them to get a few statements from the children and teachers who had been close to the events on the stage while Hanford told a few senior teachers to take charge to restore order. Then he turned to Conners.

"Detective, we can talk in our green room, off of the stage over that way. It's a performers' waiting room and reception room to meet their admirers after an event; it has comfortable seats."

"Okay, Mr Hanford, lead the way," Conners said. "Jonesy, come with us too and," he pointed to Amelia, Jeremy, and Kevin, "you three too."

Amelia had gotten some safety pins from someone, closed up her blouse, and was now quietly talking to Jeremy, holding one of his hands with both of hers, and tears were still leaking down her cheek. Jeremy reached up with his free hand and wiped a tear away.

"It's okay now, Amelia. You're safe now, and Kevin's here too."

"Yeah, it's just that reaction setting in now, Jeremy. Kevin was right, I'm feeling very vulnerable and exposed now. Oh, please hold me..."

Her knees started to buckle; Jeremy grabbed her and moved her to a nearby chair, easing her into it, as Kevin looked over with a concerned expression.

"I'm okay," Amelia assured him. "Just got a bit unsteady but I'm really..."

Just then Kevin's mobile rang and Amelia looked at him expectantly.

Kevin looked at the device. "Excuse me, it's my fiancée," he apologized. "I need to take this."

Conners grinned. "For sure. Go ahead."

"Hi, darling, Amelia's okay. I'm here with her right now."

"..."

“I heard what was happening on my mobile as I was going there, but I haven’t spoken to her about it yet. We’re going to talk with the detective now. But she seems okay... yeah, she’s nodding yes.”

Amelia called, “I’m okay, Denise. Scared out of my mind, but I don’t think I got hurt very bad.”

“...”

“No, I don’t think we’ll need you now, but can you check with Dr Singh’s office to see if Amelia can see him? Just in case. She said her legs were pulled apart and it feels different now.”

“...”

“Yeah, any time this afternoon... Detective, will we be free by 1 pm? Okay, after 2 or tomorrow.”

“...”

“Sounds good. Text me then. Love you.” He turned to Amelia. “She sends her love. She had her phone on silent in class and didn’t hear the vibrate go off and feels bad about that.”

“You got the call and that’s what mattered,” Amelia told him as she rose from the chair and hugged him.

“You okay now, miss? Sure you don’t need to be checked over?” Connors asked and Amelia nodded.

“Detective, we’re getting her doc to check her after we’re finished,” Kevin told him.

“Good, please come with me then.”

They walked over to the green room and found seats. Connors looked around at the group.

“Let’s begin with your names. Then tell me your role in the school, what you were doing here this morning, and where you were before the alleged assault took place.” He pointed to Hanford.

“Mr Hanford.”

“I’m Clarence Hanford, head teacher. I was holding a school assembly. I was on the stage with three of my staff members and the local EA Program representative.”

Connors made some notes. “EA I know, Education Authority, right? But is ‘Program’ what I think it is?”

“The Naked in School Program. That’s what the assembly was about,” Hanford supplied.

“Right. Humm... I see... Okay, you next, young lady.”

“Sir, I’m Amelia Hadad and in the sixth-form here. I was sitting with my class in the audience seats.”

Connors glanced at Jeremy. “Young man?”

“Jeremy Porter, sir. Also a sixth-form and was in the audience seats with my classmates too.”

“And I’m Kevin Coris, Amelia’s guardian. I was in class over at the London Economics Institute when I got Amelia’s alert that she was in trouble.”

“Okay, Mr Coris, we’ll get to that part in a few minutes. Now, Mr Hanford, please describe what you were doing before the alleged assault occurred.”

Hanford began, “I had covered the pupil rules for the Program and then called out names for the week’s selected children to come up to the stage. No one came up. You see, last week an anonymous flyer had circulated in the school which encouraged our pupils to refuse to participate. The LEA learned about this and sent a rep and some security people here over my objections.”

“Were these the people who were involved in the alleged assault?” Connors asked, making notes.

“Yes, we didn’t invite them but Mr Whiston, the LEA rep, insisted he had the right to be here as an observer. I told him he could only observe, then, and not involve himself.”

Hanford went on, describing how Whiston took over the assembly and began to describe how he had used his security people to force the children to go onto the stage.

“When Whiston threatened the children with punishments if they didn’t obey but still nobody came up, that’s when he told me I must get the children to participate forcibly,” Hanford went on, “I told him that using force was illegal and said that our governors had specifically directed me that no force was to be used. He disregarded me and that’s when I suppose the assaults began as I expect that physically dragging a child somewhere against his or her will is an assault.”

Connors made some more notes, then looked up. “So from the state of Miss Hadad’s clothes, I assume that pupil’s clothes were removed forcibly? I realize this is a leading question but I’ve investigated cases in other schools where it was claimed that children were forced to disrobe but there was no physical evidence of the use of force.”

Hanford nodded. “I’ve heard that about other schools too. Teachers cajoled and persuaded the children, even helped them disrobe, but I think they used little overt force in the cases I’m aware of. In early Program days they sometimes had a teacher undress a pupil when he or she wouldn’t, but I don’t recall hearing that any pupils physically resisted by struggling. Teachers did get the Program participants to disrobe mostly under their own volition, albeit rather reluctantly, in almost all cases I heard about.”

“Yes,” Connors replied. “On occasion some parents have called the police to try to lay charges but on investigation, I found that the pressure applied to the child didn’t rise to the level of a battery and the disrobing request was actually lawful under the terms of the Program law. What did you witness happened with the injured child?”

Hanford continued, “Mr Whiston had the so-called security men drag the children onto the stage. Some children had run off the stage, some may have even left the auditorium, but all were refusing to cooperate. When some of them ran off, the men just grabbed a few others, children who weren’t on the participation list. Then Mr Whiston pointed to a year-ten girl, Hana Malek,

who one of his men was holding, and ordered them to strip her.”

Amelia began crying again and Jeremy slid over to hold her hand. Kevin glanced over at the couple and smiled to himself.

Hanford described how Whiston then tried to use the girl for a masturbation demonstration.

Conners looked shocked. “I understand that doing that is voluntary; children can’t be forced to do that?”

“Well, under the Reasonable Request rule, I suppose it can be asked of a participant,” Hanford commented. “That’s what Whiston told her. She refused, saying that she couldn’t do it so Whiston asked his man to force her do it. Somehow he thrust his fingers into her privates then; I couldn’t see it.”

“I did,” Amelia said. “I was right in front of her. Hana pulled her hand away from his and he pushed his fingers into her. And she was cut—she had the FGM and her fanny looked—oh, it was awful, it was all wrong down there...” she shuddered. “I saw pictures, but seeing it on someone... how could they do that to a girl?”

Conners looked at Amelia with sympathy. “Yes, I know about the genital mutilations. We investigate reports of that happening right here in London, too, happens here and not only in Africa and Asia. What happened after Hana was injured?”

Hanford looked at Amelia. “You can tell what happened to you now, Amelia.”

Amelia looked down and clasped her hands together and Jeremy gave her a reassuring touch.

“Ah, when kids ran off the stage, one of the men came to where I was in the seats and grabbed my arm and dragged—practically carried me to the stage. I told him that I had an excuse, I had pelvic surgery last week, but he ignored me. After they finished with Hana they turned on me and just about tore my blouse off, see how I pinned it up?—and the man in front pushed me into the other one; I was kicking my legs so they grabbed them and held me. Then that big beefy man pulled off my pants and pulled my legs wide apart. That really hurt. Then he grabbed at my panties gusset. He was going to rip them off like he did to Hana. That’s when Jeremy pulled the man holding me away and I was able to back up and kick the other man and get loose.”

Jeremy broke in, “Yeah, she nailed him really good.”

Amelia shot a quick glance at him. “Jeremy took care of the other three of them—he kicked one down and threw the other two halfway across the stage.”

She grabbed his arm with her hands. “Jeremy, you saved me just like Kevin saved Denise, you know.”

Jeremy looked at her, puzzled. “Like Kevin how?”

Kevin reminded him, “Jeremy, remember when Denise and I visited in August and you told us about the Program in your first school?” Jeremy nodded. “Denise told you we met when she was

put in the Program in her high school. She calls our meeting my ‘saving her.’”

“Ah,” Jeremy nodded. “You need to tell me that story.”

Conners cleared his throat. “Clearly you all know each other very well...” he began.

Jeremy interrupted, “Actually I didn’t meet Amelia until just now, back there on the stage. We heard about each other—Kevin’s a family friend—but I’ve never met Amelia. And I’m happy I did,” he added quietly.

Amelia smiled at him.

Conners looked at Jeremy. “Do you have anything to add?”

“Not really, sir, only that I witnessed a total abuse of authority. Forcible restraint of children, stripping, sexual assault. I told the constable here that I thought that those men violated a law, Section 58 of the Children Act of 2004. Probably assault and battery laws too.”

“Indeed, that’s what we’ll be booking them under, innit,” Jones confirmed, grinning.

Conners looked at Jeremy intently. “Oh really? And just how do you happen to have this information so handy, son?”

Jeremy chuckled ruefully. “Head teacher knows; I’m always in trouble for it. The head’s been after me for writing a human rights blog that annoys the authorities and it’s been covering the Naked in School abuses on it lately.”

Amelia gasped. “Ohmygod! That blog! Are you the ‘Realist’?”

Jeremy grinned at her. “Guilty as charged. The head wouldn’t have ever known except I did a dumb thing once and did a posting from a school computer.” He smiled at Hanford. “Sir, can you see now why I do that kind of thing? And why I couldn’t bear to see the girls treated like that?”

Hanford looked at Jeremy. “We’ll discuss this later, Jeremy.”

Conners looked distressed. “People, we need to keep on topic or we’ll never get this sorted. Jeremy, there were three men you subdued, correct?”

“Yes sir.”

Jones interrupted. “Two of them were bruised, Detective. They were pretty slow to recover and we had no problem getting bracelets on them. I did want to ask what you did to them, Jeremy. They were pretty well knackered.”

“I’m a black belt in *taekwondo*. Actually, Kevin taught me for my first few years in Seoul,” Jeremy said softly.

“Bloody hell, *he* taught *you*?” Jones exclaimed. He looked at Kevin. “If a sixteen-year-old could do what he did, Mr Coris, I’d hate to think of what his teacher could do.”

“Yeah, Kevin is almost a grand master...” Jeremy said proudly while Kevin shook his head

warningly.

Conners felt like he was losing control again. He looked at Kevin. “Okay now, Mr Coris. How are you involved... besides being Amelia’s guardian... ah... and Jeremy’s teacher, that is,” he asked, shaking his head. “I’m gonna hate trying to write all this... this rubbish up...” he muttered.

“Yes. Amelia was quite distressed last week when she heard of the Program coming here. She herself was subjected to genital cutting as a young teen in Indonesia. As a result of the damage, she’s been in fairly severe chronic pain since then, and recently her father was able to arrange medical treatments here in London to repair the damage. He works in Jakarta and couldn’t stay with her, so she’s living with us while she gets her treatments. She just had a genital surgical procedure, it was only last Wednesday.”

“Bloody damn,” Conners whispered, shaking his head.

“She brought a medical directive to the school which exempted her from the Program, but even with the exemption, she was afraid to come today because she knew that some children had been forced, thanks to her reading Jeremy’s blog articles. So I got her an emergency alert device to carry and when they grabbed her, she triggered it. I got the message and called the police 999 number. I tried to reach her by phone after she sent the alert but couldn’t; anyway, her mobile kept her voice channel open so I was able to record it during my taxi ride here.”

“Kevin, he was holding my arms and I couldn’t reach the mobile to hear if you were there,” Amelia said mournfully. “I tried...”

Kevin looked at her protectively. “Well, I could hear what was happening and tried to get the driver to go faster. He joked with me that I was acting like I was in some kind of crime show. He’ll never know how close to the truth he was. Anyway, I was dying to get here in time, and then I heard shouting, Jeremy I guess, then thumping and banging sounds with your voice saying things like, ‘Yes, good, oh my, wow,’ and that sounded far better to me than your screaming sounded earlier.”

Conners sighed resignedly, “We keep getting sidetracked. Mr Coris, I’ll get an evidence tech out here right away to copy that audio file. Thanks for being so alert and responding so decisively.”

Amelia and Jeremy had been whispering together; then Jeremy told her, “I’ll tell you later.”

Jeremy looked at Kevin. “Can I come over to talk to you and Amelia sometime soon?”

Kevin grinned. “Certainly. Anytime, Jeremy.”

Hanford was looking anxious. “Detective Conners, are we done here? I need to see if I still have a school out there and probably will need to deal with hordes of angry parents too,” he asked carefully.

“Yes, I think so; right, Jonesy?” Conners asked. Getting an affirmative nod from Jones, he said, “We might need followup statements and possibly an appearance at a trial as witnesses. Are you all willing to work with any prosecution, should that be necessary?” They all agreed. “Good; Mr

Coris, can you wait? How long for the tech, Jonesy?"

"The tech is on the way. Be here in ten or so," Jones replied.

"We can go to my office, then," Hanford said as they all rose to leave.

As they were walking to Hanford's office, a text from Denise arrived.

*"Singh appt tomorrow @ 7 am."*

"Amelia, Denise has an appointment for you tomorrow morning at 7. How do you feel now?" Kevin asked.

"Achy down there, no sharp pains, but something feels different there," she replied.

Conners looked over. "Please let me know if they find any injury, okay? I'll give you my card."

After the tech had retrieved the audio file from Kevin's mobile, the police left, saying that they'd be in touch as the case needed. Hanford asked Amelia how she felt.

"Um, a little shaky..." she ventured.

"I think you should rest and not stay at school for the day," Hanford replied.

Amelia looked at Kevin. "Kevin, can I go home and rest? Are you coming home now?" She looked at Hanford, then at Jeremy.

Kevin looked at Hanford. "Sweetie, I think I'd like to talk to Mr Hanford for a bit..."

Amelia interrupted, "Can Jeremy help me to get home? Is that okay, Mr Hanford? Please? Kevin?"

Hanford shrugged. "It's not like the two of you will miss anything today, it's a total loss. Sure. If Mr Coris agrees."

Kevin smiled at Amelia. "That's a good idea, honey. Here's some taxi money. Jeremy, why don't you stay for dinner; call your folks to tell them, okay? Tell them I said it's really important."

Jeremy nodded. "Thanks, Kevin. There'll be no problem with my folks. I'll tell you about that later when you get to your flat."

After the two left the office, Hanford told Kevin, "One minute, I need to find out how the other girl is doing." He picked up his phone and pressed some keys. "Iris, please find out where they took Hana Malek. Probably St. Whitson's; it's the closest... Okay... And find out how she is... Good. Thanks. Oh, please hold any calls." He turned to Kevin. "I never asked for this kind of rot in my job. Anyway. Yes, I did want to talk to you also; that was an impressive performance you put on last week. The governors all want you to be on our side, too. I also have a sneaking suspicion that somehow you were behind last week's flyer..."

He stared at Kevin intently, looking for a reaction—an involuntary flinch, pupils contracting, hands tightening—anything to give him away. Kevin sat gazing at Hanford, openly but

impassively, his eyes locked on Hanford's, giving away nothing.

Hanford looked away after a few seconds and shrugged. "Hate to play poker with you, son. It felt like you were probing my soul just then... never had anyone do that to me before," he muttered. "Okay, then, let's talk. You wanted to tell me something?"

"Mr Hanford, I get the impression you were on the right track in the way you were trying to start the Program but got derailed by those goons who took over. Now you've got a lot of damage to repair, I figure."

Hanford sighed, "You certainly got that right. I don't know how I can ever get the Program going here, the children are adamantly opposed and so are their parents. And the Program Committee's response seems to be to use force."

"I've seen the same things happen in the States. You saw what kids like Jeremy can do if force is used. I've had force tried on me and I know of one case in California where two men, employees of the Program, were killed as a result of going against a student who had martial arts training; that involved a close friend of mine who was protecting her cousin and two Program people died. We mustn't ever resort to force. What I believe you need to do about the Program is to work along two separate paths.

"First, I suggest trying to figure out what form of the Program might be acceptable here at Norwich. My fiancée Denise and I might be able to help; we were involved in a project at our last high school that was run by Avery University. It was designed to meet the Program objectives and was able to accomplish them with no nudity needed. It's what I said at the meeting: you can run the Program, but with clothes. There are ways to do that, actually, that work better than the Program.

"Second is mounting a publicity and legal challenge to the very existence of the Program here. It was through Jeremy, and incidently by reading his blog—actually I had no idea he was involved with that—that Denise and I became aware of the problems in the U.K. that seem to be Program-related. Like those honor killings, for example. I think I can help here too, but also I think that Jeremy might actually be your secret weapon. He's a damned impressive young man, you know. He's got an amazing memory and the ability to connect facts, and knows a surprising amount of things about human rights."

"Yes, it was his blogging about human rights that brought him to the attention of some important political figures," Hanford agreed. "They had a posting traced to a school computer here and that's when we learned that he was the blog's author. But we've not publicized who he is; that's a minor's privacy issue."

Kevin nodded. "That's good..."

Just then Hanford's phone buzzed. He raised a finger and picked up the receiver.

"Yes, Iris. ... Ah. Good. ... Okay, thanks. Any calls? Oh my god, okay. Please ask Karen, Audrey, and Elise to come see me in ten minutes. Thanks."

He turned to Kevin. “The phone lines are melting now and the governors are rounding up for an emergency meeting later so I need to return to my duties now. I like your ideas and will mention them to the governors. And the girl—Hana. She was badly bruised in her vulva. There was a laceration too, some bleeding. She was in shock and is being sedated now; her mum is with her, but the docs say she’ll be okay physically. Psychologically they won’t say yet.”

Kevin stood up. “Thanks for telling me that. Again we may be able to help because Denise has worked once with a girl who was almost gang-raped. Denise was molested herself as a young teen and knows how that affects a young girl. Just let me know. She’s marvelous with working with teens. Amelia worships her and they only met a few months ago.”

He shook Hanford’s hand. “Good to talk with you, sir. Here’s my contact info.” He handed a card to Hanford.

“Likewise,” Hanford replied. “I’ll be in touch.”

## Chapter 9

When Kevin returned to his flat, he discovered Amelia and Jeremy sitting at the desk in the main room, noses buried in Amelia's laptop.

Amelia jumped up, ran to Kevin, and hugged him tightly.

"Oh, Kevin, I love you so much!" she exclaimed. Then she pulled back slightly and blushed. "Ahh, I mean... You came so fast when I needed you... OH! You're like family, the brother I never had and you look out for me so well and..."

"Amelia... Amelia, sweetie, I love you too, you're like the sister I always wanted. So tell me, how do you feel? You still okay? Any aftereffects or pain? You'll tell us if you have trouble sleeping or get bad dreams, okay?"

"Um, no, it doesn't hurt any worse than before, but it feels stretched, kinda, down there," she whispered. "I'll be glad to have it looked at. I'll tell you if I get any bad psych effects, but I think I can cope. The therapist I saw after I was cut worked with me so I think I'd know if I get bad feelings over what happened. Now you see what happened? I told you there'd be trouble over that Program starting," she pouted.

"You're a better prophet than me, sweetie. I didn't think that anyone would send a goon squad to interfere with the school's first Program day. I don't think the Program people ever did something like that before. Jeremy? Have you ever heard of something like that happening?"

"Well, at my last school, the teachers stripped those two girls—that's all I know about, but they did it in private so no one saw how much force they used," Jeremy replied. "I spoke to the second girl who was stripped and she said she didn't struggle; she told me she was kinda in shock. When I saw them handling Hana like that, it took me by total surprise. I never expected such violence. It's too bad I was at the back of the auditorium because if I were closer, I might have gotten to the stage in time to help Hana, but it happened so bloody fast. I had to push through a bunch of kids just to get out of my row of seats. I did get to Amelia just in time, though," he smiled at her.

"When I saw the flyers that Amelia brought to school—yeah, she told me that you and Denise did them—I just knew that your strategy would work with the kids. In the other schools with the Program, just like my last school, the teachers always seemed to manage to cow the kids into submitting to do what they were told and the threat of an academic punishment of some kind was enough to make the parents go along. Also, no one has ever organized any concerted parental opposition before. Your flyer, and what Amelia told me about the meeting you went to, got both the parents focused on supporting the opposition and got their kids organized to resist. That was a super move, you know."

"Thanks, Jeremy," Kevin grinned. "It's not like we were without experience in anti-Program organizing. I suppose that if we were like the typical parent, we might have been cowed too..."

"Somehow I'm not convinced that's true," Jeremy retorted, laughing.

“Anyway, since you’re attending Amelia’s school—what an amazing coincidence that is, by the way—how come we didn’t see your folks at that meeting?” Kevin asked.

“Yeah, I was going to tell you about that. Dad’s been stuck at a NATO meeting in Bonn for the past ten days and Mum’s been with her mum in the States. Grandma broke her hip two weeks ago and Mum went to help her. I brought that letter about the parents’ meeting home but I didn’t want to open it since it said ‘Parents Only.’ The next day I heard about the meeting from the other kids, so I called Dad, read him the letter, and he said he would send the school a message opposing the Program. Mrs Sheppard is watching my brother and sister, so I can stay but I need to leave at 7:30. My ‘bodyguard’ will pick me up,” he grinned.

“I see you and Amelia kind of connected, too,” Kevin smiled at them.

“Kevin, I told you that Jeremy’s my hero just like you were to Denise,” Amelia said shyly. “I told him about what you did for her and he said your story is much more dramatic than what he did for me. I told him, no way, I saw him in action and he was awesome.”

“I was glad I could help you, Amelia,” Jeremy smiled at her.

“So what are you guys...” Kevin broke off as the door opened and Denise came rushing in.

“Amelia, sweetheart!” Denise called as she ran to hug her. “How are you feeling...? Jeremy...? Um, why’s Jeremy here...?”

Kevin laughed. “Sit down, darling. It’s a long story. Turns out Jeremy goes to Amelia’s school too.”

“No! Oh my goodness!” Denise exclaimed.

“It gets much better, Denise,” Amelia grinned. “Jeremy was the one who saved me from that awful man who was stripping me. He slammed him down and then threw two other men across the stage.”

“Oh my... shit... it’s just like Kevin and me...” Denise said, in shock. “Wow...”

“*YES!* That’s just what I was saying to Kevin!” Amelia crowed.

“Okay, everyone,” Denise commanded. “I want to hear it all. The full uncensored version. Right now! Speak!”

Kevin chuckled. “Amelia, take the floor, please. Jeremy can assist.”

The two teens related the morning’s events and Kevin filled in the few details he could, and then told them all about his meeting with the head teacher afterwards. Denise listened in amazement.

When they were finished, she shook her head in wonder. “That’s quite some story. Jeremy? What I don’t get is how you wound up at Norwich. I know your folks wanted you in an independent school, but you need to be in an arts program here.”

“Oh, I play trumpet, Denise. In the orchestra I’m the co-soloist and I play in the concert band

too.”

Kevin grinned. “Another well-rounded student, Denise. Guess what? Amelia found out that Jeremy’s also that ‘Realist’ blogger.”

“No way! OH! That explains where your mom was—the evening we met the president...”

Jeremy grinned broadly. “Oh, right. The head teacher was raising bloody hell at me in school that day and Mum had her hands full with his calls all evening. Hanford had a major fit when I told him he couldn’t stop me from doing the blog; I had told him that muzzling my free expression was a violation of the Human Rights Act of 1998. So he called Mum. Several times. She finally told him to back off of me, but from what you just told us, Kevin, looks like he’s not going to make me any more trouble, right? He’s accepted that I won’t stop doing it?”

“Yeah, grudgingly anyway. He said your blog was a sore point for some political figures—didn’t say who. He’s also willing to have you and me come in to discuss some strategy for getting the school out of the Program, apparently, said he’d let me know. Say, Denise, just when you came in, I was about to ask our two geniuses here what they were up to all day. Hanford let them go home for the whole day and they spent it here.”

“Yeah, Kevin, we were comparing our human rights blogs!” Amelia said proudly. “I was showing Jeremy what my friends and I were working on and he showed me how he works on finding material for his blog. Then he posts teaser links to his Facepage and gets wider coverage.”

Jeremy took Amelia’s hand. “You know, just before you got home, Amelia told me this ace idea she had gotten; it was brilliant. From her work on the U.N. and E.U. human rights treaty stuff and other articles she’s found, she pointed out that the Program, in a way, is just like the genital cutting problem. They both affect children. They’re both a form of severe abuse—no, torture, even. And they both affect sexual desire in extreme, unhealthy ways. So when you came in, we had just started to plan a way of incorporating her ideas in the ‘Realist’ blog to kick off an anti-Program campaign.”

“Goddamn,” Kevin muttered in amazement. “I told Hanford that Jeremy would be useful for the school in challenging the Program. I’ve got to add Amelia to that recommendation. You two have confirmed that idea for me. What a compelling image, Amelia: drawing attention to the similarities of the Program to genital mutilation. Wow.”

“You guys *are* amazing,” Denise concurred. “But I’m starving... how about dinner? I was planning on making a pasta dish...”

Kevin interrupted, “I know, let’s have a sushi takeaway—see? I’m learning my British. There’s that place on the corner we’ve been meaning to try. Is that okay?”

Everyone agreed, so they pulled up the menu on line and ordered. They spent the rest of the evening chatting while Kevin and Denise watched as Jeremy and Amelia interacted. Their mutual attraction was very apparent.



The next morning, Amelia received good news from Dr Singh. She had been injured in the assault, but it was limited to some pulled stitches and a little bleeding. A new wound dressing was needed but she would be allowed to continue with normal, non-strenuous activities. Singh was appalled when he learned how Amelia had been injured; he wrote a brief letter for Kevin documenting her injury and explaining how serious it could have been, asking that he get the letter to the detective.

When she arrived at school, Amelia went to her second period class; she recalled that she shared her third period class with Jeremy. She hurried there to meet him before class started.

“Hi!” Jeremy said brightly when he saw her. “You okay today? The doc visit?”

“All good,” she said, shyly, looking at him.

He took her hands in his. “I missed you,” he said softly.

“Me too... Um, what happened yesterday and this morning? You know, any news about the Program?” she shuddered. “Anything about Hana?”

“Some stuff happened, not important though... Listen—when’s your lunch? Mine’s next period.”

“Me too! You can catch me up then!”

The first bell rang.

Jeremy slowly released her hands. “We need to sit.”

“Yeah.” Reluctantly they separated.

They took their seats.

After class they walked together to the lunchroom.

“I need to talk to my blogging girlfriends, Jeremy, then we can sit and talk. I need to thank them and tell them that I’m okay.”

“Okay, sure.”

Amelia got her tray and went to the girls’ table; they were excited to see her and began throwing questions at her.

She interrupted them. “Listen, the boy who saved me, he’s actually the son of a family friend and I only just met him when he rescued me from that attack yesterday. I’m okay now and want to thank you, especially Tisa and Estelle, for trying to help me and Hana. Do you know how Hana is? No? Maybe I can find out. Anyway, Jeremy, the boy who saved me, and I have ideas for our blog but we have some personal things to talk about.”

Estelle smiled. “I saw it was Jeremy who clobbered those duffers. He’s in one of my classes. He’s a looker, too. Is he your boyfriend now?”

“Um,” Amelia blushed. “I hope...”

“Don’t hope! Ask him!” Darra exclaimed. “He’s smart, I heard. And a hunk. And not a jerk. So go, but tell us about him later,” she waved Amelia away.

Amelia hugged each of them and then rejoined Jeremy. When they found seats, Jeremy began to tell her about what he had heard earlier.

“Everything’s suspended for the Program for now. There’s an emergency governors’ meeting this evening. A teacher, she’s one of the staff governors, said that the head got assurance from the LEA that the school won’t be interfered with by outside people like yesterday. It took the rest of the morning to get the school sorted and then all of the teachers were in meetings in the afternoon. The kids were left to have study time and the head boy and girl and the prefects were left in charge. We didn’t miss a thing.”

“Did you hear about Hana?”

“No,” he said. “Say, kids said you were really brave, fighting off and kicking that bloke in the bollocks. They think you’re hot looking too,” he smiled, “so do I.”

“OH! They saw me... Oh shit, I forgot I was almost naked... Oh, I’m so embarrassed...”

“Don’t be, Amelia, it was like you were wearing a swimming costume, really.”

“Umm... Do you really think... I looked... hot?” Amelia asked, blushing.

“Oh yeah! For sure. You’re beautiful. But even better, you’re smart, and witty, and fun to be with and... um, well, I’d like you to be my girlfriend, if that’s okay?”

“Oh, Jeremy! Yes, I’d love that...”

“Oh, thank you so much!” Jeremy exclaimed, taking her hand. “Err... Would you be mad at me if I asked you to wear this?” he asked, pulling out a box.

Amelia opened it; it was a gold necklace with a little heart pendant.

“Oh my!” she exclaimed, “how pretty! Oh how sweet... thank you... I don’t have anything to...”

Jeremy put his finger on her lips. “Shhh. I don’t need a present. I wanted you to have something from me to wear close to you, that’s all.”

“OH! If we weren’t in school, I’d hug you, Jeremy. Thank you. You’re my gallant knight and rescued me from a fate of nudity, and now I have your favor, too,” she giggled, but a tear leaked from her eye. “Thank you again for rescuing me.”

“Gladly, my ladyship,” he sketched a bow.

She giggled. “Silly. Jeez, when did you get the necklace, anyway? You just met me.”

“Um, on the way home yesterday. I hoped...”

“You’re really so sweet, you know? Say, I was thinking, we’ve been in school for what, over two months and I never saw you coming on the bus; you live further away than me and this is the only bus that comes by here.”

“Oh, I get a chauffeur ride—embassy security, don’t you know. You come by bus? Hey, I could pick you up each day; your flat actually is only a few blocks away from the street we use to get here.”

“Really? That wouldn’t be a problem?”

“No, I’m not driving, anyway, so sure.”

“That’s so cool, thanks. It’ll be fun seeing you every day,” Amelia said softly.

“Yeah...”

Amelia was lost in her thoughts for a few long seconds. “Did you think about your next blog posting?” she asked.

“Ummm... sorry. What?” Jeremy had been lost in his own thoughts. “Oh, right. Yes. Let’s do what Kevin suggested and use that flyer as a guide to design a public anti-Program campaign. You told me that he wrote an article that his friend snuck into their school newspaper?”

“Yeah. And it went viral, too,” she giggled. “That was an amazing story. The school tried to expel them for opposing the Program when all they did was to talk to other kids about it. The school official suspected that Kevin put the article into the paper but had no way to prove it since only he and the teacher in charge of the paper could approve the copy that got printed. When it got out, the article was copied all over the whole country! And it made the ‘Just Say No’ movement a national one.”

“Well, let’s try to do that right here, then,” Jeremy smirked. “Let’s work that flyer into a snappy article and maybe the regular press will reprint it as news instead of burying it on the opinion pages. We can try to word it so it has some sexual innuendos and maybe even get featured in tabloids like *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, and *Daily Star*.”

“Wow, you think?”

“Maybe. I try to model some of my blog writing style after that kind of writing. Like edgy and suggestive. How much time do we have?”

“Ah, a half hour now,” Amelia said.

“Let’s do an outline, then. Maybe we can put it together after school? I won’t have any problem getting us dropped off at your flat.”

“Okay. I’ll text Denise and tell her that you’ll be home with me.”

They set to work on the outline.

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Later that afternoon, Denise arrived home and found the kids hard at work on writing the blog posting. She peered over their shoulders and read for a minute, smiling broadly.

“Good job, guys!” she told them.

Jeremy turned around. “You think so?”

“Oh yes. Is this for another school handout?” Denise asked.

Amelia giggled. “Jeremy has bigger ideas.”

“Oh really?” Denise smiled.

Jeremy explained his thought about trying to get the mainstream press to pick up the article as news. Denise laughed and shook her head.

“Well, that’s just what happened with an article that Kevin wrote in high school,” she chuckled.

“Yeah, I told Jeremy that story. Oh, look, Denise,” she showed her necklace. “Jeremy asked to be my boyfriend,” she smiled.

“Well, congrats, you two. Not that it’s such a surprise. Very nice necklace, Jeremy.”

“Thanks, Denise. You think that Kevin’ll be okay with my being Amelia’s boyfriend too?”

“Oh, sure, he’ll be delighted. Well, go to it, guys. Get that article done. This should be interesting,” Denise grinned as she walked away.

By the time Kevin returned home, the article was in its final form. Amelia explained what they were doing and gave a copy to Kevin and Denise to read.

### ***Independent School Declares Independence: No Naked Pupils in Our School***

British government authorities in charge of the notorious “Naked in School” program have again overstepped their authority. The law authorising the national school curriculum, which includes the nudity program, actually applies to state schools; those schools are completely funded by your taxes and are required to follow all of the state-mandated curricula. But the authorities have recently decided to extort any non-state school which receives even minor amounts of government funds, generally in the form of bursaries which are intended as general scholarship support, into adopting the Program in these formerly exempt schools.

One such independent school in London, confronted with the threat of their pupils’ financial support being withdrawn, was recently coerced to begin the Naked in School Program despite the strong opposition of 95 percent of its pupils’ parents and guardians.

As readers of *The Realist* have learned, the Program is based on educationally and psychologically invalid principles: the idea that to grow into a mature and well-adjusted adulthood, children must demonstrate their acceptance of their individual sexuality through public displays of sexual activity. Pupils are being forced to permit other children

to fondle and grope their sexual organs with no limits, made to engage in masturbation in front of fellow pupils, and in the ultimate of humiliation for many people, required to use the rest-rooms of the opposite sex so that the elimination of their bodily wastes may be watched.

Program children must also submit to have their naked bodies used as props and teaching aids for all classes, whether or not the class's subject is the human body. Except for classes which teach specifically about the human body, *The Realist* cannot imagine any possible need at all for a pupil to be naked for a classroom demonstration in maths, for example. Yet *The Realist* has learned of an instance where a class was assigned to measure a pupil's erect penis to figure its volume. If children refuse or even object to Program excesses, they may be punished by being required to spend additional time being naked while outright refusal to participate will result in threats to withhold the pupil's academic record, preventing their uni enrollment or gaining employment.

Such was the situation which the pupils of our independent school recently faced. However, instead of submitting to the humiliations of this misguided government program, the pupils took up the chant, "Just Say No!" and not a single pupil agreed to participate. These brave children have declared their independence from the tyranny of an over-reaching government. They have asserted their cultural and religious rights to personal privacy, morality, and dignity, and in doing so, have shown the way for all pupils in the U.K. to resist being required to participate in an activity that is an immoral and unethical imposition on their basic human rights. And their payment for refusal was severe but untoward: dozens of children were violently attacked by four adult employees of the government's Program agency and several were injured, one seriously. Speak to your MPs and ask them why your government is allowing its employees to violently abuse your children.

*The Realist* will not discuss in detail here the safety hazards of the Program, a topic we've covered before; we'll only briefly mention the terrible idea of forcing girls to be naked in boys' locker rooms, showers, and rest-rooms. That rule seems to be only about voyeurism and humiliation; what is the supposed educational value of humiliation in making the participant more "comfortable" with his or her sexuality, as the objectives of the Program state?

Our courageous pupils who are resisting the Program—the entire school—face the threat of possibly damaging their chances for their future education. However, *The Realist* has learned that virtually all universities in the U.K. and Europe will allow students whose schools refuse to certify their completion of school because they declined to participate in the Program, may still apply for admission. The admission procedures may be slightly different, but if your grades otherwise qualify you for admission, you will be admitted regardless of your participation in the Program.

As the pupils of our independent school knew when they refused to allow the Program to

begin at their school, it's absolutely clear that participating results in no benefit of any kind for them, not social, psychological, nor educational.

*The Realist* will have more to say on this topic in coming weeks, so please check in with us for updates. And we love to read your comments, too, so please keep giving us your encouragement. And tell us if your school will join the "Just Say No" movement too.

Kevin whistled as he finished. "This is an independence manifesto, guys. You're declaring war on both the Program and the Education Ministry and this article is your call to recruit warriors."

"You missed your goal of snappy tabloid writing filled with innuendo, though," Denise observed. "This is very compelling writing but it's very earnest, serious—even legalistic."

"Yeah, we know that," Jeremy agreed, "but the lighter writing we tried just didn't have the impact. We want this to be taken seriously. Not as cheesy, titillating entertainment. We thought if the press does want to look into this, it wouldn't take very much to find our school." He smiled. "Just think of what the tabloids would do with a story of a kids' riot caused by a sexual assault? That might be even better for us."

Kevin laughed. "He's right, Denise. Damn, you've got a great PR sense, Jeremy. I wouldn't touch a thing you wrote, either. Shit, I can't wait to see what fun this unleashes."

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When Kevin returned home Wednesday evening, he had news for Denise and Amelia.

"I see Jeremy's not here," he observed to no one in particular.

Amelia giggled. "Kevin! We do have to get our homework done, you know. And the teachers are trying to get caught up so we're buried with work. Tuesday was kinda wasted too, you know."

"Well, I had an interesting conversation with your head teacher," Kevin said. "They had a governors' meeting last night. They're very eager to look into some kind of challenge to the Program Committee. Not through the courts, at least at first, though, but by using the facts I threw at them at the parents' meeting. Maybe do it at a meeting with the Program Committee people themselves."

"Amelia, tell him about Jeremy's blog," Denise prompted.

"Oh yeah—it's great... everyone at school's talking about it. The kids are so proud that they were called 'brave' and 'courageous' in it but I don't think anyone suspects that it's Jeremy's blog yet."

After dinner, Amelia was talking to Denise when her mobile rang. It was Jeremy.

"What's up?" she answered. She listened for a while. "Wow. Okay, see ya tomorrow."

Turning to Denise, she said, "Official action from the blog article. Mr Hanford got dumped on today by all kinds of important people so he tried calling Jeremy's folks. They're still away and

Jeremy took the call and told him they were in Germany and America. He wasn't happy at all but Jeremy said he'd have his dad call. He did that; his dad called the head and then called Jeremy back."

Kevin walked in just then and began listening.

Amelia continued, "Jeremy told me that before he called Mr Hanford, his dad read the blog. The head told his dad that all kinds of reporters figured out the blog was about our school and were trying to get statements or interviews from him and the Program people were complaining to him about the bad publicity he had caused because the kids at his school had refused to cooperate. His dad told Jeremy that it sounded like Mr Hanford just wanted to vent to someone. So Jeremy's dad told him that he told Mr Hanford that he had read the blog and agreed with everything in it. Then he told him that since he had been handed a bag of lemons by the government, he should just buck up and make lemonade! So funny!"

"Warren's a way cool guy," Kevin said. "He'll back Jeremy all the way. You know, the kids of diplomats... Jeremy's a lot like me. Yeah, we've had the same experiences growing up. I had the need to protect other people, and did it with the Program in the States, and Jeremy's doing that too, with his blog. Wow..."

"Did Jeremy say if Hanford was giving a statement?" Denise asked.

"No. Sounds like he was complaining about the problems the blog was causing. Uh oh. Do you think Jeremy's in trouble?" she asked, very concerned now.

"I doubt it," Kevin said. "Say, since his folks are out of the country, tell him to call me if anything happens that he thinks may be a threat to him. I can react pretty quickly and even have some legal contacts here in London now."

"Oh, Kevin, thanks!" Amelia exclaimed as she hugged him.

Denise smiled at her. "You really like the guy, don't you?"

Amelia blushed. "Oh yes."

"So do we," Denise agreed.

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The embassy driver pulled up in front of Amelia's building the following morning and she hopped into the car, greeting Jeremy with a kiss on his cheek.

"Mornin' sunshine," Jeremy smiled at her. "You're looking pretty this morning; pretty happy too."

"Happy to see you," she replied. "Good morning, Mrs Thompson," she called to the driver.

"Morning, Amelia," came the response.

"That was some news you told me last night," Amelia said as the car pulled out.

“This is even better,” Jeremy grinned as he pulled three tabloids from his backpack. “Mrs Thompson gave these to me. Security keeps up on everything that could affect us diplomatic families. See, front page?”

“Ohmygod, Jeremy! It made the front page! OH! I’ll bet things aren’t gonna be quiet at school today.”

“Look how much of the blog they quoted, too,” he said proudly. “And they even gave its web address.”

“Jeremy, you know you need avoid speaking or writing about your association with the embassy if the matter ever comes up, right?” Mrs Thompson asked. “We’re concerned about your safety here and don’t want anyone to get ideas.”

“Yes ma’am, Dad spoke to me about that when he agreed to let me do the blog.”

“Good. And since Amelia’s part of your life now,” she glanced at them, smiling, “please give her my contact info and the embassy Security emergency number too.”

“Sure. I’ll bet you ran a security check on Amelia.”

Mrs Thompson laughed. “You don’t know the half of that, buddy. We have profiles on everyone who goes to your *dojang* too.”

“Ooohhh... How did they do that?” Amelia wondered aloud.

Jeremy laughed. “Mrs Thompson has a fourth degree black belt and sometimes trains there. She’s been my toughest sparring partner, but doesn’t get much of a chance to come any more. But Security keeps track of people I have contact with.”

They pulled up around the corner from the school and the two teens got out.

“I meant to ask, Jeremy, how come we got dropped off here and yesterday at a different place—and the car was different too.”

“Yeah. It’s not to fall into habitual patterns. If someone was watching me, they’d find it difficult to know just when or how I arrive.”

“Ooohh, like a spy story!”

“Yeah,” he laughed. “Kinda.”

“How do you know where to be picked up?”

Jeremy smiled. “Oh, that’s secret.” He laughed as she made a fake scowl. “Okay, okay, I get a text where the car’ll be.”

“I’ll bet it’s in a secret code, too,” Amelia laughed.

“I love to see you laugh, Amelia,” Jeremy grinned, “Your whole face just lights up, like a beacon. I wish you’d laugh more.”

“Maybe I will now, since we’re a couple,” Amelia said shyly, “and my pain isn’t... OH!” she exclaimed and stopped. “Oh wow...”

“WHAT?” Jeremy stopped too, alarmed. “Are you okay?”

“Better than okay... I just realized... that awful, gnawing pain I’ve had for years... It’s still there, but it’s much less now. Maybe my surgery’s working... Oh god, I hope so.”

“Wow, that sounds like wonderful news... can I call you ‘honey’ or ‘dear’? Since you said we’re a couple?”

“Sweetie, you can call me any of those words if you’ll let me use them too,” she said, kissing him on the cheek.

“Ahhh, that was nice,” he said, touching his cheek where her lips had been. He leaned down to kiss her cheek back but Amelia turned her head and their lips met. And held for several seconds.

“Oops,” Jeremy said after they separated. “I didn’t try to kiss you there but I love that it happened.”

“And that was really nice, too, honey,” she demurred.

He looked up. “Aw, we’re at the school now, too bad; we need to split. Can’t wait to see you in history!”

Jeremy looked longingly at her. He squeezed her hand and they went to their own classrooms.

Of course the classes were buzzing with the news from the newspapers. Besides the extensive quotations from the blog article, the newspapers had identified the Norwich Academy as the school mentioned, had comments from a few children who were not identified by name, and had gotten a promise for a statement from the head teacher later in the day. Hanford had told the reporters that he had to clear any statement with the school’s governors.

Representatives from the Program Committee were quoted as saying that any resistance to participating in the Program would be punished, but reporters’ attempts to learn what punishments would be given were brushed off with the comment that they would be “appropriate for the situation.” Parents of students in several other schools were contacted and most claimed that they would support their child’s refusal if they were selected to participate.

Amelia was delighted about how the blog article was covered. When she checked her phone between classes, she found a text from Kevin.

*“Blog in todays paprs. Bringing home a few.”*

She texted back, *“Saw some. Way kewl. Excited kids here.”*

When she met Jeremy coming to their history class, he pulled her aside before they went into the classroom.

“Head called me to his office and basically told me I was making his life difficult. I told him

maybe it would get easier because soon he wouldn't have to worry about running the Program," he snickered. "Anyway, he wants to meet with Kevin and me—you too, apparently. Kevin will tell us about it."

"ME?" Amelia squeaked.

"Yeah. About our anti-Program ideas."

"Oh. I don't know how I could help there..."

"Are you kidding?" Jeremy took her hands. "You came up with that idea of comparing FGM with the Program!"

"Well, I guess..."

"Here's what I think: We'll go to your flat after school, okay, do our homework, and maybe even finish by the time Kevin gets home. Then we can find out together from Kevin what the head wants from us."

"Okay..."

"Oh, my dad's coming home tomorrow night. Mum's already gotten back home. My aunt—Mum's sister-in-law, who lives in Denver, came to take care of Grandma and get her moved out there. Dad wants to have everyone for dinner Saturday night. I'm sure it's to meet you," he grinned at her. "You know I've never dated before..."

"Hey! We're not dating, just so you know! You never asked me on a date."

"Shit... What a jerk I am... I ask you to be my girlfriend even before a date with you and..."

The bell rang.

"Ooops. We need to continue this later. Erm... You're not angry, are you?"

"Oh, no," Amelia grinned. "I was just teasing."

"Phew. You had me worried. You're a good actor..."

"Yeah, dummy, that's why I'm in school here, right?"

"I better keep my mouth shut while I'm still a little ahead," Jeremy groaned as they went into the classroom.

After class, on the way to lunch, Jeremy asked, "I'm gonna make up for my oversight. Amelia, would you like to go to the cinema with me on Sunday afternoon? I'll need to ask my folks first, of course."

She giggled. "I'd love to. I'm sure Kevin and Denise would agree. Okay, now that we're officially dating..."

"Now she's acting the clever dick," Jeremy smirked.

“Huh? Did you call me a dick?” Amelia pulled a face at him.

“Erm... no... it means, like, ‘wise guy.’”

“Oh. Hey, you talk just like a Brit all the time but you’ve lived here only since, um... February?”

“January. Actually I was born in England; Dad was posted here then. And I’m actually a dual citizen since my mom is a Brit, born in London, but her folks moved to the U.S. when she was little. We don’t publicize my dual citizenship ‘cause of Dad’s position; it could cause some unwanted questions. Anyway, we lived here till I was six and I hung with all of the British kids. Then we moved to Japan briefly, then Seoul. In Seoul I went to the international school. Almost all the teachers there were Brits and a lot of kids were too, including some of my best mates. I got good at mimicking their accents, somehow, and my friends loved it when I did.” Jeremy switched his accent. “Noo, dearie, let me tell yaouw all abart this noo, marvelous Naked in Sgool idae that’s captivatn the entire country...”

“Stop, stop!” Amelia laughed. “I get it! You sound just like my granddad!”

“Yeah... that was Brum. They speak English that way in Birmingham.”

“That’s where my grandparents live, but they’re in Africa this year. Wow, you’re really good at that, you know.”

“Thanks. Let’s get lunch and find a seat.”

“Say, how about you meet my friends who helped with the FGM blog I was showing you.”

“Cool.”

With their trays, Amelia and Jeremy went to the table that the girls had claimed as their own. Amelia made the introductions, blushing as she identified Jeremy as her boyfriend. Darra winked at her and she smiled back.

“Erm, are you okay with my sitting with you and talking to you?” Jeremy asked, looking at Mariama and Fayola. “I mean, aren’t you supposed to...”

Fayola giggled, “Hey, we’re not like nuns, you know. We’re allowed to talk to boys. The hijab isn’t a ‘keep away’ sign.”

The other girls laughed.

“You were awesome on Monday, Jeremy,” Darra commented, and the others agreed. “You looked like a ninja warrior, how you protected Amelia and bashed those blokes. Did you study how to do that?”

Jeremy nodded, “Yeah, for years, since I was maybe nine. I just wish I could have gotten there in time to help Hana, though. It just happened so bloody fast.”

The girls asked a few more questions about Jeremy’s martial arts skills but soon the discussion turned to the FGM blog.

“Amelia showed me what you guys were doing with that and I think it’s an ace idea,” Jeremy praised them. “I’m a supporter of human rights too, and... say, I have a brainstorm... Someone who goes to my former school has a blog...”

Amelia looked at him in alarm but he squeezed her hand reassuringly.

“I think I can get in touch with him even though he keeps his name anonymous. He does a human rights blog called, erm... ah, yes, ‘The Realist.’”

“Oh! That blog!” Mariama exclaimed. “The one that the papers wrote about!”

“Yeah,” Jeremy shook his head ruefully. “I wish I had thought of doing something like that and could write that good. It’s kinda famous now, I heard.”

“More than famous,” Fayola objected. “Me and Mariama, well, you see how we dress, if we were stripped like poor Hana was...” she shuddered, “anyway, my parents think that blog should get an award or something. When it mentions Muslims, it’s always in a very positive way.”

“Say, what happened with Hana, anyway?” Jeremy asked.

Darra shook her head. “No one’s seen her since that rot on Monday. Anyway, what about ‘The Realist?’”

“I can try contacting the blogger,” Jeremy answered. “Maybe instead of your trying to keep up a whole new blog, he’d agree to post articles about abolishing the practice and use the materials you find, even include stuff you write. He’d have to agree, first, though. I have his contact info from when I was at my old school. He used to have his email address on the blog but not any more. I could leave a blog comment but maybe he’d think it was a trick or something and ignore it.”

“That’s a great idea,” Tisa enthused. “We were wondering how we could get publicity so that our blog would be noticed. Do you really think he’d use our stuff?”

“Maybe,” Jeremy said, making a thoughtful face. “I think it’s kinda up his alley, you know, human rights and kids. I can only try, can’t I.”

Estelle jumped in, “I remember when he wrote about those honor killings and insisted that they were a result of misguided cultural ideas and not Islamic law, no matter that some imams seemed to think that women could be punished if their family was upset about something they did. It’s the same with cutting. That’s cultural and not a Muslim law.”

“Good point,” Jeremy agreed. “You should be sure to mention that when you write stuff.”

The girls began to discuss some of the details of their blog ideas with Amelia and Jeremy and Jeremy told them that he wouldn’t mind being the intermediary for the group. When lunch ended, the girls had decided on a few topics to write articles about.

After Amelia and Jeremy left the lunchroom, Amelia stopped him and dragged him to an isolated corner.

“Shit, I can’t believe how you pulled that off,” she exclaimed. “You know, if they found out you were...”

“...yes, it would be all over the school,” Jeremy soothed her. “I wanted to have that FGM stuff for the blog but then I thought that giving out disinformation about the blogger could be a ruse to throw off anyone trying to find who it was. So now, everyone in our school will assume the blogger is at another school. All they’ll know is that the only contact is through me but the person is anonymous even to me.”

“You did that so coolly... you called me a good actor before,” Amelia grinned slyly.

“It comes from something I learned when I was studying with Kevin. Part of collecting your thoughts and not showing them in your face. Like... erm, it’s learning how to keep an impassive expression so your face doesn’t show what moves your body will make when sparring. People at the *dojang* joke about it making them good poker players.”

Then they noticed a commotion developing down the hall and wandered closer to see what was happening. A teacher came down the hall, asking the children to stay away.

“What is it?” one student called.

“It’s a telly crew,” the teacher responded. “They wanted to do interviews about what happened here Monday and get reactions to those news articles in the papers. The head is making them leave.”

“Shit,” Jeremy whispered to Amelia, “It’s getting on telly now,” he grinned. “That’s just brill. Are you okay for after school, then? We’ll be able to talk about that meeting with the head?”

“I guess... not that I don’t like spending time with you. I’m nervous about anything to do with the Program.”

“I’m sure you’ll be great, honey. The stuff you put together for the FGM blog was great; you can do that in writing about Program abuses too.”

“Well, maybe. See you in maths, then,” Amelia said. “Then after school we’ll go to my flat but we should do our homework first.”

## Chapter 10

The teens arrived at Amelia's flat after school. They were talking about seeing Hanford, as they left the building, being videoed and interviewed in front of the school by several TV stations.

"Let's watch the news later," Jeremy said. "I'd like to see what he told them."

"Jeremy," Amelia asked, "you know why I started trying to do a blog on FGM, but when did you get into the human rights stuff you write about?"

"Hmmm, that's complicated. I guess I was interested almost forever. I started my first blog in Korea and wrote about the way the North Korean government treated their people. I also wrote about the terrible pressure on kids for the tests they have to take to get into uni there. I called the blog 누가 진짜야? *Nuga Juujja*, 'Who's Real?' Then when I moved here, I read about some bad stuff that government officials were doing—and honor killings too, and decided to keep blogging. So I called it 'The Realist.' In Korean that would have been 현실주의자 [*hyeonsil juujja*] which means 'realist.'

"Yeah," Amelia said. "I saw some of your early posts. But they weren't about the Program then."

"No, that came later. After a few weeks of seeing it in my school. I was freaked when I went to school the first day of the new term and suddenly began seeing kids all starkers. I had no idea what was happening but found out really quick. The kids in my class didn't realize I moved here from the other side of the world and thought I was a dummy at first."

"You were in it? Shit! How could you do that? I totally panicked when that man started ripping my clothes off." She started to tear up.

Jeremy embraced her. "Oh, sweetie. You're shaking! Shit, that must be like what a rape victim feels..."

"Oh, hold me, Jeremy. Suddenly it came back again, those helpless feelings, like I had when I was cut and then on Monday when that awful man was pawing at my knickers..." She began crying, then shook herself. "Ugh. I'm so sorry..." She rubbed her eyes.

"No, sweetie, don't be; I think it's natural to have that reaction. Shit! That only happened three days ago! You're still raw over that. Yeah. You were fuckin' scared. Of course you're getting those feelings. It took me months to get over what I saw, when I was in my other school. I hated it, really did. Not being naked, that didn't matter to me a lot, but the other crap I had to see. Hell, some of those kids, even some guys, were scared shitless."

Amelia sniffled. "I feel so safe when you hold me... God, how you looked when you pulled that man off me. I thought you were gonna kill him and you didn't even know me."

"Wanna hear a secret?" Jeremy asked softly.

"Okay...?"

"Of course I noticed you in the classes we share, Amelia. Oh, your name is so pretty, too..." She

giggled. “I kinda fancied you but when I finally got up the nerve to try to talk to you, you were always rushing off, and then you started hanging with that group of girls.”

“Fancied? as in a crush? Really, Jeremy? You were crushing on me?” she blushed.

“Oh yeah. I’m really kinda shy around girls, I guess, so I didn’t wanna look pushy and hurt any chance to meet you.”

“So is that why you came roaring up to save me?” Amelia teased.

“Oh, no! What was happening up there... It reminded me of... Shit. I couldn’t let any girl be treated that way. In fact, I’m not sure I really realized it was you up there; it was so chaotic and I was way at the back. The other girl was being abused too; I was so far away and stuck in the middle of the row, just pushing kids, trying to get up there to stop it. I just wish I had gotten there sooner, before Hana got hurt. But I’m happy beyond belief that I was able to help you.”

“Oh, you’re so sweet, Jeremy. You know, you’re so much like Kevin and I can’t get over that he did the same thing for Denise in their school. Life’s so strange.”

Jeremy smiled at her. “Kevin’s my role model. You just made my day, saying I was like him. I really like you, Amelia, I’m so glad you’re my girlfriend.”

They hugged. Then Amelia pulled away. “Um, you didn’t answer when I asked how you could have gotten naked when they picked you.”

“Is it okay with you if we talk about that rot, honey? I don’t want it to scare you again.”

“No, I’ll be okay—if you’re here to hug me, that is,” she said shyly.

“Okay, it wasn’t the nudity itself that bothered me. I’ve kinda been naked in public before so that part wasn’t too terrible. In Korea I went to the 찜질방 [*jjimjilbang*] with my mates’ families...”

“What’s that?”

“Means ‘heated rooms’ but they’re actually upscale saunas—bath houses. They’re almost all segregated by sex, but my best mate’s family liked to go to a coed one and took me there often. I really liked going, too. So being naked with boys, girls, men, and women there wasn’t a big deal. But everyone there was naked—or discreetly covered by a towel or the water. It’s a whole different thing when you’re starkers and no one else is, you know, in school. Being the only one naked bothered me a lot—well, there were a few others too but maybe only a dozen at the same time in the whole school, so we were basically alone. I just did it for two days—actually only part of two days—and then I stopped; I didn’t do the whole week like you have to do. And I did stuff that got me in trouble too.”

“You did? What happened to you?” Amelia asked, intrigued. “And... um... what did it feel like to be naked going to school... everyone looking at you... and touching you...? Ugh!”

“I never told anyone the whole story, not even my folks. It was way too embarrassing. Mum and Dad supported me against the school, especially for my helping this one girl, but didn’t press me

for details. But yeah, maybe it would be good to talk about it now. Let me tell you about that week...”

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Jeremy had just started school in London; it was during the change of classes after the first period on his first day when he first saw them. Two naked girls! Standing in front of a row of lockers, red-faced, while a few boys were feeling their breasts and one had his hands between both girls’ legs.

“What the bloody...” he exclaimed as he hurried over to the group; a small cluster of kids was watching. “Hey, stop that,” he called.

A boy pulled on his shoulder. “Hey mate, let them be. They have to do that and you can’t stop them. You get punished if you interfere with Reasonable Requests.”

“What the hell do you mean, Reasonable Requests? They’re being assaulted!” he objected. “And why the fuck are they starkers?”

Another boy motioned to catch his attention. “Hey there, mate, you a clot? You never heard of the Program?”

Jeremy was now surrounded by six guys. Another grinned at him and taunted, “Yeah, he’s thick. Doesn’t know about the Program. Where’ve you been these last few years, mate?”

“Hey, bugger off,” Jeremy objected. “This is my first day here. I just moved here from Seoul in South Korea.”

“No shit!” one of them muttered.

“What about the girls?” Jeremy asked as the first bell rang and he saw them run off as the rest of the group moved toward their classrooms.

“Get a Program book!” one of the boys called as he dashed off.

That was Jeremy’s introduction to the Naked in School Program.

Jeremy found it very difficult to keep from interfering with the groping of the girls he saw and was surprised to see that even some boys in the Program were getting abuse—having their penises pulled or slapped by giggling girls as they passed a naked boy, watching boys being forced to masturbate and spray their semen on the floor, and made to push their fingers into their rectums. He even saw girls who were forced to allow their vaginas or rectums be penetrated by their tormentors’ fingers.

Of course he got a Program booklet and was even more disturbed when he found that many of the activities he had witnessed were actually not allowed by the rules.

Jeremy saw naked students being made to do humiliating tasks or demonstrations in some of his classes too. So he began listing all of the abuses he saw each day and then he posted his list to the

school's pupil comments web page. After a week of his writing his posts, he was called to see the head teacher.

"Mr Porter," the head teacher told him after he was in the office, "I realize you're new here and completely unfamiliar with the Program. But I must insist that you stop your criticism of the things you see as they are all part of the objectives of the Program."

"Sir, I read the booklet," he replied. "Categorically the items I've posted are violations of the rules. For example, boys aren't permitted to put their fingers in girls' vaginas or anuses but I see that happen almost every day. Even on both of the first days, both Mondays, I saw touching being forced on some kids. You're not supervising properly."

"That's just an example of kids being kids, young man. If someone objects, they can complain at the office."

"Mr Jamieson, I heard how complaints were handled last term. You typically claimed that since a teacher didn't witness what happened, you had no way to verify that the improper contact occurred, so you dismissed the complaint. The kids don't bother complaining anymore. I'm sure you've noticed."

"Regardless, Mr Porter. If you don't stop your improper criticisms of the Program, you'll be subject to severe punishment."

"Do you plan to expel me then? I believe I have the right under British law to express my views. I read an article that mentions my rights, like free expression, in a recent magazine. I'm going to look up that law. And sir, I will not stop until you stop the abuses."

"Don't be impertinent. I will be in touch with your parents about this, young man."

"Please do, sir. Is that all?"

"You may go. And remember what I told you."

Jeremy's mother got the call from the head teacher. She told him that Jeremy was indignant about how the school wasn't protecting the students from abuse. She mentioned that she had read about the honor killing that had happened in the fall and told the head teacher that she supported her son in his writing about his objections to the problems he saw.

Meanwhile, Jeremy began researching the education laws, including the law that created the Program, and downloaded copies of policies, laws, and manuals which covered school administration, and began quoting, in his postings on the school site, how many of their provisions were violated. He had already begun writing a blog about human rights based on one he had started in Korea and began thinking about including the Program abuses he saw in his blog, but the school's site gave him better access to the kids and teachers he wanted to reach. But within a week, he found that his comments were being edited or even removed. Then he turned to the school's Facebook and posted his objections there and got reprimanded for doing that.

Small wonder that when March arrived, Jeremy was called to participate in the Program.

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Amelia interrupted Jeremy's reminiscences. "Oh, so that's how you know so much about all those laws. Is that when you started blogging about the Program?"

"Not yet, sweetie. I'm coming to that. The selection of kids for the Program was supposed to be random. My school had about 1200 kids. The head teacher told me that I'd be punished so I wasn't at all surprised when I got picked. So when March began, my name was called to go to the office on that first Monday morning. I had been thinking what I'd do if I got picked..."

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"Jeremy Porter," the teacher called that Monday morning. "Go to the office, please."

Jeremy heaved a sigh, picked up his rucksack, and went to the door. When he got to the office after dropping his rucksack off in his locker, he was ushered into a small conference room next to the head teacher's office and found over a dozen kids already there, milling around and talking angrily, complaining about their bad luck. Two girls were in a corner, crying softly. Jeremy noticed a stack of Program booklets on a table; he picked one up.

"Hey everyone," he called. Kids looked around at him. "The worst of this rot is the Requests but look at page 7, item 2(b)(ii). It says, 'Program participant is the sole judge of the reasonability of any request that involves physical contact. Any attempts to coerce the participant into physical contact beyond what the participant finds reasonable will result in disciplinary action by the school administration in accordance with the judgement of local Program officials. This will apply even if it is later decided that the participant was not acting reasonably.' So don't let them do anything to you that bothers you!"

Some students exclaimed "YES!" loudly at that.

"Read the booklet carefully, follow the rules to the letter, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise," he continued, as the head teacher came in with a few more students.

"Mr Porter, just what are you telling them?" Jamieson asked.

"Only to read the booklet and follow just what the rules say, Head Teacher," he answered.

Jamieson looked at him suspiciously. "I'm sure you did..."

A few boys spoke up. "Yeah," "He did." Another boy looked at the head challengingly. "He did, told us t'do what the bloomin' rules say an' naught else."

"Well, then, good advice," Jamieson remarked. He launched into a brief explanation of what the students were expected to do and then told them to disrobe.

Most began, very reluctantly, as two teachers entered the room and spoke quietly to Jamieson.

"Then get her and bring her here," he replied.

Several minutes passed as most of the kids, naked now, were pointed to the door and told to

leave. Jeremy was still dressed and a few others had stopped undressing.

Jamieson looked at them all. “You all need to finish undressing. Mr Porter, why haven’t you undressed?”

“Sir, my records show I’m an American citizen and not subject to British law for this idiocy. Did you not notice that fact? Did you ask for a legal opinion? The Program booklet states on page 10, item 1, I’ll read right here: ‘Local Program officials may make exemptions for students unable to participate in the Program. These exemptions will not be given lightly and will be limited to...’ and lists these two items, ‘diplomatic status, international treaty.’”

“Well, Mr Porter, I didn’t notice your citizenship status but don’t see that it’s important. As a registered pupil, you’re required to follow all school rules, including the Program. If you refuse to strip off, I’ll get a teacher to assist you.”

Just then the two teachers returned, pulling a girl between them. She was dressed in her uniform but it had an oversized top and a long flowing skirt. She was wearing a hijab.

She was crying, “No, I can’t, I won’t do it, you can’t make me...”

Jamieson told the teachers to take her to his office.

“She’s a noncomplier,” he told them softly. They nodded. He turned back to Jeremy. “Do I need to get assistance for you too, then?”

“Sir, no one can use physical force on me, they would be damaged if they try. I’ll comply but under protest, and may look into legal remedies.”

Meanwhile the final kids had stripped and left the room; the two weeping girls holding onto each other.

Jeremy quickly stripped off his clothes and put them into the box provided. Just then he heard a series of piercing shrieks coming from outside the room. Dashing out of the room, he saw the teachers pushing the naked girl out of the head’s office; she was struggling against them, trying to avoid being pushed out, and screaming. Jeremy looked around the outer office wildly. Then he ran to the window and pulled one of the curtains off its rod. Before anyone could react, he sprinted back to the girl and pulled her away. Throwing the curtain over her, he hoisted her into a fireman’s carry and ran out of the room while the head teacher and the others stared, flatfooted, amazed. Jeremy got out the door before anyone reacted.

“Don’t struggle,” he panted at her as he kicked the door closed, “you’re safe. I’m gonna hide you.”

“Aagghh,” she grunted, “please help me.”

“You’ll be okay...”

Jeremy dashed to the stairway next to the office. He assumed that the flight down this stairway led to the mechanical room; the gate across the descending steps implied that the area was off

limits but it wasn't locked. He carried her down the flight and put her down on her feet.

"Shhhh, let's get out of sight," he whispered as he grabbed her hand; her head and body were still covered by the drapery and she couldn't see.

Jeremy led her down the corridor, trying doors; the third one was unlocked and opened. It was a custodial storage room, full of shelving with supplies and piles of cartons.

"Here, this place should be safe," he told her. "What's your name? Mine's Jeremy."

"Mersiha..." she sniffled. "Where are we?"

"Storage room. I know you need privacy, so I'm gonna go behind some shelves so you can wrap yourself up in the curtain so you can see. Then we'll figure out what to do."

"Why are you helping me?" she asked as Jeremy moved away.

"You wear the hijab. What they did to you was like a rape. No one should be made to suffer like that."

"OH! You know how it felt! Are you Muslim? Okay, give me a minute.... Erm, I'm kinda decent now..." she said shyly.

Jeremy came around the shelves.

"*Aiy Allah!* You're naked! Oh, oh, I can't look!"

"I can't help it, Mersiha. I got put in the Program too. No, I'm not Muslim, but I know some of your customs. If it makes you feel better, none of the kids saw you—just the head and the two teachers. Me too, but only for a few seconds before I wrapped you in the curtain. I hope you can forgive that breach. They didn't hurt you when they stripped you, I hope."

"Oh, Jeremy, you saved my honor by what you did. No, I wasn't hurt; I think I almost fainted from the shock while they undressed me but when they tried to push me out of that room, I kinda recovered and fought back. So I can't forgive the head or the teachers. I don't know if my family will allow me to stay at this school. Erm, I need to let my big sister know. She'll probably hear that I was picked and might panic."

"Where is she? I'll try to get word to her."

Mersiha told Jeremy her sister's name and where to find her.

"But how do I get out of here?" she asked plaintively.

"An idea I just got. I noticed that naked kids seem to have an automatic hall pass. Here's what I'll try doing."

He explained his plan and Mersiha giggled. "Oh my, that is so audacious!" she exclaimed.

"Okay, stay hidden behind that pile of boxes. When I come back, I'll tap on the door like this before coming in." He tapped a series of thumps on a shelf, then left the room to contact

Mersiha's sister.

Being naked, Jeremy found, was indeed just like a hall pass. No one stopped him. He went to the classroom where Mersiha's sister was, entered, went to the teacher, and told her that the girl was asked to go to the office. The teacher let her go with no question. Jeremy told her to take her things with her. Out in the hall, he quickly explained the situation to the worried girl and she gave him a quick hug. He asked her if she could get into Mersiha's locker for her coat; she could.

“Good. Get her coat—yours too if you're taking her home and go to Mersiha's classroom to get her schoolbag. Tell the teacher you were sent for her stuff. Then here's how to get to the storeroom where she's hiding and then tap like this on the door first so she'll know it's okay.”

He tapped, then told her how to get to the storeroom.

Then came the difficult part of his plan; getting Mersiha's clothes. That's when he heard an announcement over the PA system that he and Mersiha were being looked for. Going into a vacant classroom near the office, he used the intercom phone in the room to call the office, telling the clerk that he saw Jeremy and Mersiha going into the trainer's room in the gym. They saw him and told him that they wanted to speak to the head teacher before they would come out. About a minute later, Jeremy watched as the head teacher rushed out of his office and headed down the hall toward the gym.

Jeremy slipped out of the classroom and went to the office. He was able to enter unobserved and went into the head's office. Looking around, he spotted a clothing box and confirmed that it contained Mersiha's clothes. Taking it, he headed out when the clerk saw him.

“I was told to get this stuff to take to the head,” he called, “he needs it right away.”

The clerk waved him on out. He ran down to the storeroom, tapped on the door, and entered.

The two girls were holding each other and crying. When Mersiha saw Jeremy with her clothes, she began sobbing even harder.

“*Alhamdulillah*, you are an angel,” she cried. “You are wonderful... you did this... you don't know me and did so much...”

“Please, it's okay,” Jeremy objected. “You needed help and I could help you. Now hurry; get dressed and get out. At the other end of the hall, there are stairs that lead to an outside door. You can get out there but can't get back in, I checked. Tell your parents what happened. I don't know what they can do to keep you out of the Program, but I'm pretty sure that the teachers aren't supposed to be allowed to use force to strip off your clothes. Your folks will have to decide what to do. Anyway, I gotta get to class. Good luck!”

The two girls both hugged him and he left.

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“Ohmygod, Jeremy!” Amelia exclaimed. “You really *are* a hero! That was awesome, like an

adventure story! Damn, you must have gotten in deep shit for doing all that.”

“No kidding. Not for a while, though, since the head didn’t think to look for me in my classes until the afternoon.”

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As Jeremy emerged from the stairway to the maintenance area into the hall, the bell for the next class change rang. He headed off to his locker, grabbed his books, and went to his next class, completely ignoring all of the calls for ‘Reasonable Request’ as he brushed past the kids.

He entered the classroom and took his seat. When the teacher began the class, she asked Jeremy if he needed relief.

“No, miss.”

“Well then,” she began the class. “Last time we were discussing ‘Pride and Prejudice.’ Austen paints compelling personality traits in her characters, like foolishness, pomposity, and snobbery. Let’s talk about character development by looking at the characters in her novel and seeing how she makes their traits clear to the reader. Mr Porter, please come to the board and as we mention a character, write the character’s name and the trait.”

“Miss?” Jeremy asked the teacher. “If no one here was in the Program, would you have a pupil do that?”

“Of course not,” she replied. “We’re supposed to use Program pupils to do things like that.”

“Well, I decline then. That’s not a proper Program demonstration as the rules provide for. There’s no teaching purpose which requires the display of a naked body.”

“You have to comply, Mr Porter.”

“No, miss, I don’t. And since this isn’t an academic matter, you can’t mark me down for that. Tell the head I declined.”

“Well, I never...” she huffed, stared at him while the class tittered, but he stared back at her impassively. She shook her head, then resumed her lesson.

The head teacher found Jeremy in his last class of the day.

“Come to my office now, Mr Porter,” he called from the classroom door.

Jeremy followed Jamieson into the hall.

“Do you think you will get away with your flagrant...” he began.

“Sir, in private. I won’t discuss this in the hall,” he replied.

Jamieson, red-faced, led him to the office. Inside, he went to his desk and sat.

“Now first, young man, where is Miss Kassem?”

“I suppose she went home.”

“You stole property from my office...”

“Sir? I stole nothing. Her property—her garments—were stolen from her. I found them and returned them. It was my civic duty.”

“Why, you... you... impertinent... you also interfered with the operation of the Program, and damaged school property...”

“I’ll tell you where the curtain is. If there’s any damage, I’ll pay for it, but I just slid it off the rod. And I’m sure her parents could claim sexual assault and battery, since I read that the use of force is not permitted against pupils in school,” Jeremy retorted.

“In the Program it is,” Jamieson replied.

“I beg to differ, sir. Read the Human Sexuality Act. I did. It doesn’t mention that force can be used with a child.”

“For your blatant violations of school policy, I’m contacting your parents and will seek to have you expelled,” Jamieson declared.

“I’m not going to argue, sir. Let me state some facts. First, you drafted me into the Program without checking my status *vis-à-vis* any existing treaty or diplomatic matter. Second, you instructed teachers to forcibly strip a child. I found laws that say that doing that’s a felony. Third, you use the Program to punish pupils for non-Program offenses. That’s illegal. Fourth, you don’t properly supervise pupils in the Program to ensure their safety. Shall I go on? I won’t make threats. But I will make those facts public.”

“We’ll see, young man, we’ll see.”

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“How could you talk back like that to the head teacher?” Amelia asked, amazed. “Where did you... weren’t you scared?”

“I was kinda pumped, you know? I felt like it was when I was testing for a new *dan* in *taekwondo*. I concentrated on my objectives, my fighting plan, what I knew, and simply responded to his attacks. I knew my folks would back me too. Probably the diplomatic part would help me too, but I didn’t want to bank on that. So I used what I knew about the laws and stuff.”

“Well, this is such an awesome story. What happened with your folks?”

“Ha. Talk about quick action. I guess I’m a privileged case. As soon as I got out of the head’s office, I called Dad. He picks up my calls no matter what he’s doing. I told him what happened very briefly; in just a minute I told him what I did. Didn’t leave out a thing. He told me not to worry; that he was on it.

“When he got home that evening, he told me what he had done—he told Charles Wixom, he’s the U.S. ambassador, you know, about what happened to me and what I did for Mersiha. And that I was in the Program under protest. Dad told Charlie that he was gonna call the head teacher but Charlie told him to let him take care of it. You know? Charlie called the fuckin’ prime minister of the U.K. I’m surprised he didn’t call the Queen too. Dad said he really told the PM off and asked her if that was an example of how the Brits treated their children—and especially their minorities.

“Charlie told Dad to tell me not to worry about getting expelled, but I should keep my nose clean. I should use my judgment about being in the Program, but—get this—they’d support me if I protected anyone else from being harmed.”

“Oh, wow. Now I understand why you reacted that way at our school,” Amelia said. “But I still want to think of you as my knight, riding to my aid.”

“Oh yeah. When I realized that it was you I helped, I felt like I was... well... walking on air, I was so happy. My girlfriend. Shit, that sounds wonderful.”

They hugged.

Amelia grinned at him. “So was *this* when you started blogging about the Program?”

“Erm... No, not yet... Getting there, though...”

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The next day was really cold. During the winter, the school didn’t have the Program kids undress outside, of course; the commons area was designated for what the kids called the “morning grope” session, and as it was Tuesday, this was the first day that touching was supposed to be allowed for the new Program group. When Jeremy arrived at school, he bypassed the commons area and undressed in a restroom. He ignored the opposite-sex rule and used a boy’s restroom anyway. Folding his clothes and putting them in his rucksack, he put his winter jacket back on and slipped out. He didn’t want his clothes taken away where he couldn’t get to them, he wanted them immediately available. Then he put his coat in his locker.

Going into the commons area, he went over to where a group of boys were huddled, suspecting a problem. In all the previous weeks, he had staunchly avoided the morning grope sessions but somehow he felt a responsibility this time, as a fellow victim. Sure enough, there were two girls trying to fend off a flurry of hands. Jeremy waded into the group.

“Okay, you blokes. Cool it! If the girls say no, it means NO!” he called.

Two of the boys turned to him. “Oh, a naked dude! Dude, I request you wank yourself!”

“Go fuck yourself,” Jeremy retorted. “Leave the girls alone!”

“Gonna make us?” a guy taunted. “Let’s see you handle this,” he sneered, reaching for Jeremy’s penis.

Jeremy grabbed the guy's arm and twisted him into an armlock and pulled up hard.

"That was an attempted assault, you bloody berk," Jeremy grunted as he pulled the arm up and pushed the kid into two others, making all three stumble away and fall. "If you try it again, I'll dislocate your shoulder."

He turned to the girls. "Did you give permission to be touched?"

"OH! Thanks! No, they didn't even ask," one cried. "This is bloody awful!"

Jeremy raised his voice. "Program people! Over here, all of you! Anyone wearing clothes, stay away from them!"

A hush fell over the area and a few naked kids tentatively slipped over to where Jeremy was standing.

"Okay, everyone here in Commons," he called again. "The Program rules say no fucking touching unless you ask AND get permission! If you touch without permission, I'll find out who you are and have the bobbies on you within the bloody hour!"

"Who the fuck do you think you are?" a voice called.

"Just a bloke who got put in this ruddy Program," Jeremy answered. "And I'm gonna see that anyone who's being a clot and can't follow the rules gets his bonce handed to him! Now the groping party's over. Sod off now! Let 'em go to class."

He looked at the naked group, who were looking at him, glassy-eyed.

Jeremy spoke to them, "Don't let 'em do that. If they try to touch, say NO and walk away. Keep your mobiles available and ring 999 if someone frightens you. If they touch you without your permission, it's sexual assault. If the bobbies have to keep coming, the head'll have to..."

Just then, a big guy pulled at Jeremy's shoulder. "Called us clots..." he began and then launched a punch at his face.

Jeremy reacted instantly, twisting away from the punch and grabbing the boy's arm, he continued to turn and pulled him over in a shoulder throw. As he crashed away, out of the corner of his eye Jeremy noticed another kid moving in on him.

Jeremy twisted, bent his right knee, and kicked out with his left foot, hitting the charging boy in the gut. The boy was lifted off his feet and flew several feet back. Just then two teachers appeared.

"Stop the fighting!" one called. "What's happening?"

One of the naked girls called, "Those two guys tried to attack this boy—they tried to hit him but, wow, that was amazing the way you did that..." she finished, looking at Jeremy.

"Come along to the head's office now... you two also!" the other teacher called to the two subdued boys who were trying to slink away.

The group in Jamieson's office consisted of Jeremy, four of the group of Program students, the two boys, who were limping and clutching various damaged body parts, and the two teachers. Jamieson looked at them and then fixed an angry glare on Jeremy, who regarded him mildly.

"All right, what is this about?" Jamieson asked testily.

"Fighting, Head Teacher," one of the teachers said. "This boy—" pointing to Jeremy "—and the two with clothes."

Jamieson glared at them. "You know we have a nil tolerance for fighting. There's a mandatory three-day suspension..."

"Head Teacher, ask if your teachers saw anyone fighting," Jeremy asked.

"WHAT?" Jamieson shouted.

"You need a witness, right? A witness who saw a fight? You've told me that you can't take complaints without a witness," Jeremy persisted.

The Program kids smirked.

"Danvers, Wibert. Did you see them fighting?" Jamieson asked sharply.

"Erm... no," one teacher answered as the other shook his head. "Just those two getting up off the floor."

"But I see those two boys holding themselves," Jamieson persisted.

"I saw those boys running and then trip," a naked girl said sweetly. "Right?" she asked the others.

"Yes," they all agreed, nodding.

"Damn," Jamieson muttered. "All right, you can go, all of you—wait, Porter, you stay."

The others filed out while Jeremy waited.

"All right now, Mr Porter. I don't appreciate what I was told by the Local Education Authority but apparently they were contacted by the highest levels of government about serious problems in my school. I was specifically told not to discipline you in any way. Care to fill me in?"

"No, sir. I don't know what you were told."

"It was... never mind; doesn't matter. Now about the fight that didn't happen..."

"Head teacher? Proper pupil supervision? I'm sure you know what the kids call the pre-school disrobing session—the morning grope? I'm surprised that no one's been injured; you have no idea of the problems I saw."

"Just go to class, Porter. If you cause any other problems, in spite of your apparent connections, I'll have to... um, just go to class."

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“Damn, Jeremy, it gets better and better,” Amelia breathed, captivated by Jeremy’s retelling. “So are we where you began blogging *yet?*”

“Almost, honey. Almost there.”

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After Jeremy’s class, some of the naked kids found him during the class change and began thanking him.

“One sec, guys,” Jeremy said. “I got a Reasonable Request; I Request that you all ask me questions and listen to my answers. That way you can ignore anyone else’s Requests since you’re doing one.”

“Shit, that’s right brilliant,” a guy grinned.

They began firing questions and were talking while fending off Requests from other kids. Then Jeremy heard a girl’s giggle behind him and suddenly felt a hand reach and grab for his penis.

Like a flash, he grabbed the wrist and pulled it. With a squeal, the girl attached to the wrist was pulled around in front of him.

“All right, you dumb twit, what the bloody hell were you doing?” Jeremy growled as the girl tried to shrink away.

“I... erm... they dared me...” she stuttered.

“Okay, then. Now I’m gonna rip off your shirt and bra and twist your nipples. How’s that?”

“YOU CAN’T! That’s sexual assault!” she cried.

“And what was it you tried with me?” Jeremy pulled her so her face was thrust closely into his.

“But you’re naked!” she objected.

“Read the bloody Program booklet, then, about Requests! Wait till you’re in the Program. You’ll see just how it feels.”

He released her wrist and she slunk away, holding it and crying. Jeremy shook his head.

“Damn, I feel like shit for scaring her like that,” he thought. “This bloody Program’s awful. I’ve never acted like this before... I don’t go around scaring girls!”

Jeremy trudged to his next class, ignoring several “Reasonable Request” calls to him.

His next class was biology; there hadn’t been any naked kids in this class before, he suddenly realized as he entered. “Oh shit,” he thought to himself.

The teacher smiled when he saw Jeremy. The class started and the teacher began the lesson.

“We finally have a naked boy today, so we’ll have a chance to see how the male sexual parts work,” he stated. “Mr Porter, please come up.”

Jeremy went to the front of the room.

“Before we do anything, sir, what was today’s lesson to be on?”

“We’re doing environmental science. The next lessons are on ecological systems.”

“Thanks. Please tell me what the male genitals have to do with ecology? Just curious.”

“I’m substituting a Program lesson for today, Mr Porter.”

“I see. Please tell me, since the GCSEs are only about eight weeks away, will the exams cover environmental science?”

“Of course. That’s a major part of the curriculum,” the teacher replied.

“That’s what I assumed. What did you want me to demonstrate, then, sir?”

“How you get an erection and then ejaculate. It’s to show male sexuality.”

“Wasn’t the human anatomy section covered last fall? Does the biology exam require that we know how to get erections and ejaculate, then?”

“Ah, no...”

“Please tell me then, with the exams so close, why you’re not teaching a lesson on a required topic and doing one on a topic not on the GCSE?”

“Young man... you will follow my instructions. Your being in the Program requires you to participate in classroom demonstrations. Make yourself hard now.”

Jeremy decided to play dumb. “Excuse me? Explain what you mean.”

“Get an erection, Mr Porter, don’t be a twit.”

“Please show me what you mean. I’m not sure I understand.”

The teacher scowled. “I’m not about to touch you!”

The class tittered.

“No, no... Show me what you want me to do—use yourself, not me. I need to see exactly what you want me to do.”

Laughter.

“What! You’re the one in the Program, not me...” he exclaimed.

“It’s the teacher’s job to instruct us how to do something, right? You need to show me exactly what you want me to do since I’m not gonna guess at what you want. I’m just clarifying what the demo is supposed to show. I don’t want to do something wrong. Why can’t you show me

yourself?”

“I won’t humiliate myself in that way, young man!” he huffed.

“Oh, then that’s it—this is to demonstrate something humiliating? Is that it? Is that what you’re asking? You’re asking for a humiliation demo?” Jeremy persisted.

“I want you to wank!” the teacher shouted.

The class roared in laughter.

“Aha,” Jeremy smiled. “And besides its humiliation value, the educational value of my wanking is what, exactly?”

“It’s a Program requirement, young man,” he roared.

“I see. You can’t tell me there’s any educational value, then. Sir, I’m not gonna be your humiliation demonstration.”

“Young man, the Program rules...”

“Eff the Program rules... sir,” he interrupted. “This rot is totally twisted and obscene. How it helps us kids is beyond me. It turns kids into perverted voyeurs who want to abuse others, and it turns kids into scared, no, terrified people, maybe damaging them for life. I’ve decided I’ve had it; I’m out. Not doing it any more.”

There were gasps from the students at those words. Jeremy walked back to his desk, pulled his clothes out of his rucksack, and began dressing as a hush fell over the room. Then applause broke out.

The teacher exclaimed, “What are you doing... how do you still have your clothes...?”

“Obviously I’m dressing, sir. And I kept my clothes. No way was the school keeping them hostage.”

“You shall go see the head right now, Mr Porter. He’ll sort you.”

“Sir, I have to take that request as an unfair punishment because it will mean that I’m missing a lesson. With exams coming, I don’t intend to miss any lessons. If I am to go to the head’s office, you must go as well to explain, since I have nothing to discuss with the head.”

“Mr Porter, I’m assigning you to detention and will let the head know of this.” He turned and began his scheduled lesson.

Jeremy ignored calls in two later classes to see the head teacher. When it became time for his gym class, he finally went.

Jamieson was very angry.

“Porter, why are you dressed?” he exclaimed. “You’ve gone way too far today. You’re going to remain in the Program for the entire month now.”

“No, sir, I’ve decided. I’m not continuing with it. I hate what it’s doing to me; my anger and my losing control of myself. I don’t want to hurt anyone but if I’m attacked or threatened, I’m afraid of the result. You can’t force me to be naked. Don’t even think of trying to use force; I have martial arts training and don’t want to have to injure an adult—or kid. But if someone lays a hand on me, they’ll greatly regret it.”

“Mr Porter, I will not have our discipline so flouted,” Jamieson rumbled.

“Sir, I’ve complied with school discipline and followed every request made of me, except the Program ones. Please read our school’s Pupil Handbook where it speaks of courtesy, respect, proper behavior, integrity, and treatment of others. Read where it requires uniforms and modest underclothing too; pupils must dress modestly and they must not call special attention to the way they’re dressed. You require this strict dress code and enforce modesty in dress, yet kids have to spend a week naked and all the behavior rules are suspended for how they are to be treated. What message do you think this sends to us kids? Now, except for your compelling me to violate the rules of ordinary modesty, tell me where I’ve failed to meet any of the other standards in the Pupil Handbook. Those are the school rules that I’ll follow. Not the immoral, pornographic ones imposed on the kids by people who don’t understand how to properly treat children.

“Now give me your lecture and then I’ll leave. Oh, that detention I received. I don’t think that was justified. That was given from spite and not from any misbehavior, since the teacher was reacting to my not participating in the Program by not doing his random demo. All I want to do is to attend school and learn and the Program has become a real barrier to my learning. I’m not challenging your authority and I’ll cooperate with you in any way you want. Just not in Program stuff. Now can we call a truce? I’ll agree not to directly oppose you; I’ll stop trying to post anti-Program comments on the school’s site and its Facebook.”

“Listen, young man,” Jamieson said slowly. “This isn’t a negotiating session, but your comments about the Pupil Handbook—Mr Porter, those are the behavior values essential for having an orderly school. I appreciate your comments about the Handbook’s ethical and behavior standards. We want our pupils to always follow them and I admit that there are fundamental discrepancies between our Handbook and the Program that are very bothersome to our governors. But you’re posing a real problem to school discipline with your active Program opposition. You said that you’d agree not to continue to oppose our running the Program?”

“Yes, sir. It really bothers me to say that, but just before I got dressed in biology class today, I realized if I get too involved in opposing it, someone may get hurt, like almost happened a few times earlier today. But I wish that you’d get teachers to watch out for the poor kids who are suffering abuses. I think that’s my most serious objection and I can’t see how kids getting sexually abused can improve their sexuality.”

“You are aware that by refusing to participate, the school will be freezing your academic records, making it almost impossible for you to go to uni,” Jamieson went on. “That’s from the national regulations. If you change your mind and do the Program later, you’ll need to do it for a whole week, actually even longer now, because of your refusals to follow the rules these two days.”

“I’m aware of that, sir, but remember that I’m an American citizen and that’s an unresolved issue between our governments. We can’t know how that will finally work out. But we’ve been at odds over this issue since I arrived here two months ago and I know I’ve been trying your patience while I’ve been arguing how troublesome the Program is for me. So will you agree to a truce?”

“Against my better judgment, I think I will. Your citing the Pupil Handbook’s behavior code is the only reason I’m even considering this. However, I’ll agree only under the condition that you don’t cause any further trouble, young man. Since you’re not participating, then, please stay away from those who are. Don’t agitate. Don’t interfere. As long as you can do that, I’ll defer disciplinary action for these two days’ incidents. But if you become involved again, we’ll be right back here with you facing your punishment. Is that clear? Can I trust you?”

“I’ll do my part, sir. No interference.”

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“So *that’s* when you started blogging, right?” Amelia prompted.

“Yep. It hurt me to agree not to get involved. But I was just a single person fighting the whole system, and if some of the guys ganged up on me if I stopped them from abusing someone, well, I didn’t want to chance seriously hurting another kid. Shit, Amelia, what I learned in the Art can kill a person. And, my god, how I reacted when that girl tried to grope me. I almost crushed her wrist. I hated how I felt after that; that was the turning point. I couldn’t tell my folks anything about that, it was too embarrassing—how I lost control. After that happened, I did a lot of meditating, trying to find where that anger came from. That’s when I found my release in the blogging.

“But that wasn’t the whole story at my old school. What happened later was pretty bad. Let me tell you about that; it’s why I’m at Norwich now.”

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Jeremy finished the week of his non-participation in the Program while having to put off the pleas of some of the Program kids to help them. He did whisper a few suggestions and hints about how to be creative in avoiding some of the more objectionable Requests. He quietly told some kids to stand on their right to refuse to do any requests they felt were too degrading. Two of the kids actually did call 999 as a result of aggressive abuse and the police responded; this caused a stir and the more noisome abuses became much less frequent, especially after police removed one abusive boy from school in handcuffs.

Jeremy also had to deal with his teachers who gave him a hard time about his being clothed. He repeatedly told them that he had withdrawn from participating and if they wanted further details, they should ask the head teacher.

The following Monday, a new crop of Program students was named and Jeremy kept to himself, but the following day, when he arrived at school, the building was closed. The building was encircled with yellow tape printed with “Crime Scene—Do Not Enter.” Jeremy began talking to

several other students who were arriving but none knew what was happening. Then his mobile phone rang. It was his mother.

“Come on home,” she told him. “School is closed today; they just called.”

“Yeah, Mum, there’s police tape all around. What’s happening?”

“A firebombing yesterday late afternoon. I’ll tell you what I heard when you get home.”

Jeremy went home and his mother had several newspapers for him to look at.

“Mrs Sheppard brought these papers,” she told him. “They say more about the school situation than what I heard.” She pointed to the articles.

Jeremy read them. The first article described the scene at the school on Monday afternoon. The head teacher had just left the school building on the way to his car in the car park when his car became engulfed in a sheet of flames. In less than a minute, the fire reached the petrol tank and a huge fireball erupted. Jamieson was slightly burned; he was taken to the hospital to have the burns treated and had been kept overnight with a mild case of shock.

The fire brigade was located only a block away and responded quickly. The tabloid’s reporter learned that a petrol bomb with a timer had been secured under the car. If the head teacher had left the school at his habitual time, he would have been in the car when the bomb went off, but he had been delayed on the phone and left five minutes late. The school building was closed while detectives searched the car park, grounds, and building for any possible clues, and to ensure that no bombs had been left in the building. The school would be open Wednesday unless police had any further concerns. The second newspaper’s report was essentially the same, except that it mentioned that a stoppered glass bottle was found near where the head teacher’s car had been parked and the police had told the reporter that a folded paper sheet was inside. No information was available about its contents.

“God, Mum. This is awful. Someone tried to kill him.”

“Yeah, looks that way. Listen, be very careful tomorrow—no, always—at school now. Damn, I think we need to change your school. First that honor killing and now this.”

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“Was the head okay?” Amelia asked. “I know you didn’t get along, but...”

“He was okay, well, you know, as okay as possible when you’ve escaped being killed.”

“Did they find the person who did it?”

Jeremy sighed. “No, but we did hear about that paper in the bottle. It was a note that said he was punished in retribution for humiliating a Muslim girl. I can’t imagine that this was about the girl who was killed by her brothers last fall, so it must have been about Mersiha. The school put security cameras up over the car park and we had frequent police patrols too. That all happened in mid-March. And that was when my folks decided to change my school for the autumn and

began having embassy security watch over me. I had to text security several times a day—just sending them ‘OK’ was enough—and I couldn’t go to any after-school stuff. So that was my Program experience, such as it was.”

“Damn. What an incredible story, sweetie. It must have been really bad.”

“Yeah. But I learned an awful lot about myself, like how to control that burning anger I got when I faced real injustices. I learned where it came from and that let me know how to control it, so at least that was constructive.”

“Oh, that’s good. I think... oh!” Amelia suddenly giggled and flushed.

“What?”

“Ah... well... um... you were naked and with naked girls too... Did that make you... Uh, did you, you know...” she asked, her face as red as a beet. “Oh, I’m embarrassed for asking...”

He laughed. “Don’t be. No, I didn’t get hard. I can’t recall seeing *any* boys getting hard, actually, but I never really looked, either. I take that back—I did see blokes getting teased and Relief sessions a bunch of times but I tuned that out. Blokes didn’t wander the halls with random wood, though. Maybe it’s because you don’t get hard if you’re embarrassed or humiliated. Maybe it’s just me, but I didn’t find any of that rot a turn-on.”

“Uh oh, look at the time, Jeremy. We gotta get our work done. Thanks for telling me your story, though. That sounded like a horror thriller, actually.”

## Chapter 11

When Kevin arrived at the flat later, the teens were still busy with their schoolwork. Not having many classes in common, only history and math, they were working separately. Amelia was working on a literature paper and Jeremy was studying Spanish.

Amelia looked up at Kevin as he bent down to kiss her. “Hi, sweetie, how do you feel today?”

“Good, Kevin. Going to school is fun again,” she sighed and stretched. “I think that’s all I can do on this essay now.”

Jeremy had looked up from his book. “Hi, Kevin. It’s strange learning a Western language. I know Korean and speak a little Chinese and Japanese. Spanish seems so weird. Like English but so different too.”

“Any news from school?” Kevin asked. “I brought some papers home for you.”

“The big news was in those tabloids, actually,” Jeremy grinned. “Oh, there was a telly crew in school; they got chased out. Maybe there’ll be a news item later. And you got the text about Saturday dinner, right?”

“Yep. We’re okay for Saturday,” Kevin confirmed.

“Jeremy asked me out on a date for Sunday,” Amelia whispered in Kevin’s ear.

He nodded. “Sure, have fun,” he whispered back. She glowed a smile at him.

Denise arrived a few minutes later and they turned on the TV news. The news basically duplicated the tabloid articles, then the reporter interviewed two parents from a London school which was running the Program; both parents appeared angry that their school would be continuing to require student participation and they told the reporter that their children would refuse if selected. The piece ended with a brief interview with Mr Hanford standing in front of Norwich Academy. His only comment was that the school’s governors were working with the National Program Committee to decide their next steps in adopting the Program. The report ended as the reporter mentioned that student resistance to the Program appeared to be spreading throughout the schools in the country.

Hearing that, Jeremy whooped with glee and Amelia clapped her hands.

Kevin grinned at Denise. “I guess that’s the difference between Brits and Yanks, sweetie. Remember, after our student newspaper article hit the press? The parents practically revolted against the Program. Here in Britain, it’s ‘keep a stiff upper lip’ and ‘keep calm and carry on.’ In public, anyway. I’ll bet that the resistance’ll grow, but it’ll happen more quietly here.”

Jeremy was grinning broadly. “But that was just the opening salvo in the resistance, Kevin, right? You said you had a meeting with our head teacher so maybe we can work our school’s resistance into the news again?”

Kevin laughed. “You’re thinking big, Jeremy; I like that. Yes, Mr Hanford wants to meet

Monday afternoon. Denise can come and the two of you also. This is a team approach and I'll explain what Denise and I came up with. Hanford needs something to hold the Program Committee at bay so we'll give him an idea for a whole new way of having the Program operate. Besides preparing the tools to tear down the Program's legitimacy. We'll discuss it after supper—you can stay, I hope?"

"Yes sir, I made arrangements."

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On Friday morning, Denise was preparing breakfast when Amelia rushed tearfully into the kitchen and embraced her, sobbing.

"Amelia! What's wrong, honey? Did something happen?" she exclaimed, alarmed.

"No, no, Denise," Amelia sniffled. "I'm okay—that's why... I was just overcome... I'm so happy that I'm crying."

Denise relaxed. "Oh thank God. I thought it was something with your surgery..."

"That's what it was, Denise. My pain's all gone! I just realized! Well, not quite all gone, I still feel something that hurts in there... but when I just took a pee and dabbed dry, it didn't hurt! So I tried pressing near the bad spots and it didn't hurt!" Her tears began again. "When I realized... I just lost it then. All those years... all that pain... It must be my surgery, they must have fixed the problem. Oh thank you for taking care of me, I love you so much... and Kevin too, for helping me."

"That's incredible news, darling. And your post-op visit is this afternoon. Dr Singh will be so pleased. He can check to see how it's healed and we'll talk about what happens next. I'm so, so happy for you! Can I let Kevin know? He'll be delighted."

She nodded and hugged Denise again, then ran to her room to get dressed.

Amelia floated through her day, rejoicing in her awareness of being relatively pain-free. She still experienced twinges of pain and some dull throbbing at times, but her constant pain, which was so intrusive to all of her activities, was mostly gone. Her hospital visit provided even better news. The surgical wound had healed quickly and cleanly and when Singh gently probed the area, the pressure produced hardly any pain, only a dull discomfort and feelings of a tingling warmth that she thought felt weird.

Singh was very pleased. He told her that the twinges were likely signs of the damaged nerve fibers coming to life again while the throbbing was possibly a sign of improving blood supply, which could be a sign of scar tissue breaking down. And he thought her report of feeling warmth was a sign that her genital sensitivity would improve. Amelia and Denise were overjoyed with his report, happily discussing it as they made the appointments for her continued weekly therapy.

When Amelia returned home, she texted her father with the good news and then they visited by videochat for a while until Kevin got home. Hadad was concerned in a fatherly way when he

heard that his daughter had a boyfriend, but after being reassured by Kevin that Jeremy was a long-standing family friend, he told Amelia to have fun but to be careful.

“Of course I will, Papa,” she responded with an expression that only teenaged daughters have learned to master so well.

Then Kevin and Denise celebrated with Amelia by going to an upscale restaurant and enjoying an excellent meal.

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Saturday’s dinner with the Porters was epic; the families had a lot of catching up to do. They were delighted to meet Amelia, who made an immediate favorable impression. Of course there was a lot of interest in the unusual way that the teens found out that they were attending the same school, with Jeremy and Amelia describing exactly how they met. Then they were persuaded to relate the school events of the past week, although Amelia was reluctant to tell them any details of her assault by the Program security man. Denise made a mental note to talk to her in private later to discuss the healing powers of talking through bad memories.

“Oh, speaking of Program matters, I’ve got some news from State, guys,” Porter told Jeremy and Amelia. “They decided that the children of American diplomatic personnel mustn’t get involved in the Program here. That’s because it was declared educationally unsound in the U.S.”

“YES!” cheered Naomi. “That’s soooo great! Thanks, dad!”

Then Kevin described the parents’ meeting to the Porters and also about his meeting with Hanford and the upcoming planned meeting.

“So what’s this next meeting about?” Porter asked.

“Two topics,” Kevin responded. “First will be the arguments against the Program’s legitimacy on educational, cultural, and fairness grounds. The second is an idea that substitutes a different way of achieving the so-called Program objectives. That’s based on an Avery University study Denise and I were in a couple of years ago. Our friends were the study’s authors but they told us that hardly any school in the U.S. is doing their version; the Program gave any of these new social program ideas a bad rep.

“Hanford is being pressed to start the Program but he knows that none of the kids will agree to participate. So he’s stuck; he has to run the Program but no one will cooperate. He can’t force cooperation and any sanctions the government thinks that they can impose aren’t convincing the parents. I thought if he offers my idea as an alternate—it has the same objectives and actually works—it might take the heat off because then he can show the government that he’s trying and not ignoring the law.”

“Sounds like a tall order, Kevin,” Porter remarked. “Jeremy’s happy that you’ve included him.”

“Jeremy’s had some really good ideas and so has Amelia. They can help to deliver a powerful message.”

“Okay,” Porter said, “enough serious talk. Let’s annoy my son and Amelia and talk about their first date tomorrow,” he grinned.

“Dad!” Jeremy complained.

“Okay, Warren, let’s go eat,” Barbara winked. “Don’t tease the kids.”

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The beginning of the first week following the abortive Program launch was uneventful for the Norwich school students, but behind the scenes, the school’s head teacher and governors were wrestling with the government’s educational authorities. By mid-week, Dr Abberle, the chair of the governors, had arranged for a meeting with National Program Committee members to discuss the impasse.

At Kevin’s meeting with Hanford, he had outlined his general plan and the governors decided to present those ideas to the Program Committee. One of the governors with political connections also was able to arrange for four MPs who represented Greater London, including their borough, to attend the meeting. Three were from the Labor Party and one was a Conservative. The meeting was arranged for the evening of the first Monday in December.

Jeremy and Amelia kept up their blog postings on *The Realist* blog, but they made a change in the blog’s web hosts. Porter had become concerned that the newfound publicity of the blog would result in Jeremy becoming identified as the author and his link to the U.S. embassy as a diplomat’s son disclosed. An embassy security expert worked with Kevin and Jeremy to check all of Jeremy’s uploads he had made to his blog and they were gratified to find that, except for a single case, all of his uploads had been made using the Tor network; his location having been masked by the anonymizing application. They knew that the original server which had hosted the blog was located in the U.S. and that Internet company’s policy was not to divulge the identity of its subscribers without a warrant for the investigation of a crime.

Kevin then worked with Jeremy to set up his blog on the server he had used for his anti-Program activities, just as he had done with Amelia’s blog a few weeks earlier, and the security person found that the software spawning the proxy server network was still running. Satisfied that any link between Jeremy’s blog and the embassy could not be found, the security person left Jeremy with the admonition to continue to be careful.

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The following day after school, Jeremy and Amelia went to her flat to finish the moving of his blog to its new home. Jeremy copied the blog files onto Kevin’s server and deleted them from the old one. The two teens next took the summaries they had made of some of the FGM articles written by Amelia and her classmates, those which highlighted the human rights issues of the practice, and uploaded them to Jeremy’s blog.

Then Jeremy and Amelia posted their next article.

### ***Human Rights: Mistreating Kids in the United Kingdom—Illegal and Legal Torture Too***

*The Realist* has been exploring human rights problems which have been afflicting our society and we've recently been concentrating our reports on children, who are amongst its most vulnerable members. In an article last week, *The Realist* mentioned how a group of children took their own defence in hand and stood up for their individual rights, rights which were threatened by the adults who were charged to protect them.

A society where adults think that they have the right to inflict major harm, physical as well as psychological, on children, is an immoral society. Is British society immoral? *The Realist* believes that yes, it is, as long as its citizens continue to tolerate the harming of its children.

Our last posting was about a custom which causes one form of extreme harm to children; it's a custom that's practised in over 30 countries world-wide: female genital mutilation or FGM. This is a primitive cultural practice which is common in the equatorial regions of Africa, in Egypt, in some middle-eastern and Southeast Asian countries, and shockingly by some immigrant communities in Europe, America, and Australia. You can read more about this terrible practice in our last article.

The victims of these mutilations are almost always young children, aged from infancy to early teens. A significant number of victims even die as a result of the procedure, which is typically done under primitive, unsanitary conditions. But, you ask, how does this affect children in the U.K.?

When people in various cultures emigrate to new countries, they bring their cultural practices with them, and sadly, genital mutilation, or cutting, is one such practice. FGM is, to coin a phrase, "alive and well" in England. According to a recent report, over 100,000 females from age 15 to 49 are believed to be living with FGM in England and Wales. This number includes about 10,000 girls under 15 years old.

While *The Realist* hasn't been able to find any reports of the actual genital cutting procedure occurring in the U.K., we have found many reports about girls who are sent abroad, generally to their cultural homes in Africa, to undergo the procedure. A law passed by Parliament in 2003 made it a crime to send a British citizen or permanent resident abroad to be cut, but to date it seems that no one has been successfully prosecuted.

In parts of London, there are many children who have been mutilated by genital cutting, and some boroughs have the highest proportions of afflicted children in the nation—almost 5 percent of the girls in some schools have been cut. For example, *The Realist* has learned that in all of the secondary schools in London, schools where the Program is running, about 2 percent of the girls have had the mutilation. In fact, *both* of the girls who were "allegedly" assaulted by the Program officials at the independent

school we wrote about last week—refer to the newspaper articles which covered that travesty—had been genitally mutilated, and one was severely injured when she was forcibly stripped and the man forced his fingers into her genitals.

And that brings us to the point of this article. FGM is a violation of children’s human rights. It’s torture under any definition; it’s also a permanent, life-altering mutilation. In a significant number of cases, it’s fatal. Girls who are mutilated cannot enjoy a normal life; their lives are afflicted with pain, infections, difficult childbearing, and higher infant mortality rates for their babies. *The Realist* urges that anyone who has the ability to do so, to do whatever they can to help stamp out this primitive practice.

Another abusive practice affecting children is happening right here in our country. Just like FGM, it’s a form of child torture too and must be eliminated. This home-grown abuse is known as the Naked in School Program and it’s actually a “legalized” form of torture. How is the Program like FGM, which has been made illegal in numerous countries, and how can it be called “torture”? Simple: both practices are imposed involuntarily on children by adults; they both affect *only* children. They’re both a form of severe abuse, rising to the level of torture, both physical and psychological. FGM is performed without benefit of anaesthesia and its pain and aftereffects last a lifetime. The Program produces severe psychological “pain” in many children whose effects may also last for a long time, as well as significant numbers of physical injuries through genital trauma or infections. Read past articles in *The Realist* if you need to be convinced of the psychological damage as well as some physical damage inflicted on children by the Program. Being driven to suicide seems to *The Realist* to be sufficient proof of its bad effects on vulnerable children.

Finally, a major advertised objective of the Program is to force a child to accept a one-size-fits-all idea of sexuality; typically it’s the most invasive, abusive, and non-consensual form of sexual activity. Think about it—both FGM and the Program are intended to affect sexuality in children, but operate in opposite ways, the first one completely eliminating sexuality and the second, legally forcing kids into extreme forms of it, but the end result of both tortures is radical, profound, and unhealthy.

Readers of *The Realist* can’t do very much individually to affect the FGM problem other than to contribute to organizations which are attempting to eliminate the practice, but they certainly can influence whether their own children are hurt if they are told that they must participate in the Naked in School Program. The children at our now well-known independent school showed us how to protect them. They told us: “Just Say No!”

Amelia turned to Jeremy after the article was displayed on their screen.

“Wow, that looks so good! But how do we tell people how to find the new server?” she asked.

“Kevin had an idea; he was going to ask his expert contact in Jakarta,” Jeremy said. “He thought that there might be a way to redirect visitors to my old URL. I’m also going to send an email with

this article to the newspapers who covered our first blog post and give them a link to the new blog. I found this email service where you can send anonymous emails; that will protect our identity. They limit it to sending to ten addresses to prevent spamming.... Ummm... Amelia? What are you looking at?”

“Ah, you, Jeremy. You get such an intense look when you’re passionate about something. I love how you get all caught up in doing this work. Uh, Jeremy? Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Cause you’re gorgeous, honey. I love looking at you all the time...”

Their hands found each other’s and then their lips. Soon they were in an embrace, kissing passionately, tongues dueling, breaths panting, as the flat door opened and Denise came in.

“Oh!” all three exclaimed; then Denise laughed while the two teens blushed furiously.

“Erm... We... we... it’s just...” Jeremy began while Amelia buried her face in her hands.

Denise went to Jeremy and hugged him, then Amelia. “It’s fine, it’s fine. Don’t even think about it. You both care for each other, right?”

Amelia nodded, sniffing, while Jeremy said, “Oh yes!”

“Kevin and I see your care for each other all the time when we’re with you. So it’s perfectly okay to express your feelings of affection. In public you need to restrain yourselves, but in private, one of the best ways to show your affection is by physical contact. So don’t let me stop you, kids!” she chuckled as she went to change her clothes. “Jeremy, you’ll stay for dinner?” she called as she disappeared into her bedroom.

Amelia and Jeremy shyly, longingly, looked at each other and then went back to the computer.

Later, Amelia showed the article to Kevin and Denise.

“Well, it’s good you switched servers,” Denise chuckled. “After this gets out, I think there’ll be people looking for *The Realist* blogger with tar and feathers at hand.”

“Yeah, this should get the establishment really riled up,” Kevin agreed. “Guys, it’s time to discuss Part B of our plan for the governors, and we want to see what you think about it—and you’ll be our guinea pigs first.”

“Uh oh,” Amelia said to Jeremy. “I’ve heard how they operate. This means trouble.”

“What do you have in mind?” Jeremy asked warily.

Kevin explained his idea. “If the Program Committee demands some kind of physical form of having the Program, which is the sense I’m getting from Hanford, first we’ll ask them to tell us how we can compel participation. Using force isn’t allowed, although in some schools they broke that restriction and in others they came close to force by using extreme threats and coercion. We succeeded in mobilizing the kids and parents at your school so that coercion won’t work there and neither will the threat of any kind of academic punishment. You know all that stuff already.

“But I can’t see that the committee members will be able to suggest anything. The school says they’re willing to have the Program, and technically I guess that it’s running, but no one’s participating,” he grinned. “Amelia told us that they’ve been calling kids’ names every single day to go to the office to participate, right?”

Amelia and Jeremy nodded. “Yeah, they’re still doing that,” Jeremy agreed. “No one ever goes.”

Kevin went on, “The head teacher told me that he’s informed the National Program Committee that it’s not the school’s fault that kids won’t participate and that the committee can’t tell him a legal way to compel participation. So it’s an impasse. Denise and I can suggest a way to break the impasse. I’ve got all the materials we need to do that now; I just got a set of DVDs from our friends back in the States. The videos show an alternate kind of Program that a group of us developed. It achieves the exact same objectives as the one that the U.K. Program law states.

“If we do go ahead with our version—a different program, we’ll need help and you guys will be that help. We were the first helpers for this project when our friends got the idea for it back when we were seniors in high school. There’s no nudity but lots of contact. Are you okay with that?”

Amelia looked at Kevin, then at Jeremy. “Contact? What do you mean?”

“Simple touching, embracing, holding hands, and later, a kind of massage,” Denise said.

“Oh...” Amelia said. “With Jeremy?”

“Sure. Is that okay?” Denise asked, smiling; she hadn’t told Kevin about finding the teens in a passionate embrace.

“Oh my, I think I’d like that,” she said shyly and Jeremy took her hand.

“I would too,” he said, looking into Amelia’s eyes.

“Okay, that’s great!” Kevin smiled. “Because we’ve got a massage class scheduled so you can learn something about it; our Plan B program for the school ends up with some massage procedures.”

He gave them a flyer.

“Tantric massage?” Amelia read. “Um... Isn’t that about doing... sex things?”

“Well, sometimes tantric massage does involve sexual intercourse. A better name for those particular massage sessions might be ‘tantric erotic massage’ or something like that,” Denise told her. “But read the flyer.”

Amelia looked it over while Jeremy read it over her shoulder.

### ***Tantric Massage Workshops Offered***

The word “tantra” often evokes the image of a sensual or even sexual massage; it’s a word which is frequently misused and conjures up many misunderstandings. Often people assume that the object of a tantric massage is for the recipient to have a sexual release.

An ordinary massage is given to relax the recipient, mainly by kneading the muscles and relieving bodily stresses. This technique is directed toward the *yin* energies which circulate in the body. The *yin* energies promote relaxation. Instead, tantric massage improves on ordinary massage by mobilizing both *yin* and *yang* energies. The *yang* energies are stimulating energies and the tantra techniques are designed to interweave and modulate the energies of relaxation and stimulation, building up and releasing these opposite energies in the body, which results in the recipient achieving a deep sense of peace and a fulfilling sense of wholeness.

Another misunderstanding is that it's assumed that tantric massage must be done with the recipient being naked. The *yin* and *yang* energies are actually mobilized through the stimulation of focal points on the recipient's body and along the body's energy meridians, so it's possible to give a tantric massage through clothing and also without touching the sexual organs, but some people have actually attained orgasmic experiences with no contact with their sexual organs, even while they are wearing their clothes! But remember, the massage's objective is not necessarily for the recipient to achieve sexual release.

If clients are interested, they can consider our advanced classes, which do cover the teaching of massage techniques that incorporate nudity and include the genitals in the massage since the sexual organs are an integral part of the body and an essential contributor to the body's energy sources. When the sexual organs are incorporated in a tantric massage, the unique energy they contribute to the experience, the strong life force energy which flows through them and into the other parts of our bodies, allows an unparalleled orgasmic experience.

But our basic workshops are meant as an introduction to tantric techniques and there will be no pressure for anyone to move past their own comfort limits.

See below for the times that these workshops will be offered. We hope that you will take the opportunity to study tantra with us....

Amelia looked up; her face was beet red. "Oh, I don't know..." she began. "Orgasmic release?"

"You don't need to do any of that, honey. But it's really not sexual, mostly. Sensual, yes. Kevin and I have done a number of these tantric classes," Denise explained. "My first experience was at a workshop where we were expected to get naked. I didn't know about the nudity part beforehand; we went to the class on a lark and I almost ran out of it when they told the group that we should get naked. The nudity part kind of broke up the workshop because the others who came soon left, but the teacher convinced Kevin and me to stay and did a private lesson for us with our clothes still on. I had a wonderful time. Kevin and I still do what they taught us, too. We put parts of what we learned at that workshop into the program that Cindy developed at Avery."

"Jeremy, if I go, is it okay for you?" Amelia asked.

"Sure, I'll go. We won't do anything that you're uncomfortable with. I know a bit about the *qi*

energies and meridians, Eastern lore, from my *taekwondo* classes and had some massages. It was really tame stuff,” he assured her.

Kevin smiled, “Good. I’ve already signed up for a session tomorrow evening; now we all can go.”

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The tantra class the following evening was very basic, as the flyer suggested. The instructor showed the locations of the major *chakras* and energy meridians and then demonstrated with her partner various massage techniques, mainly concentrating on the hands, feet, legs, and back. She showed the deep stroking methods that could be used, which she explained are only effective using massage oils on bare skin, and told the group how the alternation of deep pressure and sensual stroking could stimulate erotic sensations in the body. Everyone was encouraged to try the techniques on their partners, and then partners switched around so the giver became the recipient to allow both partners to learn the techniques.

Amelia and Jeremy were enthralled with the experience, and after the class ended, Amelia embraced Jeremy in a passionate hug and kiss.

“Ohmygod,” she panted, “that was... oh... so intense. Wow. I tingle all over my body!”

Jeremy looked like he had been slugged when Amelia let him go. “Wow... can we kiss that way again, darling? Kevin? We have to demonstrate that stuff to the kids in school? Shit, that’s like X-rated, almost!”

Denise giggled. “You two really got into it. You both had such an intense look. I think you’re both naturals. We’ll show you the moves that we’ll want you to demonstrate when we do the first class. But Kevin and I wanted you to experience the kind of power that simple touching can unleash, even over clothes, as we’ll be doing with kids, if they accept our suggestion ”

“Damn. That was just brill. When can we start?” Jeremy asked brightly.

They all laughed.

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The next day, Amelia and two of her friends were waiting in the lunchroom for Jeremy to join them. He hadn’t come to their history class and she was concerned. About five minutes later, Jeremy showed up. He motioned to Amelia that he wanted to speak to her privately so she joined him.

“I got pulled into the head’s office,” he explained. “All kinds of shit hit over the last blog. He tried to tell me that I needed to stop it but I told him that he could deny that anyone at this school was involved. So he reminded me that one of my early postings had been traced to this school and he knew that I was the only pupil signed in to use a computer then. I got a bright idea then; I told him that the media lab has a wi-fi hot spot and if someone used it, it would show the same address as the lab computers since everything shares the same router. So he could claim that

anyone could have their device on the school's wi-fi connection and the password was common knowledge; they didn't even need to be in the building.

"He looked doubtful but then called the technology teacher, who basically agreed with me. Then he had me wait while he rang up someone, who was apparently really angry—I could hear the yelling from where I was sitting. The head told the guy on the phone that he had done some further checking and explained what the tech teacher told him. And he and I listened to more yelling."

"So what happened? Are you in trouble?" Amelia asked, concerned.

"Ha! No, after he rang off, the head teacher told me that the guy on the phone told him that he had decided to get an expert to trace the blog's account to try to identify its owner, only to find that the old blog account was now gone. Then this morning our new article appeared in the papers about kids being tortured in the Program and now the blog was on a different server. And the head told me that they have no idea where that new server's located! So everything's ace 'cause the papers publicized the blog article and Kevin's server is really hidden!"

"And that took the whole period?" Amelia wondered.

"Only part. The head had me wait till he could get a copy of one of the tabloids so he could see what it said. Then he spent the rest of the time telling me to be less inflammatory in my writing." He smiled. "I told him that I'd try to tell that to the blogger."

"Shit," Amelia grinned, "I can't believe what you're doing, sweetie..."

"Hey, I'm using your ideas too, honey. We're making a good team."

Amelia kissed her fingers and touched Jeremy's lips. "That's all I can do in school, Jeremy. I like being on your team. Now let's go sit with the girls. They're burning to talk about the FGM blog."

They went to the girls' table and Jeremy was immediately inundated with questions.

Darra got hers in first. "Jeremy, you must have persuaded the *Realist* blog guy real good; that was a hot article. Did he say that he would keep putting our stuff on his blog?"

Jeremy nodded. "He's cool with doing it. But he tries not to include stuff that'll give away who his sources are. You can imagine why."

"Oh yes," Tisa said, "I have a newspaper here with that article from yesterday."

Amelia reached and Tisa handed it to her. Amelia and Jeremy scanned the article.

"I tried to find the blog last night but it was gone," Mariama complained.

"It got moved," Tisa told her. "That was in the paper too, with the new address."

"I'm guessing that the blogger must have been feeling some political heat," Jeremy said.

"Especially now that he's telling people not to be in the Program. Maybe... oh, I'll bet he found a way to keep his identity hidden. Ha, he must have a secret identity."

The others laughed.

“Oh, my mum heard something about Hana,” Estelle told them. “She’s mostly ok but isn’t coming back to school. Her dad decided to take her out of our school. My mum said their family was embarrassed at how terrible it was that she let her privates be exposed. Mum tried to tell them that Hana was forced, two men were holding her down, but Mum said that her mum didn’t understand. I think that they didn’t *want* to understand.”

Jeremy nodded, “I wish I could’ve gotten to her in time. Well, maybe all this anti-Program publicity will help.”

“Ugh,” Darra scowled. “We still have that hanging over us—there’s been a rumor that the Program people are coming to the school for a meeting next month.”

“Yeah.” “Heard that too.” “Huh-uh.” the others replied.

“So ladies,” Jeremy asked, “do you have any more stuff to pass on for that blog?”

Estelle dug a sheet out of her bookbag. “Here’s what a girl wrote about her experience for me. So far we know of seventeen girls with FGM in the school now. I think that’s all we can find.”

Amelia was looking at some papers; then she looked up. “That actually fits the published stats I found, Estelle,” she said. “We have 431 girls here and if 17 were cut, that’s... um... almost 4 percent?”

Jeremy was punching his phone. “3.9. Wow. Very good, Amelia! How’d you do that?”

She grinned at him. “Simple maths. Okay, this article says, in a survey done by the Home Office, that in South London, the number of girls affected is between 3.9 and 4.7 percent. It’s highest here than in the rest of the country—which makes sense, we have the largest immigrant population here.”

“Does it say what the whole country is?” Tisa asked.

“Um... yes. England and Wales it’s only half of one percent of girls. All London is 2.1 percent. That’s where the immigrant families mostly are, for sure. But the larger cities, like Birmingham and Manchester, have about 1.5 percent.”

“That shows why the pilot tests of the Program didn’t encounter girls who were cut,” Jeremy mused. “Those schools were rural or very suburban—I remember that in the first school where the Program was started where that girl committed suicide...” He stopped at the girls’ blank looks. “Didn’t you guys have to read her journal? No? Well, it’s part of the stuff that kids at Program schools are required to do. I guess we never got to that point here. Anyway, that was at a school in a suburb of a small city, Canterbury, I think. There were about 350 kids there. If half were girls, then half of a percent with FGM is less than one girl. I think the other pilot schools were like that too.”

“So then when they started the Program in London, they ran into all the Muslim issues,” Darra

continued. “And got girls who were cut and would have real problems—health problems—with the Program.”

“Exactly,” Jeremy confirmed. “Which is why I hope that all the anti-Program propaganda works.”

The conversation turned to sharing ideas for a future blog article. They planned to use Amelia’s demographic information on FGM prevalence in a discussion of expected numbers of affected children in urban schools.

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When Amelia and Denise arrived home after her hospital treatment on Friday, Denise noticed that Amelia seemed to be very uncomfortable; she had looked uneasy and agitated on their trip home too.

“Sweetie, is there something wrong?” Denise called when Amelia fled to her room after they entered the flat. “When we were riding on the tube, you were twitchy and couldn’t focus when we were talking. Did something happen during the therapy?”

Amelia came back out of her room. “Denise, I don’t know,” she wailed. “It’s all tingling and throbbing in my fanny now and I can’t think straight!”

“What is it—when did that feeling start?” Denise asked, concerned.

“Ooohhh... It started when Miss Romert was pressing into the skin over where the incision was. She said she could feel some tightness and said she would loosen the area. After a minute of her massaging, it suddenly felt like I was going to pee, like a big wave or a pressure was building down there, sort of, and I gasped, so she stopped and told me she thought that maybe doing that should wait till next week. But it feels so hot and throbbing and twitchy and squirmy there now and I don’t know...”

Denise was trying hard not to giggle, so she grabbed Amelia and wrapped her in a hard embrace.

“Oh, sweetie, sweetie, that’s incredible news,” she murmured into Amelia’s ear. “You know what’s happening? No, you don’t? You’re horny! You know what that is?”

Amelia pulled back and stared into Denise’s eyes. “Uh, yes, I know what that means... wanting sex? But...”

“Not exactly ‘wanting sex,’ dear. It’s more like a feeling of arousal, of sexual excitement. What you felt happened because your privates were stimulated by the treatment. It shows that your nerves have healed and you’ve gotten normal feelings now. You probably almost had an orgasm while Miss Romert was treating you,” she giggled.

“Ohmygod! You think? Is this what arousal is like? I can’t think straight! How does it go away?” Amelia asked plaintively.

Denise chuckled. “Well, I can think of a few ways... Most might shock you. How do you feel

about masturbation? No? Didn't think so. Hmmmm. Maybe... Okay, let's take the G-rated approach; you can take a bath or a cool shower. That might work. Later we can talk about the R-rated approach if you want."

"Denise, I kinda felt that way after our massage workshop yesterday..." Amelia said softly. "It just occurred to me. So is that what it means to be horny? It makes me feel... like needing something that's missing... but desperately wanting..."

"That's it exactly. It's one of the most primitive feelings that people get, according to what I learned in psych."

"Aaaagghh! I need a cold shower!" Amelia exclaimed and ran off.

"Remember to tell Jeremy to come here tomorrow after *taekwondo*!" Denise called after her.

## Chapter 12

“So what are we doing after today’s sparring matches?” Jeremy asked as they dressed in their *dobaks*.

Kevin glanced at him. “Plan B. We’ll show you and Amelia about what we’re calling ‘sensitivity enhancement techniques.’ We’ll take showers before we leave here because we’ll want to be fresh. You’ll see why.”

Jeremy shot a puzzled look at Kevin, but Kevin was already going through the doorway and missed seeing it.

When they arrived at the flat later, Denise had the floor in the main room covered with several thick pads and a bunch of tower candles had been set out. She was wearing a robe.

“Good, you’re back. Amelia should be home from her swimming in a few minutes. I’ll light the candles and turn the heat up a bit now,” Denise told them. “Go change.”

“Huh?” Jeremy said.

Kevin grabbed his shoulder. “Yeah. Come put on a tank top and nylon shorts; I have your size in my bedroom.”

They walked in and Kevin gave him the garments.

“Ah, underpants?”

“No, it’s commando today,” Kevin grinned.

Then they heard Amelia greet Denise.

“What’s all this?” they heard Amelia ask.

“For our teaching session. Go put on your bikini, okay?” Denise said. “Then come back.”

Amelia went into her room and the guys went out to the main room. Amelia came out in a few minutes, walked into the room, and stopped.

“Oh! I didn’t know they’d...”

“It’s okay, sweetie. We’re going to show you some of the things we learned about enhancing the body’s sensitivity. You’ll be helping to teach this in your school—wearing more clothes, of course—but you need to be less dressed to get closer to the full effect.”

“Um, dare I ask what the full effect is?” Amelia asked carefully.

“Heh. Nudity, dear,” Denise grinned. “But just imagine you’re at the beach, okay?”

Amelia looked at Jeremy and they shrugged at each other.

“All right,” Denise said, “we’ll start with basics. The first step we teach is making a connection between you and your partner. There are a number of variations we’ll use because we don’t want

kids who haven't done it yet know what to expect. Kevin and I will lead and you guys follow and we'll tell you what each move is supposed to do. We'll start with this one. It's to enhance your awareness of your own body and your partner's. First, kneel like this, face to face, close enough to touch, and then look straight into each other's eyes. Now take your right hand and place it over each other's hearts. Look deep and with your eyes and your touch, let your senses feel each other's aura—try to draw in your partner's energy. If it helps, project your feelings about each other as you sink into their gaze. Keep this up for a bit....

“Now I hope you won't be horrified, kids, but Kevin and I need to be more comfortable. We don't expect you to copy us; we think it might be too intense for you if you did,” Denise said as she slipped off her robe.

All she was wearing was a brief pair of panties. Kevin slipped his shirt off. The two teens gasped with Amelia blushing too. Jeremy stared at Denise, slack-jawed, and she winked back at him.

Denise continued. “Now let's close our eyes; sorry, Jeremy, no more eye candy. Keeping them closed, put your hands on each other's shoulders. Next, using the palms of both hands, stroke your partner's chest wherever your partner lets you, that is, if you'll allow Jeremy to touch your chest, Amelia. You can move your hands down over their nipples, across them and around, sensing the shape of your partner's chest, and then moving back up to the shoulders. Is that comfortable for you, Amelia?”

“Ahhhh... Uh huh...” she squeaked. “Ooohh, go lightly, Jeremy...”

“You touch Jeremy too, Amelia; both of you touch where you can, also try to feel the texture of their skin where you can. Let your hands follow their body's curves. Press in a little and feel how the skin moves over their bones as you apply pressure. And try to remember how doing this feels. Stroke up, stroke around, and stroke down with your palms, following the chest's shape. Now comes a difficult part—obviously you know that the shape of the chest you're feeling is a lot different from your own...”

The teens giggled.

“...but I want you to try to imagine that *you* are the one being stroked, your partner's touching parts of a body that you don't have. Recall how your partner's chest felt and let your imagination become your reality. Jeremy, imagine that it's your breasts that Amelia is stroking. Amelia, feel Jeremy's hands as they run over your flat, muscular pecs and your tiny boy nipples.”

“Ooohhh,” Amelia sighed. “That's hard...”

Suddenly Amelia realized what she said and began laughing; the others followed.

“Okay, that broke the mood, so let's get back to imagining again,” Denise chuckled. “Close your eyes again. Now place your palms on your partner's shoulders and let your arms touch, skin to skin, along their length. With just your imagination now, think of how your partner's chest felt as you stroked it. Run your imaginary hands over their chest again. See if you can become one with each other as you stroke them in your imagination....”

“How does that feel?” she asked after a few minutes.

“Dreamy...” sighed Amelia.

“Like meditation on steroids,” whispered Jeremy.

“Good,” Denise went on. “Kevin and I find this next part very intense. It stimulates feelings of intimacy without contact and it’s based on a tantra exercise. Bring your bodies as close as possible without touching—your backs should be straight from your tailbones to your necks. Your eyes are still closed. Jeremy, wrap your arms around Amelia in a hug, but don’t touch her anywhere. Let your arms just encircle her—get closer if you need to but don’t touch. Next, move your heads close so that your cheeks are almost touching and your lips are close to your partner’s ear. Okay? Now breathe slowly and deeply and listen for the other’s breaths and breathe along with them. Imagine that you’re breathing for your partner. This is similar to the breathing in meditation and it stimulates the body’s energy flows. But in this posture, you might forget to breathe, so keep aware of each other and remind each other if they forget. Remember, you need to breathe for each other.”

They did this exercise for a few minutes and then Denise told them to switch; she told Amelia to encircle Jeremy with her arms and they should repeat the breathing part.

Kevin spoke now. “Okay, guys, how did that feel? Did you feel any connection, like you could sense each other in any way?”

“Ohmygod,” breathed Amelia, “it felt like Jeremy was part of me in a way, like I was him and was me at the same time, but having the strain of not touching... I’m like, on fire! My whole body is throbbing and I have electric shocks all over!”

Jeremy had been squirming and trying to hide an obvious lump in his shorts.

Denise glanced at his swollen bulge and grinned evilly. “Jeremy? How did you feel?”

“Goddamn.” he whispered. “Horny out of my mind.” He was almost inaudible.

“Aha,” Kevin nodded. “You see the energies that tantra can build? Okay, the next part involves a lot of sensual touching but there’s no sexual contact at all. These techniques result in very close feelings of bonding. Sit cross-legged, knees touching and eyes closed. First Amelia, take Jeremy’s right hand in both of yours, feel his hand, try to memorize what it feels like. Touch his hand all over, run your fingers over its back, palms, and fingers, and then relax and try to remember how they feel....”

“Oh!” Amelia exclaimed. “They taught us to do that in drama, to get familiar with someone who we had to act with.”

“That’s right,” Denise said. “It’s a technique that makes people feel very close since gentle touching of the hands can be very sensuous. We’ll use this technique with the kids too. It’s part of the ‘getting to know you’ process. Do that with one of his hands for a bit.... Okay, now do his other hand.... Now we’ll switch and Jeremy, take Amelia’s hand and do the same.”

When they were done, Denise asked how they felt.

“Um, very close,” Amelia said. “Like I’ve known him... I don’t know... forever? But it’s only been a bit under two weeks.” She smiled at him warmly.

“Yeah,” Jeremy said, “that exercise was kinda cool. Almost like Amelia was ... um, part of me while I was stroking her hands.”

“Exactly,” Denise agreed. “Okay, next. Jeremy, swing around now and sit behind Amelia so your chest is touching her back and Amelia, lean back into Jeremy.”

They moved around and Amelia leaned back against him.

“Hang on,” Jeremy said. “I need to take this off.” He slipped off his shirt. “It was uncomfortable rubbing between us,” he explained.

“Okay, Jeremy, wrap your arms around Amelia like Kevin is doing to me, and gently—using no pressure—rest your hands over the top of Amelia’s breasts. Eyes closed. Now lean together while you listen for your partner’s heartbeat. Try to lose yourselves in each other’s embrace. Feel their heartbeats and breaths. Feel the sensations that the touching of your bodies is producing.”

“Ooohhh,” Amelia sighed, “This isn’t working. I can’t feel anything with this top in the way...”

She pulled off her bikini top and tossed it aside, then leaned back against Jeremy. “Much better...”

He whispered in her ear, “My god, sweetie! Shit, you’re so gorgeous...”

Denise smiled to herself and continued, “The next step moves into massage, but we’ll stay seated like we are. We use oils to lubricate the skin because it makes stroking the skin easier and enhances the sensual feeling. Kevin, give them some oil.”

Kevin twisted around and pushed a pan filled with warm water over to Jeremy.

“There’s a squirt bottle with massage oil in that pan of water. Use lots of oil,” Kevin told him. “Jeremy, sit like we are, take the oil and put a glob in your hand—wet them both. Now put your hands on Amelia’s arms and slide them up to her shoulders—watch me—then slide them down her ribs, around to her tummy, and up to her chest and breasts, and around and down again. Press in slightly as you move your hands and in places, like the ribs, just lightly stroke, but do it slow and steady. Remember that you never do anything quickly in giving a massage. Do ten slow strokes.”

Jeremy copied Kevin’s movements and Amelia closed her eyes and lost herself, sighing, in the feelings the massage was creating. After a few minutes, Kevin began speaking softly again.

“In the next technique, we’ll do a seated back massage. Make sure your hands are wet with oil and Amelia, scoot forward a bit, just a few inches, and bend forward slightly. Jeremy, you’ll do her back the same way you did her front. Starting at her shoulders, move your hands down her sides, across her lower back, and up on both sides of her spine. Do it slowly and firmly, ten

times.... Okay, now repeat, but change your direction like this, and keep your hands moving steadily and firmly. Make sure your hands get to cover her entire back and remember to press firmly with your fingers when you move them along her back. Let's do it ten times here too."

Denise looked at the teens. Jeremy was concentrating intently on his technique and Amelia was looking serene, eyes closed and hands relaxed near her lap.

Kevin began again. "Oh, I almost forgot the hand massage part. Amelia, lean back against Jeremy again, that's right. This is a massage now; before you were just stroking each other's hands. Jeremy, let Amelia's right hand lie in your own right hand. Then use your left hand to spread the oil slowly all over hers, over each of her fingers, palm and back, while you press and massage her hand with slow and deliberate movements. When you're done with one hand, do the other. Keep your hands wet with oil. Guys, this time we'll just have Jeremy do everything. Next time, if you want, Amelia can try. Is that okay?"

Amelia looked at Kevin, her eyes hooded in sensory overload. "Whatever..." she murmured.

Jeremy just nodded.

"This next part will probably be the most surprising. I'll bet you never knew how erotic a foot massage could be. When we learned this massage, the teacher told us that the feet are special since they have many reflex points. He said that each foot has points that correspond to parts all over the whole body; the head, the heart, all the other internal organs, as well as the sexual organs, they're all mirrored in each foot. Let's switch around; move like Denise is doing now."

The girls scooted around so that their feet rested on the boys' laps.

"The foot massage uses the same kinds of stroking as the hand massage. Take more oil and work the oil into the sole and top of her foot, her ankle, behind her heel, and each toe, using deep pressure but not so much that it's uncomfortable for Amelia. Move your hands firmly and deliberately. Watch her face to see when you do something she enjoys. We'll do this for a few minutes and then switch feet."

Amelia was lying back, propped up on her elbows; her eyes were closed, and her breathing was deep. Every so often her body shuddered as Jeremy stimulated a deep reaction. Soon she was sighing in pleasure.

"Jeremy, darling, that feels so wonderful," she moaned as Jeremy switched to her other foot. "I feel like I'm floating."

After they finished with the foot massage, Denise sat up.

"You guys need a break?" she asked. "We're gonna do the body massage next so grab a couple of pillows."

"No, I'm okay," Amelia sighed. "This is... intense... I never felt anything like this..."

"I know, sweetie," Denise said. "But it's fun, right?"

Both teens nodded.

Denise positioned some pillows and then slipped off her panties. Jeremy stared, groaned, and furtively but vainly tried to adjust his throbbing erection.

Denise glanced at his blushing face and giggled, “Surely you saw naked girls in school, Jeremy...”

“Yeah... but no one looked like you... stunning... god, you shaved there... frikin’ spectacular... uh, sorry, Amelia.” he blushed.

“No, it’s okay, she *is* stunning, Jeremy,” Amelia said admiringly.

“Thanks, guys,” Denise said quietly. “I think Kevin’s ready...”

“Okay, the full body massage now,” Kevin announced. “Amelia, get on your front with one pillow under your hips and another under your breasts. Jeremy, kneel over her like I’m doing. Some massagers pour oil right on the person’s skin but we don’t like how that feels. Put the oil on your hands first and rub it in. Start with Amelia’s legs. Go from her feet up the outsides and backs of her legs to her butt and then back down on the insides and backs, up and down, keeping the skin wet with oil. Slide your hands slowly, in a continuous motion all the way up and then back down just like I’m doing. When you get to the inside of her thighs up near her crotch, press in firmly there but don’t touch her sex.”

Amelia’s whole body was shuddering after several minutes of this treatment and she was groaning with pleasure.

Kevin looked over. “Jeremy, I think you need to lighten up a bit, Amelia’s going into overload.”

Amelia giggled. “Ohmygod, it feels like I’m gonna explode. When you press in at the top of my thighs, I feel like it’s electric shocks now.”

“Well, let’s go on now—moving further up. Jeremy, slide up so you’re straddling Amelia’s thighs. You’ll have to skip her butt ‘cause the suit’s in the way; you’ll do her back now. Take some...”

“No, wait,” Amelia whispered. “Don’t skip it. Let me...”

She twisted around and slid off her bottoms.

“You sure of that, darling?” Denise asked.

“Oh yes, I’m sure... oh yes...” she sighed, and resumed her prone position again.

“Well, okay,” Kevin said. “Amelia, you have an awesome body too, you know. Okay, Jeremy. Here’s the thing about the buttocks. First, they’re all muscle so they can take deep pressure. Second, they’re one of the major erogenous parts of the body. So a massage involves applying force ranging from deep pressure all the way down to sensual caresses. Use a firm force to dig in deeply and then soothe that area with lighter rubbing. Use lots of oil, too; that’s really important.

Move your hands like this: beginning at her hips, move up and around the cheek tops near those cute little dimples, then return down, pressing into the crease between her cheeks. Circle inward on each go-around, pressing and kneading and following up with medium pressure and light stroking. Let's do this for several minutes."

Jeremy could see the effect his massage was having on his partner; Amelia's shoulders and upper back were flushed and he could see beads of sweat forming on the part of her forehead turned toward him. She was sighing softly, making little mewling sounds.

"That was good, Jeremy. Time to move up to their backs," Kevin announced.

Amelia gave a little sigh of disappointment.

"Get more oil and scoot up a bit. Good. Lean forward and reach to her shoulders. Now use a figure-eight motion: starting from her shoulders, stroke down at an angle across her lower spine to the opposite hip, then over her butt and around to the other hip, and then back up, crossing over her back to the opposite shoulder. Make a big eight, over and over, and make your strokes so that you'll eventually cover her entire back. Vary your speed and pressure, but don't rush it. Your motions should be steady and sensuous. Keep going till I say....

"Good, now change direction. We were told that this massage method unites the body's energy forces and balances the *ying* and *yang* energies, relaxation and stimulation. We'll do this for a couple of minutes, maybe fifteen to twenty deliberate strokes....

"Next, we also need to massage the spine. What you do is to make small spiral motions of your fingers, moving along the spinal muscles—not the bumps right on the spine itself but on the muscles on its sides. Press in but not so hard that it hurts Amelia. If it's okay with her, try using your thumbs for a greater pressure.... Good. Still okay, Amelia?"

"Wow, this is so much better than that massage workshop we went to," she sighed. "You should teach them."

Denise laughed. "Well, if the school agrees, then we probably will. But tell me, sweetie, why do you think this session might be better than the workshop?"

"Oops," she giggled, looking at Denise and then at herself. "Clothing, or lack of same?"

"Bingo," Kevin grinned. "It's a whole different massage universe. At the workshop you had a sense of how the massage's effects could be, but without skin contact, you'd never experience the full sensations."

"I see that now, and I like this. A lot. Oh shit! I just realized that I'm naked and not embarrassed at Jeremy and you seeing me..."

Jeremy took her hand and kissed it. "So why are you blushing, darling?" he joked.

"Um, Jeremy... My body's reacting a different way..." she murmured.

"Erm, my bad," Jeremy apologized. "Sorry."

“Oh no, don’t be sorry! I feel so sexy and it feels good! Kevin, what’s next?” she asked.

“Well, Denise and I hadn’t planned on going any further. Going further gets... um... awfully intense. We didn’t think you wanted... we never expected that you’d get naked, even.”

“I’m happy I did, but now I’m...” She gulped and whispered, “god, so horny.” Aloud, “I think I want to ... go further... whatever that is...” she finished quietly.

“Sweetie, going further involves frontal massage and can include some stimulation of the genitals,” Denise told her. “It would be going into what people call ‘tantric erotic massage.’ We’d never do that with the kids, obviously, even if that kind of massage were to be done without touching the genitals. But even though it’s possible to do the massage that way, it’s terribly unsatisfying. The ‘tantric’ part implies erotic or sensual stimulation with the sustained withholding of orgasmic release, which makes the feeling awesome when it finally happens.”

“Orgasmic release? You mean, like fucking?” Amelia asked, wide-eyed, while Jeremy was trying to shrink into an invisible shell.

“Not necessarily. Orgasms can happen without fucking, sweetie,” Denise smiled.

“Oh, I know that. But I never had... um... Jeremy, have you had orgasms?” Amelia asked suddenly, turning to him.

Jeremy couldn’t manage to effect a disappearing act, but he did manage to shrink even smaller.

“I... erm... well... ahhh... that is...” he choked and blushed.

Kevin shook his head, grinning. “Amelia, that’s one question guaranteed to tongue-tie any teen boy. Jeremy, just nod your head ‘yes.’ That’s a good boy. There’s your answer, Amelia.”

“If you want to, Amelia—and Jeremy—we can go further,” Denise told her. “But you can stop whenever you think it’s becoming too intense.”

“Okay, I want... Jeremy, is it okay for you?” Amelia murmured to him.

“Ye...” came out in a little squeak. “Eh, yes.” His voice was stronger this time, but not much.

“Well, I think we’ll need to restore the mood,” Kevin mused. “Gals, let’s get back on your tummies like before and Jeremy and I will continue the back massage from where we left off. Jeremy, do the figure-eights on her back, but make it slow and sensual. Get oil on your hands. Oh, and reach down and stroke over the sides of Amelia’s breasts too.”

They did that for two minutes and Kevin spoke again.

“Jeremy, oil your hands and rub them all over Amelia’s back now. Wet her back really good. Okay, now lean forward and allow your chest to touch and rub lightly along her back. Uh, hang on... these shorts aren’t working at all for this.”

Kevin pulled them off. Jeremy looked questioningly at Amelia, who gulped and nodded, so he reached down and slid his off too. As his long, erect penis came into view, Amelia gasped, and

so did Denise.

“That’s quite some tool you’re packing, Jeremy,” Denise murmured. “Really nice...”

The boys repositioned themselves over the girls.

“Jeremy, lean over and press your chest against Amelia’s back. Keep your full weight off her, but use your chest to massage her back, using your weight to vary the pressure. If you rest on your elbows, you can use your hands to caress her sides and her breasts.”

“Umm. My cock is kinda... ahh... it’s...” Jeremy began, trying to adjust his hips.

Denise chuckled. “Just go with the flow, Jeremy. That’s part of the fun. Rub it on her body too.”

Jeremy glanced at the other couple; Kevin was nuzzling Denise behind her ear and kissing her neck and back as he slid back and forth and in little circles along her back. He began copying Kevin’s movements and the kissing too, while Amelia purred and cooed in delight.

Kevin soon broke into Jeremy’s reverie. “We’re ready now to go to their fronts. Gals, flip over with your heads and hips on the pillows. Jeremy, kneel between Amelia’s thighs. Amelia, spread your legs a bit more—are you still okay with this?”

“Uh huh...” she breathed.

“Jeremy, we’ll do the figure-eight again like you did on the back. First, oil her up; spread the oil all over her body from her shoulders to her knees. Good. This time the stroking alternates direction each time, like this, watch. I’m going from Denise’s right shoulder, over her right breast, crossing over her tummy, and down inside her left thigh down to her knee. Next, I go up the outside and front of her left thigh, across her pubis around to the outside and front of her right thigh, down to her knee, back up the inside of her thigh, across her tummy, and finally over her left breast to her left shoulder. See? More like an X than an eight. Like X-rated, maybe?”

They all snickered.

“See, it’s X-rated ‘cause we’re including their erogenous zones; we’re caressing their breasts and pubic areas now. Still okay with that, Amelia? Great. Jeremy, slow a little over those areas if you want and tease Amelia a bit if she’ll let you touch her there. Add a little squeeze of her nipples between the fingers of your hand as you go by and do a little jiggle over her clit... Um, wait; that’s where you were cut?”

“Kevin... I’m... okay there... eek! now,” Amelia choked out as Jeremy tweaked an erect and engorged nipple.

“Wonderful... Jeremy, let your massage become more and more sensuous; use less pressure now and keep stimulating her nipples and pubis. As your hands pass, tweak her areolas and make little swirling motions over her pubis. If it doesn’t cause Amelia pain, you can kind of do a little massage on her pubis for a few seconds as your hands pass by there. Jiggle it gently, that’ll indirectly stimulate her clit.”

Amelia was shuddering with arousal; her hips were bucking and her chest was heaving with unfulfilled need.

“Please... please... uh... ah... uuuhhh...” she was grunting and squirming.

Kevin glanced at Amelia. “Keep doing that, Jeremy,” he whispered to him, “don’t stop your massage now till I tell you.” Jeremy nodded.

Kevin leaned down and whispered in Denise’s ear, “Slide over next to Amelia so Jeremy can see what I’m doing to you.”

She nodded and shifted over so that she was lying alongside Amelia.

Kevin whispered to Jeremy, “Okay, watch my fingers now and then do it to Amelia.”

Kevin took some oil on his fingers and slid them into Denise’s vulva, moving them between her inner and outer lips, and stroked gently, carefully brushing past her clitoris a few times; then he tweaked the little button, as Jeremy copied him faithfully.

Denise jumped and squeaked, “Uuuhhh!” but Amelia jerked, her legs shot apart and she howled, “OOOOOAAAAHHHHHHHEEEEE! AH AH AH OOOHHHHH! Ahhhhh... What... hap... ha... hap... what... was... ohmygod...”

Then she slumped back bonelessly on the pillows, gasping for breath.

Denise took her hand and kissed it. “That was an orgasm, darling. Your first.”

“Oh shit, oh fuck,” she panted. “I never...” Tears began falling. “Jeremy, I need you... kiss...” she reached up for him.

He leaned down over her and Amelia pulled him down against her body in a fierce embrace and smothered him with a passionate kiss.

“Oh my darling, I love you so much,” she panted when their mouths separated. “I love you, love you, love you,” she murmured.

“Me too, and I think I realized it when we were talking with that detective,” he whispered to her. “Since then, you’re all I think about, darling. Are you okay now?”

“Shit, I never knew I could feel anything like that. After all those years of pain...”

“Shhh... The pain is in the past, I hope. I think that your docs really cured you.”

Kevin and Denise had watched the byplay between the two with warm smiles. Denise reached over and stroked Amelia’s upper arm.

“That was an awesome orgasm, sweetie. Do you think that’s enough for this session...?”

“NO!” Amelia exclaimed. “Um... I’m still horny,” she husked in a tiny voice, blushing. “I guess I’m greedy. Is there more?” she asked hopefully.

“Next comes stuff that’s REALLY intense,” Denise warned. “You still want to try?”

“Yes I do,” Amelia declared firmly.

“Well then,” Denise replied. “Kevin, it’s all the guys’ show...”

“That it is,” Kevin grinned. “Okay, curtains up. Again, Jeremy, follow my lead and watch Amelia’s face and take your cues from her expressions. They’ll show you if she objects before she can speak, so pay attention.”

“Sure.”

“Okay, start doing the breast and pubis stimulation first; we need to build up. Let’s spend a couple of minutes with that....

“Now, see how the girls look? Relaxed, like? Okay. What we’ll do next is called a *yoni* massage. The *yoni* is the female organ; the male organ is the *lingam*. Oil your hands and with your thumbs and index fingers, gently pinch and hold the entire outer lips—see right here?—between your thumbs and fingers and now rub her lips along their length from the clitoral hood down to the vagina. Make sure there’s enough oil for lube.”

“Erm, she’s plenty wet already... wow, she’s leaking all over!” Jeremy muttered.

Kevin looked and indeed, Amelia’s vagina was secreting copious quantities of her juices.

“That’s good, but we still use the oil. Carefully massage her lips up and down, along their whole length. We’ll do that for a bit....

“Now do that to her inner lips, they’re here, see? Use subtle pressure and gentle strokes. This is supposed to produce a very sensuous genital stimulation. Once you’re doing that, you can occasionally switch between her inner and outer lips. Keep the stroking rhythmic and gentle.”

Both Denise and Amelia were beginning to pant with passion and their hips had begun to gently gyrate as their desire grew.

“You know how sensitive the clit is?” Kevin asked.

“Yeah,” Jeremy whispered. “Amelia’s was damaged though.”

Amelia had been leaning up, slightly, on her elbows, trying to watch, and heard Jeremy’s whisper.

“Oh... it’s good now ... it’s better... Jeremy. You can... touch it—carefully!” she breathed.

“Okay, let’s go there then,” Kevin went on. “Using the balls of your thumbs now, make these little circles, like this, at both sides of the opening of her vagina. You’re pressing on her outer lips, holding them together, while moving the skin over the opening. Using that motion, move your thumbs along her lips up to her clit’s hood and keep doing the tiny circles there, pressing in lightly. Amelia, still okay?”

“Aaahhh, good... ooohh... so nice... oh god yesssss...”

“Keep moving your circles up and down now; see how her love button’s all puffed up? Amelia, yours looks nice and pretty, just like all the other girls’ clits I’ve seen.”

Denise sniggered. “Spoken by one of the world’s clit experts...”

“Well, dear,” he retorted, “you must admit that being a Program expert has its perks, too, right?”

“Very funny. Be calm and carry on, Jeeves,” Denise laughed. “Ooohfff! That was good!”

Kevin had flicked her clit.

“As I was saying, Denise has a pretty clit too. Say, here’s something that Denise loves. Hold your hand like this, palm away from her vulva. Now with the back of the index and middle finger, work them in between her outer and inner lips—good, you got it—now move your fingers slowly up and down. You can squeeze her inner lips a bit and push gently into her vulva, just use a very light pressure.... Keep moving your fingers up and down between her inner and outer lips and try to include her clit area too; you can gently stroke and tease it.”

Denise was moaning raggedly as Kevin stroked her when suddenly Amelia jerked and squeaked and a little gush of juices flowed from her already leaking vagina.

“What happened?” Jeremy whispered to her.

“Uh, I... uh... think a... little orgasm, darling,” Amelia panted. “Feels soooo good... don’t stop...”

“Jeremy, don’t keep stimulating her clit, spend time stroking her entire vulva; the *yoni* massage is to gradually build Amelia’s passion, not to give her an immediate orgasm.”

“Umm... that’s... ahhh... okay.... Jeremy can give... um... as many as... eh... he wants,” Amelia gasped, stuttering her words.

Kevin spoke again, “Denise? You think Amelia can move to the next level?”

“Um, Amelia, sweetie?” Denise took her hand. “Can Jeremy put a finger in you?”

“Ahhh. Uuuhh, oh sure... Everyone... at the hospital... had... theirs in... side... there...” she grunted.

Denise giggled, “Oh, that’s right, I forgot. Okay, Kevin, Jeremy.”

“Jeremy, be very gentle now and with the greatest possible care, let one of your fingers slowly slide into Amelia’s vagina, like I’m doing here, using my middle finger. You’re not finger-fucking her. You’re doing a loving internal massage. It’s not supposed to be sexual—it’s sensual. You’re worshiping the shrine of Amelia’s femininity, her female essence, and you need to show it the highest level of respect and adulation.

“Think of what you do with your tongue when you kiss her. Imagine your finger is your tongue. Let your finger make love to the source of Amelia’s femininity, slowly and gently, let it be a

soothing, adoring, worshiping presence. While you do that, take your other hand and with the thumb, gently stroke Amelia over her clitoral hood. This part of the *yoni* massage, it's the direct stimulation of two genital areas, is said to trigger the most powerful of the body's *qi* energies and it's supposed to result in the building of great passion. But move slowly, since you don't want to force her to have an orgasm."

Kevin was doing the same to Denise as he was instructing Jeremy, and both girls were twisting and shuddering, lost in the grip of their building lust. Suddenly Amelia cried out and sat partway up, grabbing onto Jeremy's arms.

"I need... Jeremy... I need you... I have to have you in me... Please fuck me..."

"I can't... no condom..." Jeremy wailed.

"Safe time. Period's tomorrow... Please, now please please..."

Denise looked at Amelia; her face was twisted in a rictus of passion and lust. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Kevin nodding.

"Go ahead, Jeremy, honey," Denise whispered. "Go in to her. Your lover needs you bad."

Jeremy rose up and settled his body over the girl as she pulled on his arms, trying to draw him closer. As his hips settled onto hers, she reached down and fumbled for his cock, pushing it toward her needy receptacle. With Jeremy's cock head slotted at her vagina's portal, she lifted her hips and tried to push herself onto the boy's organ, but instead, Jeremy slowly pressed forward and let his cock gradually sink into her depths, not stopping until their pubic bones ground together.

Amelia squeaked as she shuddered in another small orgasm, then she locked her heels around Jeremy's hips and tried to force herself even further onto his hardness. She squealed again as she felt her clitoris mash itself against the base of Jeremy's cock.

"Are you okay?" he grunted.

"Oooff, oh, yes, feels... uh... sooo good... so big... ooooo I'm full... splitting me... OH! I never want to let you go!"

Jeremy took a few slow strokes.

"Eeeehhh, oh god... Jeremy, don't stop! Uh, uh..."

Meanwhile, inflamed with lust himself, Kevin had mounted Denise and they were lost in their own passionate lovemaking. The room became filled with the sounds of sex, naked flesh slapping on flesh, as the couples drove each other to their climaxes. Amelia was the first to peak, she had been having a virtual continuous orgasm which started when Jeremy had first fully penetrated into her. Suddenly her tightly-wound passion snapped, the muscles around her vagina spasming as it began pulsing tightly around Jeremy's cock. She screeched as her orgasm crashed over her, wave after wave, and a burning, throbbing sensation began, which enhanced the

maddening friction and pressure of the movement of Jeremy’s rock-hard organ in her core. Amelia’s internal spasming set him off, as the past hour of pent-up lust was released in a torrential jet of cum, flooding her insides, and his initial spurt was followed by four more pulses, each almost as strong as the previous one.

Jeremy pressed himself into Amelia as deep as he could and held himself there until his erection began to soften and slide out of her tight sleeve. Then, panting in exhaustion, he rolled off to her side while Amelia kept shuddering in orgasmic aftershocks. She was still breathing deeply as she and Jeremy moved into a passionate embrace, kissing and running their hands over each other as if to memorize every curve of each other’s bodies.

Just then Kevin and Denise reached their own nirvana as Denise shuddered and gasped through a mind-bending, very vocal orgasm and Kevin shot jet after jet of cum into her needy pussy while Denise shook and wailed in her own fulfilled passion.

As Denise’s wail sounded in her ears, Amelia felt a sudden wave of intense lust and need surging over her body and she seized Jeremy in a passionate grasp. Noticing that his cock, which had softened somewhat, was rapidly hardening again, she pushed him onto his back.

“God, Jeremy, I need... you again,” she gasped. “I’m still... on fire down there... need you in me,” she moaned.

She swung a leg over Jeremy’s hips, rose up over him and sunk swiftly down, impaling herself on his rigid organ with a deep sigh. Once his cock was fully buried inside her, she began rotating her hips, mashing her clit against the base of his cock, and began rocking herself on his groin, heaving in passion as she pushed her body back and forth, up and down. Jeremy cupped her ass with his hands to help her rise and fall, while she thrust her hips backward and forward, trying to squeeze her clit against his pubic bone.

Then with a gasp, she fell forward onto Jeremy’s chest; he lifted his knees and began pummeling his cock into her pussy, his hips thrusting in a blur of movement as she wailed in passion. Then Jeremy moved his head to a breast, took her nipple in his mouth and bit down. Suddenly Amelia went rigid and crushed Jeremy in a lust-filled embrace.

“Uuunnhhhhgggghh!” she gasped as her pussy muscles spasmed again, clamping hard on Jeremy’s cock. “AAAHHHHHHH!” she screamed.

Jeremy rolled over, carrying Amelia with him. He raised her legs and levered himself over her so that his cock now drove into her pussy almost vertically and began pounding into her. Amelia quickly screamed in yet another orgasm and then Jeremy’s second cum slammed through him.

“Guuuuuaahhhhaaaahhh!” he cried as his testicles drew up to deliver another payload of cum to his thrusting rod. “Uuuunnhhh,” he grunted as the pulse of semen was pumped into Amelia’s welcoming receptacle. He gasped as his body poured out several more thick helpings of cum before his organ, finally depleted, slipped out of Amelia’s well-fucked channel.

“Holy shit,” Kevin breathed. “That was your first time? That was like a porn show...”

“Aaahhhh,” Amelia sighed as she snuggled into Jeremy. “That was... oooohh... so awesome. I never realized how fantastic making love could be. And the buildup was incredible, too.”

“Kevin?” Jeremy panted. “You’re gonna do this tantric stuff with kids? Are you friggin’ nuts?”

Kevin chuckled. “No, not the tantric part. The bonding part. Tantra can be dangerous if you let it loose. I’m afraid we let it loose. Um, Amelia, you’re not on birth control...”

“It’s okay, Kevin. My period is almost here. I can feel it; I’m so regular. It’ll probably start tomorrow; I feel it in my titties, they get so sensitive just before.”

Denise shook her head. “You guys were so intense. Amelia was like a sex maniac. And the second time, Jeremy went nuts together with Amelia. Wow.”

Amelia giggled, “Um, after we finished the first... cumming... together... I thought I was satisfied but then this feeling of ... desire... need... just hit me...”

Jeremy interrupted, “It was fucking lust! It was like a wave washed over me and I suddenly got a hardon again. I’ve never got hard so fast before after cumming...”

“Yeah, maybe it was lust. I was burning. I just had to have Jeremy’s big wonderful cock in me again.”

Kevin laughed. “Guys, thank Denise. She projects lust when she’s fucking. I can’t tell you how many other people she’s affected that way. She made me cum once without even touching me.”

“Wow... is that true, Denise?” Amelia asked.

“So I’ve been told. No studies have been done to try to confirm that hypothesis, however,” she smirked.

The others groaned.

Denise tried to organize her thoughts. “Amelia? I can’t believe how you just... um... took Jeremy and so soon after... He’s got a really big cock and you’re... were... a virgin... and...”

“Remember after my treatment yesterday?” Amelia asked her. “In my treatment they press fingers into me, rubbing, like that massage Jeremy did, and on Friday it made me so fuckin’ hot. You told me I was horny and I took a shower but it didn’t help much. I tried touching myself but I didn’t know what to do, really. So this afternoon I guess it all boiled over. And then you told me to have Jeremy come over this afternoon, too, remember? He he... Jeremy did C-U-M over! I loved it; I love making love.”

“But look at how big Jeremy is, sweetie; he’s bigger than Kevin, who’s pretty big himself. I’m surprised it didn’t hurt you,” Denise pressed her.

“Think of what they stuck inside me to treat the adhesions I had, Denise. And I lost my hymen after my first vaginal infection soon after I was cut, too.”

“So you had no pain?” Denise asked.

“Not a bad pain, but I felt so stuffed. A very nice stuffed. Like it belonged there. Ooohh, I’m getting that tingling again, just thinking about it. Oh, this is sooo nice, naked and cuddling with my lover. And I love seeing both of you naked too. You’re both so beautiful, and Jeremy is such a gorgeous hunk.”

She pulled Jeremy into a deep kiss.

Denise looked at the two lovers. “Amelia, obviously you’re going to be sexually active now, but you can’t use hormones yet. Jeremy will need to use condoms—or maybe you can get an IUD?”

“Oh yes, Dr Jeffries did say something about getting fitted, but I didn’t pay much attention.”

“Well, let’s call her office on Monday. Now let’s get dressed and clean up this mess.”

“Let’s clean up—but do we have to get dressed?” Amelia asked plaintively.

Kevin grinned, “I think we’ve unleashed a monster, Denise.”

### Chapter 13

Activities at Norwich Academy had once again settled into normality. The only activity remotely Program-related—students' names were no longer being read to participate—that kept the attention of the students were the occasional articles which appeared on *The Realist* blog, which was now being read far more faithfully than any school assignment. Late in the week, the students once again had a juicy topic to engage them; Jeremy and Amelia had created another Program posting..

On Wednesday, Jeremy had gone home with Amelia. His blog had received a reader's comment—a plea for help, actually—and he wanted to get Amelia's advice about how he should respond.

After they entered the flat, Jeremy took out his laptop and pulled up his blog files.

“Sweetie, I formatted the reader's blog comment into an article to post and made up a title, so please read this part. I fixed the writing up a little. Then I'll tell you how I think we should answer. Here's the part the reader wrote:”

***The Program: Whose Morals are They, Anyway?***

Dear Realist. You write about human rights abuses and how bad things happening with the Program. I had a bad thing happen—it was a disagreement with my head teacher over how the Program rules are enforced. It seems that the rules were supposed to protect us from doing objectionable things and I think that all that wanking in public they want us to do is terribly rude and humiliating. It's just porn and isn't proper in public. I'll try to write down what happened as I remember it.

I was stopped in the hall by a group of boys and given a reasonable request.

One said, “I want you to touch yourself in your fanny.”

So I did, reluctantly, I stroked myself for him.

“No,” he said. “you need to stick your finger up in your fanny and do a wank.”

I refused then, because that involved putting something inside me and that's not a reasonable request. So I told him I wouldn't, that it wasn't reasonable. He told me he would complain to our head teacher.

The next period I got called to the office and the boy was in with the head teacher. The head asked him to tell me his complaint.

So the boy went, “I asked her to use her finger and”—he almost said wank—“get herself off to show me. She said it was a foreign object and the rules say no foreign objects. A finger isn't a foreign object so it was a reasonable request.”

I got real mad and said, “A finger is definitely a foreign object to my fanny. I have the right to say what's reasonable, the rules say so, so I have the right to say no.”

The head sat down at his desk and opened the Program booklet. He read it for a minute and then looked at me.

“I think that the booklet spells it out clearly; it reads, ‘No student shall ever be required to insert a foreign object into any bodily orifice as a part of a Reasonable Request or a classroom activity.’ I agree with Alexander that fingers aren’t objects, they’re body parts and since they’re *your* fingers, they aren’t foreign. So my ruling is that the request was proper and from now on, for all girls and boys, a request that they masturbate will be a reasonable request. You can go to class, Alexander. Jane, please stay,” he told me.

After Alexander left, the head teacher told me, “The booklet also says this about physical sexual contact: ‘No student is ever required to submit to oral sex or penetration with a sexual organ as a part of a Reasonable Request.’ Notice, it specifies that there’s no penetration with a *sexual organ*; it doesn’t mention other body parts, like fingers.”

I dug my copy out of my rucksack.

“But it says that I can decide what’s reasonable, here, where it says, ‘The Program participant is the sole judge of the reasonableness of any request that involves physical contact.’ I’m being asked to touch myself, that’s a physical contact, so I have the right to decide,” I objected.

“That right only applies to protect participants if they object to doing something and there’s no one available to make a ruling. I’ve made the ruling. Let me remind you of the purpose of the Program; it’s ‘to help you become more comfortable with your body and your sexuality’ and tells all pupils ‘to treat others ... as sexual beings.’ It’s clear that allowing intimate touching and requiring you to touch yourself sexually is obviously an essential part of teaching you to become a sexual being. If you try to avoid that, you’re avoiding one of the major Program objectives. You can be punished if this continues, Jane.”

Please, Realist, can you help? Isn’t this a Program abuse? Can we be forced to do immoral things like putting objects inside our sex? We are being asked to accept someone else’s idea of proper morals and behaviour. Shouldn’t that be counted as a human rights violation?

When Amelia finished reading the question, she was indignant. “I read that part in the Program booklet and didn’t think that the rules allowed a person’s refusal to be overruled like that!”

“So what do you think about a response that tells kids that if they refuse a Request, they should stick to their refusals, since they could refuse to participate at all?” Jeremy asked.

“Umm, I have a better idea,” Amelia replied. “Remember what Denise started in her uni? About using legal terms and definitions against the Program rules? Why don’t we see how ‘foreign object’ is legally defined? Since it’s not defined in the booklet, then its meaning can come from an accepted source. That’s what Kevin said.”

“Great! What a brilliant idea. Let’s look. Where?”

Amelia grinned. “In a dictionary first, dummy.”

“Oh. Sure. Let me try.”

Jeremy typed “foreign objects” in his browser’s search field.

“Lots of hits,” he told her. “Okay, here. It says, ‘Definition: “Foreign” means “originating elsewhere” or simply “outside the body.” Foreign objects typically become lodged in the eyes, ears, nose, airway, and rectum of human beings.’ Wow, that’s cool. Oh, we should check medical sites. That would be a better match.”

He searched again. “Okay, here: ‘Foreign objects can be inert or irritating. If they irritate they will cause inflammation and scarring. They can bring infection with them. In medical terms, a foreign object is something that is in the body but does not belong there. Foreign objects may be inserted into the body accidentally or intentionally. A foreign object may be inserted and become lodged in the rectum due to a desire for sexual stimulation.’ That’s perfect, a finger doesn’t belong in a pussy according to this.”

“I have an idea,” Amelia ventured. “Try legal sites. I’ll bet there must be stuff about sexual abuse.”

“Oh, good thinking,” Jeremy approved. “Let me see... Here’s one: ‘In some U.S. states, rape with a foreign object is classified as sexual assault. In New York State, digital rape (using a finger) is included in the foreign-object definition.’ Well, that’s from a U.S. site, but it’s still an authoritative site to mention. Let’s see if I can find others... Okay, here’s a good one and mentions that the law applies to the U.K.: ‘Sexual assault is a broader term than rape. It includes various types of unwanted sexual touching or penetration without consent, such as forced sodomy (anal intercourse), forced oral copulation (oral-genital contact), rape by a foreign object (including a finger), and sexual battery (the unwanted touching of an intimate part of another person for the purpose of sexual arousal).’ Way cool!”

Amelia had been typing on her computer. “I found one too, and it comes from this British legal site. It says, ‘The code defines a crime known as “sexual penetration with a foreign object” and includes, as examples...’ and then the article lists a number of items, plus this one: ‘Insertion of a finger into a woman’s vagina against her will,’ and the best one is this: ‘Coercion of a person to use a foreign object like a dildo or finger to penetrate their own anus or vagina.’ That’s the best one, right?”

“Sweetie, you nailed it. You should write the response to Jane,” Jeremy grinned.

“Wellll... you’re much better at that stuff, darling,” she replied. “Let’s do it together.”

“Sure.”

When Kevin arrived home, the teens were still hard at work.

“Hey, guys. What’s up?” he called as he came in.

“Hi, Kevin,” Jeremy answered. “We got a message on the blog from a girl who was told she had to frig herself if she got asked. You know, in a Reasonable Request. Her head teacher told her she had to do it, even though she showed him where the rules said she could refuse.”

“Yeah, Kevin, hi,” Amelia chimed in. “So we wrote a response. Sweetie, you think it’s ready now?”

“Yeah,” Jeremy mused, “actually... no. Not quite. I just thought of something else she mentioned—the thing about ‘sole judge.’ Did you notice that?”

“Yeah. I thought ‘sole’ meant ‘only’ or ‘exclusive,’” Amelia told him. “I think the head teacher was wrong there too.”

“Okay, I’ll look that up and write something but then that should cover it,” Jeremy responded.

“So tell me, how did you budding lawyers answer the question?” Kevin asked, grinning.

Jeremy smirked at him, “Amelia suggested using the ‘Kevin’ technique...”

Kevin shot him a quizzical look.

“...that’s where we pull out the dictionary definitions when the officials disagree with you about what a word means.” Jeremy finished.

“Ah,” Kevin nodded. “I understand from some experts that the Kevin technique even works.”

Amelia looked puzzled. “Which experts?” she wondered.

Kevin chuckled. “Denise.”

“Oh!” the teens giggled.

Jeremy had been looking up terms and typing; he was done quickly and then began transmitting the article to the blog. “There, it’s posted. Want to read it, Kevin?”

“Yeah.” He sat down as Jeremy turned the screen toward him and he began reading.

### ***Yes, Jane, the Program Denies Everyone’s Morality***

Jane, the questions you ask go to the very core of the reason that *The Realist* opposes the Program. The original idea for developing the Program was probably the naively innocent thought that requiring nudity was a painless way of having a teen overcome their modesty, similar to the way one tries to get over stage fright, by building a tolerance through exposure to the situation which causes the apprehension. But in this case, “exposure” became the actual “treatment” technique which was chosen! Exposure of kids’ naked bodies.

*The Realist* is somewhat familiar with the basis of Program as it was originally conceived by the Yanks some years ago, but it’s been ignominiously discredited and has now been

terminated on the other side of the pond. Four years ago, using a web server shielded from U.S. government censorship, an anti-Program group published articles which told readers how the Program rules were misread, misinterpreted, or even totally ignored, with the result that a social education program which was intended to help teens overcome any excessive modesty and improve their relationships with their peers became transformed into an ordeal of coercion, humiliation, sexual abuse, and yes, even terror.

In your moral code, Jane, and likely your family's too, public displays of overt sexual activity are repulsive and being coerced or forced into performing sexual acts publicly is immoral. Your viewpoint is shared by plenty of people but unfortunately those people had no voice in making the policies of the National Program Committee.

From reading the Yanks' anti-Program site, *The Realist* learned the proper way to interpret laws and rules, including the rules which are contained in the Program booklet. The key to a law or rule is the meaning of the words used. If a word or term is used in a rule, and even in a law, if its meaning isn't specifically defined in the rule, then the word or term's meaning is the plain sense of the term—not what the authorities claim it means. Jane, you told *The Realist* that your head teacher chose to define the term “foreign object” so that it meant neither “foreign” nor “object,” therefore allowing his interpretation of the rules to force you to put your fingers into your vagina.

If you look at any dictionary site on the web, you'll find definitions that give this meaning or something close: “Foreign” means “originating elsewhere” or simply “outside the body.” Since we are dealing with the body; that's what the Program is all about; we checked medical sites. One we found said, “In medical terms, a foreign object is something that is in the body but does not belong there. Foreign objects may be inserted into the body accidentally or intentionally.” According to accepted medical terminology, then, fingers are definitely foreign objects if they are put into the body—they aren't intended to be there.

Since we are also dealing with a legal situation, that is, we are interpreting a rule, *The Realist* also consulted some legal sites. Amongst many sources which could be cited, we found this one on a well-regarded British legal site: “The code defines a crime known as ‘sexual penetration with a foreign object’ and includes, as examples, insertion of a finger into a woman's vagina against her will and coercion of a person to use a foreign object like a dildo or finger to penetrate their own anus or vagina.” We've shortened the list of examples to show only the two of them that apply in your case.

The Program rules do mention self-masturbation, but that can be achieved by external means, which you did comply with in the Reasonable Request. You were well justified in declining to do the more invasive method.

Jane, you didn't ask about another of your head teacher's claims but it caught our eye. This is the term “sole judge” as used in the rules. You told him correctly; the rules say that “the participant is the sole judge of the reasonableness” of the Request. It doesn't

qualify that term anywhere, as, for example saying something like, “subject to the review of an official” or “pending the later decision of a teacher.” The term “sole judge,” *The Realist* found, is a well-known term in the law and its legal meaning is “the person with the *final* decision.” By its legal definition, the sole judge of something *cannot* be overruled.

So, Jane, the answer to your question is this: by forcing you to use your fingers to masturbate internally, your head teacher is committing the felony of a sexual assault. The Human Sexuality Promotion Act, which created the Program, has no exemptions in it for officials that shield them from violations of laws which prohibit the forcing or coercing of sexual activity. You could fight his decision by asking him to put it in writing and sign and date it. And then show that statement to a police constable and see what happens.

Our message to our readers is clear. Words and terms mean only what a dictionary says they mean. Other sources, like medical sites and legal sites can reinforce or clarify the meaning more precisely. *The Realist* has frequently urged in this blog that children not participate in the Program at all, but if you do, be sure you know your rights and challenge any attempts to define words to mean something other than their plain, dictionary meaning. And if your rights are violated, you should complain to the police authorities who can be relied on to help.

“Nice, guys,” Kevin praised them. “That really does cover the ground, geez, you got medical and legal in it too.”

“Yeah, that was Amelia’s idea,” Jeremy said proudly. “I wonder how this will shake up the Program people.”

“But what caught my attention was your suggestion of using that signed statement,” Kevin went on. “Do you have any idea of the consternation that suggestion will cause in schools, let alone among the Program Committee group?”

Soon Jeremy left for home, but later that evening, he called Amelia.

“Hey darling, what’s up? Not that I don’t want to talk...” she answered and then listened for a while. “Wow, really? ... Yeah, I’ll tell them. ... Bye, sweetie, love you.”

She went out to the main room where Denise and Kevin were working on their coursework.

“Jeremy says that Hanford called his mom again. The people who have been complaining to him about the blog are really, really angry now. You know how we said people should call the police? Well, they’ve been doing it. All evening long, too. Jeremy said Hanford told his mom that there’s been some sexual assault complaints filed against teachers in a number of schools and the school officials and teachers are contacting the Program officials and demanding help from the government. Wow, did that really happen fast!”

Kevin smiled, “Yeah, that *was* pretty fast. There must have been some very irate parents wanting to get back at some teachers for what the schools did to their kids. This might make our meeting

at your school in two weeks with those Program Committee people kind of interesting.”

“Ugh. That’s something I’m not looking forward to,” Amelia groaned.

She was cheered at school the following day when she heard plenty of chatter among the students about *The Realist* blog posts. Amelia learned that the tabloid newspapers had printed reports of police inquiries into claims of sexual abuse lodged against some teachers and school officials in a few London schools. The reports also spoke of rumors of parental interest in organizing class-action lawsuits at a number of schools.

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The following week started off quietly but as the week progressed, interesting developments began to occur. First, on Tuesday, Kevin met with Hanford to discuss the material that he and Denise planned to present to the Program Committee. Jeremy continued with his meetings with Amelia’s anti-FGM girls’ group, discussing their campaign, brainstorming topics for articles, and going over articles they had written to polish them for publication on *The Realist* blog. Then on Wednesday, as Amelia and Jeremy traveled to school, Jeremy told Amelia that he had gotten a disturbing message on his blog; a message from a girl who had reported a new Program abuse.

“And it looks like this abuse shows that some of the Program rules actually violate some existing laws, darling,” he told her. “We need to write up a response. I’d like your take on what she says, so can I come to your flat after school?”

“I’ll text Denise to get permission, sweetie,” she whispered.

After school the two arrived at Amelia’s flat and Jeremy pulled out his laptop.

“Okay, here’s what we need to work on,” Jeremy told her. “Our blog article will be in response to a message from a year eleven girl who refused to take part in a classroom demonstration. She objected to doing the demo since it was so intrusive. I’ll let you read her message.”

Amelia read it. “Ohmygod,” she gasped. “Oh, the humiliation that poor girl suffered.”

“Yeah, I’m sure that some of the things they did to her are totally illegal. Look at the article I started writing while I look up the laws that might apply,” Jeremy told her.

About fifteen minutes later, Amelia showed Jeremy her revision of his draft of the article.

“Jeremy? I thought you had condensed the girl’s message too much. Your version didn’t express her shock and humiliation—it didn’t come through in your summary. I changed it to speak in her own voice. Is that okay?”

Jeremy looked at the article.

“Oh, darling, it’s much better than my version.”

***The Program Breaks U.K. Laws? Yet Another Program Human Rights Violation***

Realist: I got put in the Program even though my mum and pop didn’t want me in it but

they were too frightened by my head teacher's threats and told me if I got selected, I'd have to do it. For the first day in it I hid as much as I could and wouldn't let anyone touch me and refused to do any requests. I have very long hair and used it to hide as much of my body as I could. The head teacher called me to the office at the end of the day and told me that I would have to put up my hair and he would have my teachers get me to cooperate.

The next day, in biology, the teacher called me for a demonstration and I was horrified when he told me what it was. To measure the volume of my vagina! First, I'm a virgin and still have my hymen. Second, I told him that I wouldn't let anyone stick objects in my fanny. He told me that he was using water, which wasn't an object, and wouldn't do anything to break my hymen. I argued with him and he showed me the thing he wanted to use to kind of push the water into me to do the measurement, it was like the bulb of a big turkey baster. I grabbed it and threw it across the room and ran out.

I went to the media room and sat there crying and the head teacher must have heard I was there, because he came in with another teacher. I hadn't put up my hair, so he told me I would be punished for that and also my refusing to do the demo. They CUT MY WONDERFUL HAIR OFF. And put handcuffs on me and told me I had to go back to class.

I was in shock, but I didn't want to go, so I managed to sneak away from the kid who was supposed to watch me and then I hid where I wouldn't be found, behind some props on the auditorium stage. It was difficult to move with the handcuffs and awfully uncomfortable. When the final bell rang, I waited a while until I was sure all the kids had gone home and then snuck out to the office. The head was very angry, he lectured me for a while, but finally unlocked me and gave me my clothes. He told me that I'd be handcuffed for the rest of the week and have to spend the following week in the Program handcuffed too.

It's been four school days now and I haven't gone back. I told my mum and pop that I won't go to school any more. Realist, what can I do? Please help me!

"Darling, I found some laws that might apply," Jeremy said. "Handcuffing a child appears to be completely illegal unless it's done to restrain them but only for a criminal act and only by police, as I understand it, but there are mental health exceptions for restraint in treatment facilities. And the Human Sexuality Act doesn't mention handcuffing—or cutting hair either."

"But what do we say in the article? We can't give legal advice, sweetie."

"Yeah, I know. But we can write what I found and if we keep it as a suggestion, that might work. I started a draft, so let's work on that."

They quickly completed their response and posted the completed article, the girl's request and their response.

*The Realist* isn't qualified to give legal advice—there are no solicitors here. It seems to us, though, that cutting your hair and handcuffing you, which are both mentioned as punishments in the Program booklet, go beyond the terms of the Human Sexuality Promotion Act which authorised the Program. Those two rules are the National Program Committee's own implementation of the Act. Handcuffing is an involuntary restraint which might only be permissible in a case where the person is suspected of breaking a civil law. Forcible cutting of hair is probably assault, even battery; again, the Act does not specifically authorise any kind of punishment for participants.

We think that you should make a police complaint. You surely were mistreated and the victim of a great injustice. But you should go back to school. You cannot be forced to participate in the Program. Show your parents this blog and perhaps they will support your decision. If they're letting you stay away from school, they'll probably support you in your not participating. You deserve their support.

This is yet another example of the evils of the Program, forcing a young girl to engage in humiliating and harmful activities which have no educational support. Is this how the British people want their children to be treated?

Everyone: Say NO! to the Program.

As Jeremy uploaded the article, Amelia sat there watching, tears in her eyes.

“Darling, you're crying?” Jeremy exclaimed as he turned to her. He hugged her.

“Oh, I just feel so bad for her, what she went through and how she must feel. Betrayed by the school and also by her parents who didn't stand up for her. I'm so lucky I have you and also Kevin and Denise. You've all been wonderful to me. Oh, please hold me, darling, I need you to make me feel safe now...”

She reached up to him and pulled him into a tender kiss, which soon turned into a passionate one. As their tongues entwined in mutual lust, Jeremy slid his hand under her blouse and stroked her bra-clad breasts, rubbing the fabric over her rigid nipples.

“Oh, lover,” Amelia gasped, “that feels so good. That's driving me wild. Wait...”

She pulled away and slipped off her blouse, unclipped her bra, and shrugged it off.

“Better,” she murmured as Jeremy's lips fastened on a taut nipple.

While Jeremy was stroking her breasts and sucking on them, Amelia undid his tie and unbuttoned his shirt.

“Let's go to my room,” she whispered as she pulled his shirt out of his trousers and slid it off his shoulders.

They hurried to Amelia's room and quickly helped each other to take off the rest of their clothes. Amelia lay down on her back on her bed and Jeremy straddled her body, knees on each side of

her hips, leaned forward, and began caressing her firm orbs with his palms, brushing them over her engorged nipples. Then he squeezed her nipples between his thumbs and forefingers, rolling them around gently as they hardened even more under the stimulus. Amelia moaned approvingly.

Jeremy gradually slid down along her body, planting tiny, tender kisses down her chest, her belly button, and lower belly; soon his lips nuzzled into the short, soft curly hair covering her puffy pubes. Spreading her thighs, he bent down between them, and his lips fastened onto her pussy, which was trickling her juices and clearly showing her rising arousal. As he kissed her there, her inner pussy lips began engorging, opening out like a butterfly's wings. As he watched, a few drops of her feminine juices oozed out from between her pussy lips, running down into the crease between her buttocks.

Jeremy pulled her legs apart and followed the little stream of her nectar with his tongue down from her pussy to the little puckered hole hiding between her ass cheeks, and tickled her hole with the tip of his tongue. Amelia's hips jerked and she whimpered as she felt the electric flashes his tongue was producing there. Then, with the flat of his tongue, Jeremy stroked up her vulva to her hard little clit and with his tongue's tip, dug under her clit hood, teasing it out.

Amelia shuddered from the intense sensation, whispering, "Aaaahhhh, oooo, yessss... uuhhh... right there... oohhh..."

Jeremy redoubled his licking, slurping up the copious juices that were leaking from her pussy. She tasted tart, with just the faintest hint of urine, but sweet, oh, so sweet. As he lapped around her clit, he slipped his finger into her pussy and curled it around, seeking the rough patch of tissue of her g-spot. When he found it, he pressed in and took the little bud of her hard clit between his lips and lashed it with his tongue tip.

"Gaaahhhh! Ooohhhhhh Jeremy! Yaaaahhhh!" she gasped as a shudder passed through her body.

Now Jeremy pushed a second finger into her pussy; her juices were flowing freely, and he began stroking in and out in a comfortable rhythm while his tongue continued to caress her clit, which had swollen so much it was standing away from its fleshy hood. Amelia's breath was coming faster and faster now. Jeremy felt the tenseness in her body begin to build.

"Ooohhh, yesssss, do it... more.... going to cuuum..." she groaned.

Jeremy lifted up his head and began sawing his fingers in and out of her pussy faster and faster; the squishing sounds that his fingers, slick with her juices, caused was driving his own lust. As Amelia's arousal started to peak, he lowered his mouth back to her vulva and, taking her clit between his lips, he nipped that engorged, sensitive button with his teeth.

"YYYYYYAAAAHHHHHHH!! Oooooooooohhhh! Aaaarrrrggghhhh!" she shrieked, clamping his head with her thighs in a vise-like grip.

Her pussy begin to contract spasmodically around his fingers as her body went rigid and a gush of fluids poured out of her body.

“Aaahhh! Aaaahhh! Uuuuhhhhhh... Ohhhhhh! Uh! Uh! Uh! Ah! Ah! Oooooohhhh...” she gasped as the ferocity of her orgasmic pulses ripped through her body. Jeremy rode her through her climax, continuing to thrust his fingers in and out of her pussy to prolong it, as her spasms gradually subsided and she was able to get her breathing back to normal.

“Ohmygod, Jeremy! That was... oh god... so awesome!” she panted as she regained her breath. “Let me catch my breath—and reward you for that glorious cum.”

They held each other and kissed for a minute, then Amelia pushed Jeremy flat onto his back and took his rigid cock in her hands, gradually letting its head slip into her mouth. Slowly she pushed her lips down over his cock’s crown and Jeremy gasped as he felt her lips slide over the corona and onto his shaft. Amelia sunk downward, forcing his cock into the warm wetness of her mouth until she felt it hit her throat and she gagged, pulling back.

“Sorry,” she apologized. “I need to learn to do that better.”

“That’s fine,” Jeremy choked. “That was fuckin’ ace!”

Amelia smiled and went down on him again, letting her tongue play teasingly across his cock’s crown. Jeremy shivered and groaned. Then Amelia gently took his shaft in one hand and pulled down its skin while with her other hand, she played with his balls. He groaned again at the incredible sensations she was causing. Now she took his cock back into her mouth and started to bob her head up and down on it, caressing its engorged crown with her tongue, licking its sensitive underside where the head met the shaft.

“Amelia... oh... oh...” he panted. “Go slow... slow... or I’ll cum...”

“Uuuhhh hmmm,” she acknowledged, but the vibrations from her voice caused his cock to lurch.

She continued to gently suck him, slowly stroking the exposed part of his shaft with her hand and Jeremy began to move his hips to match her rhythm. As she sucked him harder, his pleasure increased.

“Lover... uuunnhhh... you’re gonna... uuuhhh... gonna... make me... aaahhhh... gonna cum!” he choked out.

Amelia angled her head to peer up at him without losing oral contact with his cock.

“Guuddd... Cuuummm nnn mmmmy mmmouuuufff...”

Amelia redoubled her efforts, lashing her tongue around his rampant member and stroking him with both hands, occasionally raking her fingernails over his balls. Jeremy felt the pressure in his groin build to an impossible level and bolts of sensation began radiating out from his cock. Suddenly he felt his balls tighten and a delicious burning sensation began to form behind his cock, surging through his cock and into his belly and thighs, and then a massive spasm roared through his body.

“Gaaaaaawwwwwhhhhhhhh!” he shouted as ecstasy erupted from his being and pulsed through his cock into Amelia’s mouth. “Uuunnhh! Uuuuhhh! Aaaaahhh!” he grunted as pulse after pulse of cum spurted into her mouth.

Amelia stayed with him, letting him fire his semen into her mouth, swallowing once or twice as she kept stroking his shaft. As his pulses died down to dribbles, she sucked him as his cock began to lose some of its rigidity, and then swallowed the remaining cum in her mouth.

“Hmmm, uughh, maybe I’ll get used to that taste,” she mused as she shivered.

“Oooohh... wow... shit...” Jeremy gasped. “That was... oooohh... wow...”

He pulled her down to him and kissed her passionately. Then he broke the kiss.

“Oohh... is that what it tastes like?” he murmured. “Weird... oh shit, darling, that was incredible!”

“Mmmmmmm,” Amelia agreed.

They lay there for several minutes, kissing, embracing, and stroking each other lovingly. Amelia was gently playing with Jeremy’s cock, which was getting firmer and firmer under her caresses.

“Mmm, I love your cock,” Amelia whispered. “I just love it so much. Ooohh, look, it’s getting bigger again,” she gushed.

“That’s ‘cause it loves you, darling,” Jeremy chuckled. He made it twitch.

“Ooohh! It just jumped,” she exclaimed.

“Cause it likes when you hold it.”

“Shit, this is making me horny all over again,” Amelia groaned. “My fanny’s on fire again. Your fingers gave me a great cum, but I need your cock now,” she gasped.

Amelia pushed Jeremy back onto his back again and lifted her leg over his hips to straddle him. Raising herself up, she socketed the engorged head of his now iron-hard cock in the entrance of her pussy and dropped herself quickly down onto him, impaling herself in a single stroke. As her pussy was still drenched with her fluids, she slid all the way down his shaft without any resistance. Jeremy gasped as he felt his cockhead plow through her hot depths, pushing her internal tissues aside as he penetrated her.

As she sat on his hips, recovering from the intense sensations his cock was producing in her body, Jeremy reached up and stroked her breasts with his hands, running his palms over her nipples and caressing them. She moaned and covered his hands with hers, pushing them hard against her chest.

Catching her breath, Amelia pulled herself back up, slowly raising herself off him until his cockhead was barely still inside of her. Then she reversed, plunging herself down again, reveling in the sensation of his cock ploughing into her hot and wet innards. She repeated this several

times and Jeremy began to move his hips to complement her movements.

Then, screwing her eyes shut, Amelia began to ride him, beginning with a gentle rhythm, but then as she sped up, she leaned forward, pressing her breasts into Jeremy's chest, allowing him to fuck into her by thrusting his hips while she gyrated hers.

She began panting, "Aaaahhh... uuuhhh... getting... oohh... close..." she grunted. "Aaaahh!"

She reared back up, reached down, and began rubbing at her clit while Jeremy thrust into her harder and grabbed her nipples and pinched them, rolling them between his thumb and fingers.

"It's coming... uuuhhh... going... aaahh... to cum..." she panted breathlessly. "Uuhh, yes... uuhh, yes... yes... yes! OH! AAAAAHHHHH! Ah! Uh! Uh!" she cried as her pussy spasmed and her juices were forced out of her clenching pussy and flowed down the shaft of his cock.

"Unh," Jeremy cried, as Amelia's muscles clenched, clamping down hard on his cock, driving his lustful emotions into the stratosphere. Amelia continued to ride Jeremy's cock while her pussy kept pulsing, but the force of her climax made both of their thrusting movements erratic.

As Amelia began to catch her breath, Jeremy husked to her, "Gotta cum, need to cum, get down..."

He grabbed her hips, twisted her over, and somehow they rolled until she was on her back while Jeremy remained embedded in her vagina. Amelia squealed as Jeremy gave a tentative thrust; then she wrapped her legs around his thighs as he leaned down to kiss her. Jeremy pulled his knees up closer to Amelia's ass and began thrusting into her in a moderate rhythm using long strokes and pressing in deeply on each one. He closed his eyes and reveled in the wondrous friction of her tight, slippery, and hot channel as the head of his hard cock glided through her vaginal folds; soon he began to feel the first twinges heralding the approach of his own orgasm.

Amelia wiggled her butt. "Lover..." she panted, "it's coming again... oohhh, yes... again... uuggg... move higher... OH! YES! Right there! Harder!" she panted.

Jeremy was taking faster strokes and pushing the root of his cock against her pubic bone, squeezing her clit with every stroke now. Amelia was panting like a steam engine and her hips were jerking spasmodically. Jeremy looked down at Amelia's face; it was flushed and her expression was frozen in a rictus of passion. Sweat poured off both of their bodies as Jeremy began driving his cock into her like a piston. Suddenly a white heat swept over him and his balls felt like they were boiling with fire. He tried to slow down his thrusting to prolong his ecstasy but his climax began crashing over him; he felt a hot lance of fire start to burn out of his groin and spread into his cock.

Amelia felt Jeremy's cock swell as his orgasm started, then the first pulse of his hot cum triggered her own orgasm.

"Aaaagggggnnnnngghhhh!" she shrieked. "Uuunnhhh! Aaaaaaaahhh!  
OooooooOOOOHHHH!" she wailed, as Jeremy kept thrusting through his own climax.

“GAAAAAHHHHHHH!” Jeremy howled as he felt Amelia’s pussy clamping down on his cock as she came and he buried himself in her as deep as he could. Pulses of his hot cum kept rocketing up out of his balls and erupting out of the head of his cock as he shot load after load of his cum deep inside her.

“Unhh! uuunnh! Aaahhh...” he grunted as his cock pulsed with each contraction of his loins.

Gradually his hips began slowing their thrusting and he felt the clenching of Amelia’s pussy subsiding; slowly they both began to return to coherent thought. Finally, totally spent, Jeremy sank down on top of Amelia and then rolled off to her side and both just lay there, panting and sweaty, eyes closed, hearts pounding, exhausted.

After a few minutes, Jeremy raised his head and looked at Amelia.

“Lover?” he whispered. “You okay?”

She opened her eyes. Her expression was languid. “The best, my beloved. That was heavenly; my God, you’re a fantastic lover,” she breathed. “Ohmygod, look at this bed... oh shit, look how wet everything is. I don’t care... hug me, darling, never let me go...”

They lay there for a half hour, murmuring loving words to each other and stroking each other’s faces in wonder at the passion that their lovemaking had unleashed.

“Darling,” Amelia said at last, “I can’t believe how strongly I feel my love for you. When you’re with me, holding me, I feel safe, complete, like you’re part of me when we’re together. I see how Denise and Kevin are. How they always seem to be together, even if they aren’t close to each other, there’s a connection between them.”

Jeremy nodded, “Yeah, darling, I see that and I feel that with you too. I find that I’m always thinking of you even when we’re apart.”

They kissed.

“Um, think we better get dressed?” Jeremy chuckled. “I know Denise is pretty tolerant, but isn’t she due home in about a half hour?”

“Eeep!” Amelia exclaimed. “You’re right. Need to clean up here too. But we don’t need to hide anything from her or Kevin.”

“Yeah, they’re the greatest.”

They hurriedly dressed, stripped the bed, and started a wash with the bedclothes. Then they went to the sitting room and began doing their homework. Denise found them that way, immersed in their work.

“Hey, guys, how are things doing,” she asked when she saw them.

“Good, Denise. Jeremy and I posted another anti-Program article.”

She showed Denise the blog, still loaded on the laptop’s screen.

“Oh, that’s a very good response,” Denise approved. “Poor girl, I hope she can get through this problem.”

“Yeah,” Amelia agreed. “Um, I don’t want to keep any secrets or stuff from you...” Amelia continued, glancing at Jeremy who nodded his encouragement. “Jeremy and I were... um... intimate... a little while ago. Denise, we love each other soooo much! I hope you’re not angry or think we took advantage of you...”

“Oh, sweetie, no. Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me; this shows just how mature you both are. Kevin and I see how much you care for each other and we approve. I know the Porters like you very much and I’m certain your dad will like Jeremy. So if you want to express your love, you don’t have to sneak around or be ashamed of it. Just don’t be blatant around school or your folks, Jeremy.”

Amelia giggled. “Um, no, we’re very discreet, Denise.”

Jeremy nodded his agreement.

“Jeremy, can you stay for dinner?” Denise asked.

“I’ll check with Mum,” he replied and called her. “Yes, I can, thanks,” he told her after he disconnected. “I need to leave at 8 o’clock though.”

Kevin arrived home not long after that and he approved of the blog article too.

After dinner, Kevin was chatting with Jeremy and Amelia.

“Looks like you’re going all out on those anti-Program articles,” Kevin told them. “That fits right in with our strategy to increase public pressure against the Program. Any more articles in the works?”

Amelia nodded. “Yeah, we have an article almost ready that was inspired by Denise—it was in the flyer I took to school. It’s addressed to the parents of the kids in schools with the Program. We’re writing about that Avery University study, you know, the one where it showed the negative effects of the Program on student academic achievement. If parents see that the grades drop in schools that have the Program, we think that they’ll object and maybe even complain to their MPs.”

“That’s a good idea, kids,” Kevin agreed. “When are you posting that one?”

Jeremy grinned. “Tomorrow, actually. It’s almost done. Today we did the posting with girl’s message you just saw because it was urgent and we put off doing the grades one till tomorrow.”

“You guys are just awesome, you know,” Denise said. “When we meet with that Program Committee, we’ll really have them on the defensive—there’ll be lots of political pressure against them by then, I’d think.”

On Thursday afternoon, Jeremy posted their next article on the adverse academic achievement findings reported in the Avery University study and by the end of the week, one of the tabloid

papers had begun running a daily column on Program issues on its second page, often incorporating material from Jeremy's blog. All of the newspapers were still writing about how the blog author was unknown and how the server where the blog was hosted couldn't be located, other than probably being somewhere in the Far East. One newspaper had traced the domain registration to an empty office in Mumbai but the trail ended there. The papers did make several requests in print for the author to contact them and offered anonymity; one even offered a reward for revealing the blogger's identity, but Jeremy was keeping silent.

## Chapter 14

December arrived, cold and wet. On the first Monday, sleet had begun falling in the early afternoon, as Kevin and Denise returned home to prepare for their evening meeting with the governors and National Program Committee officials. When the teens arrived home later, Jeremy told Kevin that he had arranged for the embassy driver to bring them to the school later.

Kevin was packing his laptop as the teens came in.

“Hi, Kevin, Denise,” the two echoed, then chuckled. Jeremy looked at Amelia. “We do that a lot. Say the same thing at the same time.”

She smiled. “Yeah.”

“Hey Kevin, any changes?” Jeremy asked.

“Yeah, Hanford emailed this morning. He asked me to make my part shorter. Less video, he asked.”

“You’re gonna skip the video then?” Amelia asked.

“No, sweetie,” he answered. “I made excerpts from the Avery University DVD set—the parts which show the Avery-Denison program in use in an Atlanta high school. I took out the Program parts, you know, the video clips that show kids in humiliating classroom demos. I figured there’d be no point since that crap happened in the U.S. and not here, although I’m sure the committee people are well aware of the abuses in their schools. No point in fueling excess hostilities, I think.”

“Any changes for Denise?” Jeremy asked.

Denise came out of the bedroom. “No, Jeremy. I’m still covering the social issues—mostly taken from the Georgia Polytech report that covered the social burden of Program activity in the U.S. But I decided to present it like you guys. That was a good idea you had, to show them slides of copies of the laws that have been violated in Program schools with key phrases highlighted.”

“Yeah, I think we have it covered,” Kevin said as he finished packing. “We’re gonna challenge all of the elements of the Program that caused problems in your schools, Jeremy,” he ticked them off on his fingers, “educational, moral, social-cultural, psychological, legal, ethical, and health and safety. Now let’s eat. We took in Chinese.”

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The meeting was held in the school’s media room since it had several large tables which had been pushed together to make one large conference table, and a digital projector system.

The four arrived early to set up their computer to use the projection system and were testing it when Hanford came in.

“Hello, Mr Coris, Miss Roberts—oh, is Amelia here too?—and Jeremy,” he greeted them.

“Hello, Head Teacher,” Jeremy said. “Amelia actually developed a significant part of the presentation so we drafted her to speak too.”

“Is that so, Amelia?” he asked her. “Doing a presentation won’t get you nervous? At first I wasn’t sure about how Jeremy would do, but Mr Coris assured me that he’ll be fine.”

“I’ll be okay, sir,” Amelia replied. “Remember about my acting experience? Although I’ll admit to a bit of stage fright,” she finished, smiling at him.

“Okay then. I heard from the committee. The under-secretary of state for the Children and Families division of the Department for Education couldn’t come. He’s the committee head of the National Program Committee. Since he’s an MP, he’s elected and was appointed to head the committee. The deputy chair, he’s the executive director of the Curriculum Office of the Department for Education, will chair their group.”

Within a few minutes, the governors began arriving and greeted the group and several began asking Kevin a number of questions. Hanford came over to rescue him, explaining to the governors that his presentation should provide their answers; if it didn’t, they could ask afterwards.

Finally, Dr Byron Abberle, the governor’s chair, entered leading a group of somber-looking officials in grey or brown tweed suits and carrying briefcases. They were given seats at one side of the table and the governors sat around the opposite side, leaving Kevin, Denise, and the teens at the head—the side facing the screen.

Abberle opened the meeting, introduced Kevin’s group, then the governors, and then Henrietta Markson, the school’s solicitor, and then asked the Education officials to introduce themselves.

A distinguished-looking grey-haired gentleman raised his hand. “I’ll start, as I’m taking the Under Secretary’s place as the committee head this evening. I’m Dr Winston Granville, deputy chairman of the National Program Committee and the executive director of curriculum at Education.”

He nodded to the woman at his left.

“I’m Dr Marjory Seetis, a psychologist in the employ of the Department for Education. And a committee member.”

“Mr Wilson Eldridge. The committee’s legal advocate.”

“Dr David Dunton. Professor of education at Surry University and committee member.”

“Mrs Charlene Stokeston, head teacher at Whimforshire School; committee member also.”

“Mr Simon Luft. Deputy Director, Academies and Maintained Schools of the Education Funding Agency. I’m a committee ex officio member.”

Granville nodded when they had finished their introductions. “Besides the Under Secretary, two other committee members couldn’t attend. And we have four MPs with us who have asked to

attend; gentlemen, could you please introduce yourselves?"

They did and briefly mentioned that the press uproar over the Program had been noted by Parliament, their own constituents were contacting their offices, and they wanted to get details about the problems with the Program which appeared to be plaguing schools lately.

Abberle welcomed the group again and turned the meeting over to Hanford.

"Ladies and gentlemen, members of Parliament and committee, I appreciate that we finally have the opportunity to meet face to face," Hanford began. "As you well know, through numerous letters and phone calls, our school attempted to begin the Program..."

He was interrupted by Granville. "Excuse, sir, but please, we need to get to the heart of the problem, so an introduction isn't needed. The problem is that your school was to begin participating in the Program yet you haven't. Please explain the reason. Also, the people I see at the head of the table who were introduced as the presenters for the meeting appear very young. Two even appear to be of secondary school age."

"Yes, Dr Granville. You might however be surprised to learn that they are all extremely well-versed in the topics they will cover so I ask your patience. To your question now. Simply put, the Program can't operate here because no pupil will consent to participate. The sending of a squad of thugs to our school for the Program's inception assembly was met with a virtual riot in which some pupils were injured and the responsible men had to be arrested."

Granville steepled his fingers. "We're aware of the incident." He looked at Eldridge. "Mr Eldridge. What's the status of those cases?"

"Their defense barristers asked the Department for Education to petition the court to have the charges dropped and that was done. The court wouldn't accept the petition, however. It appears that the cases will be going to trial eventually," Eldridge replied. "I can't give any further details. Our committee has been asked not to comment on the matter and to stay neutral."

Hanford acknowledged Granville and Eldridge and then continued, "The Program representative who came to the meeting had demanded that we use force to compel the selected pupils to participate if they refused to do so. But our solicitor had determined that according to current law, it's a felony offense to use any form of force to compel a child to undress; that's a sexual battery apparently. Our solicitor also advised us that it might even be a sexual assault to use coercion—threats of punishment—to try to make the children comply. The pupils and their parents are quite familiar with the threats of educational sanctions that have been mentioned, yet those threats have continued to be an ineffective motivator.

"Until two weeks ago, every single day at the beginning of classes, the teachers announce the names of pupils in their classes who were chosen to participate. The pupils did follow, at first, the order to come to my office and did come there in an orderly, well-behaved way. They listened politely to my request for them to participate. But when I commanded them to disrobe, they just as politely ignored it. I repeated doing this call to my office every single morning for a month

with the same result. Doing that little charade each day quickly became disruptive to our school's order, so at that point, just the pupil's names were read off and they were asked if they would participate. They refused and the class then continued. We finally had to stop doing that, too. Mrs Markson, please tell the committee members what you've advised the governors."

"Yes, Head Teacher," she replied. "Our school records show proof that we are complying with the exact terms of the Human Sexuality Act as a school. We have been randomly selecting students to take part and then overseeing the activities that the selected participants engage in. Therefore, we maintain that Norwich Academy is meeting the requirements of the Act."

"That's preposterous!" exclaimed Granville.. "There's no one participating."

"We concur with your observation that no one's participating," Hanford said agreeably. "I know that the claim that the school is complying is disingenuous, but the Act speaks of what the *school officials* are to do to conduct the Program and it lists how pupils are expected to be treated and how the Program is to be run. But nowhere in the Act does it instruct school officials how they are to *get* pupils naked to participate. It obviously assumes that when told to obey, the pupils would obey. But that's not happening. And our civil and criminal laws don't permit using physical force or even coercion. Under our criminal laws and also the Program Act, we can legally only make the request for the pupils to disrobe and trust that pupils will comply. We could physically force pupils to participate only if Parliament revised the assault and battery laws and other associated laws to allow force to be used and..."

One of the MPs interrupted. "Head Teacher, that won't ever happen. Imagine the public reaction if the assault laws were changed to allow adults to assault children—even in this limited school case."

The other MPs chorused in agreement.

Hanford nodded. "Thank you, gentlemen. Dr Granville, we've repeatedly asked your committee to suggest how we are to compel participation but we haven't received any viable suggestions. So, Dr Granville, we have an impasse. We're attempting to comply to our best ability but our results don't meet your compliance standard. So tell me, do you have any ideas about where we go next?"

Granville looked at his committee members. "Mr Eldridge, is there a way around the 'no force' impediment?"

"The legal staff doesn't see one, sir," he replied. "The criminal code does rule out the use of force."

"Anyone else? Your thoughts?" Granville prompted.

No one spoke.

Hanford nodded. "I see. We have a situation where meeting the Program Act's intent is completely impossible to attain, so will you relieve us of the requirement?"

Granville scowled. “That’s something we cannot do.”

“Please, sir,” Hanford went on, “can’t you see the absurdity of your committee’s position here? You tell us we must comply and we have complied to our best ability, using all of the tools your committee and the Program Act have provided. But you do not accept our results.”

“The committee expects you to have the responsibility of solving that problem, sir,” Granville replied.

Hanford nodded. “This is precisely what we expected the committee to tell us. You give us few options to comply and the most straightforward response to resolving this impossible impasse is the legal route. Mrs Markson, please inform our committee members and our distinguished guests, members of Parliament, about our legal options.”

“Yes, Head Teacher. Since you’ve forced our academy into an impossible administrative situation, we feel compelled to prepare a motion to the Lambeth County Court requesting a restraining order against the Department for Education to prevent them from requiring that we conduct the Program at our school. First, the requirement that we do so is not supported by the law; we are not a state-supported school. The bursary support we get are awards to the families of our pupils to offset their tuition costs. Second, the pupil and parent resistance to the Program was directly precipitated by the interference of personnel from the Program agency when they instigated a riot in our school and did violence to our pupils.

“We will also seek criminal charges and begin civil suits against the LEA officials who sent those people here to cause mayhem and we will widely publicize our legal efforts, which, as you know, have been widely covered by the regular press as well as the tabloids. And third, our presenters will now cover the legal, social, and financial issues that the Program causes; we shall publicize this information widely. I suggest that you listen carefully and consider the effect of this information when it’s disseminated to the public. Please hold any questions until later; many of them will be answered by our presentations. Head Teacher?”

“Thanks, Mrs Markson,” Hanford said. “Members of the Committee, please listen to our presenters; we expect that you will give them a fair hearing. I believe at this point it might be appropriate to let some people who actually have experience with the Program to speak. Mr Coris, who’s first in your group?”

Kevin answered, “Jeremy, sir. Will you give our backgrounds or shall I?”

Hanford smiled. “Perhaps I’d better. Your modesty will do you a disservice. Ladies and gents, these four young people have remarkable backgrounds. I perhaps know Jeremy Porter best, we’ve butted heads for the entire three months I’ve been at Norwich Academy and find him to be insightful and analytical and an absolute bulldog in his zeal for promoting human rights. He seems to have a legal encyclopedia in his head and can cite chapter and verse of the laws and regulations which guarantee individual rights. And he experienced the Program in his former school, first as an observer and then as an objecting participant. He was highly disturbed by how he saw that his former school ran the Program and has developed a critical review for us of the

way its elements have been improperly implemented.

“His classmate is Amelia Hadad. Now I was surprised to learn that Miss Hadad would be addressing us—Mr Coris, it’s not about that incident?” Kevin shook his head. “Can I mention it, and her role, however?”

Amelia spoke, “Yes, it’s okay.”

Hanford smiled at her. “Miss Hadad doesn’t know that I’m aware of this, but she and a number of her classmates began an extremely impressive research project, totally on their own initiative, that is trying to disseminate information to the public about that awful women’s health issue known as female genital mutilation. She initiated the project and seems to be its leader too. And Miss Hadad was one of the pupils who was assaulted and injured by Program officials five weeks ago. She was grabbed at random, stripped, and assaulted, even though she had had a medical exemption for pelvic surgery performed just four days earlier.”

There were gasps from the committee members.

“So I’m sure with her unusual research abilities, Miss Hadad will have found information you will appreciate learning. Next is Miss Denise Roberts and Mr Kevin Coris. They’re really a team...”

Granville interrupted. “Wait. Denise Roberts. Yes, I know that name. Don’t tell me, you’re the Miss Roberts from the London School of Liberal Arts and Education?” Denise nodded. “Bloo... Indeed. Panel, do you recall *that* incident? The demise of the university Program teacher familiarization projects?”

There were nods of agreement from the committee members but the MPs looked blank. Granville turned to them.

“She—well, Mr Coris was also involved—she got the Program familiarization training in the teacher’s colleges completely bollixed up. Caused a real ruckus in Education, I should say, too. Okay, Mr Hanford, what are we in for with your secret weapons there and how did you recruit them?”

Hanford tried not to smile. “Sir, they’re Miss Hadad’s guardians, actually, and came forward when they learned that Norwich Academy had been instructed by the LEA to begin the Program. They both were in the Naked in School Program in the U.S. when they were in high school. And they both became involved in it in two different schools in two different states. You should know that both of them were decorated by the U.S. president for outstanding civilian service, work that ultimately led to abolishing the U.S. Program, with Mr Coris being awarded their Medal of Freedom, their highest civilian honor. And they were instrumental in getting the Program ended there.”

Granville scowled. “Very impressive, I’m sure. So they came to the U.K. next to try to stop the Program here,” he stated flatly.

“Not at all, sir,” Kevin said. “We came to London to take classes, Denise in education and me in international relations, and the school here is the best in the world for that subject. The Program got suddenly pushed into our faces; we had no idea you were doing it. When we were forced into it—first Denise and then Amelia—we reacted just as we did back home—in self-protection. None of our involvement in it here was planned in advance, I assure you. Okay, thanks for the intro, Mr Hanford. Jeremy, you’re up.”

Jeremy stood and pulled his laptop closer. “Hello, everyone. As you requested of the head teacher, I’ll skip the polite frills and just get to the issues. As the head mentioned, I saw the Program in action in my last school and what I saw disgusted me. Putting the issue of sex and nudity in public aside, and also ignoring the basic psychological premise of the Program, which I’m not qualified to comment on, I am qualified to comment on the rights of children not to be harmed. Adults are supposed to protect us. I’m gonna show some slides which list the problems I saw and read about in the newspapers about how you people are violating the basic human rights of children with the Program. Here’s the first slide.

“First item: training of school officials. There *is* none. This results in the same mistakes being made repeatedly within a single school and amongst all of the schools running the Program.

“Second: poor rule interpretation. Lack of training results in, amongst other problems, allowing the rules to be interpreted or enforced improperly. Teachers make the rules say whatever they want them to say or what they think they should say, even when that interpretation conflicts with the actual wording.

“Third item: poor supervision. Many problems have occurred because there’s poor or no supervision of pupils and teachers which allows pupils and teachers to abuse participants.

“Fourth: illegal actions by schools. We’ve already mentioned the violation of laws like allowing the use of force and ignoring the illegal abuse of the participants.

“Number five: ignoring cultural and religious customs. The press is full of stories of the Program clashing with the customs of minority groups. I’m sure I don’t have to tell you the stories—examples of how each one of the problems I’ve mentioned have injured or in a few cases, killed a child. I’m sorry to say this, but you people have blood on your hands.”

“I say...” Granville began.

“No, sir, please let me continue,” Jeremy went on. “In every case that resulted in an injury or death, it could have been predicted. We’ll show you how we came to that conclusion soon, but before we do, I need to cover the issues of fairness and the lack of universality in applying the Program’s objectives to all pupils in Britain. First, it’s supposed to be part of the standard curriculum in the country. But not all pupils get to participate; a lot will leave school after their GCSEs at 16 years old and won’t ever be in the Program.

“Also, pupils who attend independent and non-state schools don’t have to participate; that’s maybe 30 percent of the whole country’s pupils. Next, have you ever thought of the pupils at all

of England's single-sex schools? There are more than 400 of them. How could the objectives of the Program apply to them? Are you actually going to try to encourage or even force those children into homosexual contact?... No, please, don't interrupt."

Granville was red-faced but held his indignation while a few of the group, including all of the MPs, smiled weakly.

"Then, in a lot of cases, many state schools will never get to have every pupil participate. A lot of pupils could be missed. But pupils who never get called to participate will leave secondary schools unscathed by Program excesses; this is a fundamental unfairness. If someone is selected and refuses, he potentially gets penalized somehow while if someone never gets called, they get home free. Only a very small fraction of the country's pupils will ever participate. The number, as best as I could reckon, is between 22 to 28 percent of all pupils leaving secondary school. How does that meet the objectives of the Program? Okay, I'm going to ask Amelia to discuss some issues which you apparently never considered in designing the Program, and then I'll be back to go over human rights laws as applied to the Program. Amelia?"

Granville spoke now. "Mr Porter. Please. Before we leave your topics, I have to take issue with your implication that we're responsible for children's deaths or promoting homosexuality. That isn't..."

Kevin rose. "Dr Granville, the record speaks for itself. You may not think you're responsible, but anyone with a shred of common sense, in reading the news reports, can connect the dots. You didn't *intend* that events would unfold as they did, but they did, and the public places the blame exactly with those responsible."

"But how can you say that the public is holding the Program responsible for those terrible incidents? It was never proven..." Granville began, but an MP, face flushed, interrupted.

"It's bloody happening, Mr Granville, and blokes in my constituency are ringing my office about it every day! They want Parliament to stop the kids' deaths!"

Granville dropped his head. "We do hear about that, sir," he said. "Mr Porter. Returning to your other assertion. The Program definitely does not promote homosexuality. In fact it's not operating in any single-sex school as of now. We did attempt to require boys' and girls' schools to pair up and merge some of their classes, possibly a day or two a week, to allow the Program to function but legal problems prevent doing that." He looked at Eldridge. "Explain the legal problem, please."

Eldridge nodded. "In virtually every single-sex school, combining classes of boys and girls, even temporarily, violates the schools' charters. None of the schools' governors have been inclined to change their charters, even if it were a simple thing to do. So far we haven't been able to design a version of the Program so it can be implemented properly in a boys' or girls' school. Mr Porter is entirely correct. Program participation will miss a great majority of our pupil population."

Jeremy stood again. "Thank you for that info. It emphasizes some of the points I was trying to

make. When this law was written, little thought was given to how it would work in real life, and the rules given to the schools are even worse than the law itself, in how they are applied.”

“But...” Granville began.

Kevin rose again and motioned Jeremy to sit. “Dr Granville, please, we need to move on with our presentation; we can’t let this meeting become a debate or we’ll get nothing done tonight. Please, may Miss Hadad proceed?”

Granville clenched his fists and nodded jerkily.

Amelia stood up and looked at the group, then clasped her hands behind her. “I won’t try to be as nice to you people as Jeremy was, since you allowed some absolutely terrible things to be done to girls in the name of social engineering, ‘cuz that’s what you’ve been trying to do—to treat children like robots and turn them into little building blocks who’ll conform to a uniform idea of sexual morality, to try to make a perfectly uniform and *immoral* society,” she smiled at them sweetly.

“But people and cultures are different and shouldn’t—no, can’t—all be forced to conform to a single moral standard!” she spat. “You ran the Program for two years on a pilot basis in some small schools to test it out. Probably you were trying to see how much resistance you would get from the kids and parents. Well, the pilot schools were all rural and suburban. The population in those schools was as homogeneous as it’s possible to get in the U.K.

“Why is that a significant oversight? Well, how many minorities were in those schools? You’re aware that Muslims, the observant ones, wear head coverings and that’s not a fashion statement. Their faiths require modesty; it’s a fundamental tenet of their religion and culture, and the Program tries to strip their faith and community away along with their clothes. A Muslim girl who is humiliated like that can lose the right to marry respectably; she can become an outcast; she can even lose her life, and you certainly *must know* that some have—as a result of being stripped naked in school.

“The incident that the head mentioned here at Norwich last month illustrates a different major problem. The other girl who was assaulted, and she was injured more than I was, was a victim of FGM, you know what that is? Good. Were there girls with FGM in your pilot schools? Of course not, statistically there couldn’t be. Here at Norwich, the group of girls who were working on the anti-FGM publicity with me found seventeen girls who admitted to having the cutting. That number actually matches the London average for this borough as published by the Home Office, about 4 percent of the girls. In the districts where the pilot schools are, the prevalence of FGM is half of a percent, which works out to fewer than one girl per school. So the pilot Program never encountered a girl with the mutilation.

“Tell me, you’re supposed to be the experts, if you know what’s been done to girls with FGM, how is the Program supposed to, quote, ‘help you become more comfortable with your body and your sexuality,’ unquote, and how they can be treated as, quote, ‘sexual beings,’ unquote? Do you realize the pain these girls will suffer if their privates are groped, prodded, and probed, as the

Program requires? And are you aware of the infections they *routinely* get ‘cuz of their mutilated genitals? Even normal girls can get a bad infection from boys groping them with their dirty hands; think of the horrors a mutilated girl would suffer. According to the Home Office, there are about 10,000 girls, aged fifteen and under, living with the mutilation in this country. The mutilations those girls were subjected to were *intended* to completely destroy their sexuality! Tell me, how can the Program help them to become quote, sexual beings, unquote?

“The mutilation of a young girl by cutting out her external genitalia is nothing less than torture, but so is subjecting *any* girl to the unwilling sexual abuse of having her private body parts used for a boy’s pleasure. Physical damage can and does occur, but so does psychological damage and both can be lifelong. Denise’ll talk about that later. But my message is this: just like FGM is intended to destroy sexual response in girls, the Program is intended to attempt to *augment* their sexual response in very unhealthy ways. And both are invasive, destructive, and misguided attempts at social engineering to mold the girl into something she is not, and both have lifetime consequences. Remember: the Program is another form of child torture, just like FGM.

“Now Jeremy will discuss the Program from a human rights and legal point of view.”

The adults just sat there looking grim, like they had been hit with the worst possible news, as Jeremy rose to speak again.

“Yeah, as Amelia said, both *are* truly torture. We all agree that torture is a human rights violation, but how can we say that the Program is like torture? To get there, we need to look at a few policies, regulations, and laws which existed long before the Program came along.

“First up are the pupil handbooks which every school has. They all say virtually the same things in them about behavior and I’ll show you some typical handbook rules on this slide.”

He projected the slide, which read:

*Statements Found in a Sample of Twenty Pupil Handbooks*

- We expect pupils to show courtesy to others. Courtesy is demonstrating polite behavior; that you have excellent manners and social conduct. We expect you to be courteous to all other members of the school community and visitors to our school. Behave with integrity and demonstrate courtesy at all times.
- Every pupil has an equal right to feel safe and valued. We do not expect any pupil to feel upset, scared or unhappy about coming to school or being in school.
- You do not have the right to touch anybody else or their personal belongings. This means you keep your hands and feet to yourself. Respect the personal space of others and keep any contact to a minimum, unless you are helping or supporting another pupil or friend.

“How do these principles of behavior or a safe school environment translate in a school with the Program? Obviously they’re inoperative. The Program demands discourteous behavior because

pupils are told that they must force other pupils to submit to their Reasonable Requests; the Program expects participants to allow that discourteous behavior, even if they object to it. Teachers routinely humiliate pupils in the Program—the curricula they are given *by your office* demands this humiliation. How does this engender respect for the school’s teachers? These issues show a fundamental disregard of courtesy, teaching us that courtesy is an empty word. And I’ll guarantee that you won’t find many kids who aren’t scared to go to school if the threat of the Program is hanging over them.

“Okay now, moving to national policy. Here’s a slide showing an excerpt from the U.K. ‘Education Policy Guide.’

Various religions and beliefs require their adherents to conform to a particular dress code, or to otherwise outwardly manifest their belief. Some religions require adherents to wear or carry specific religious artefacts, others may hold a belief that they should not cut their hair, and a number of religions require their followers to dress modestly, for example, by wearing loose fitting clothing, or covering their head.

“From this you see that minority rights for personal appearance are recognized by the Department for Education, including the acknowledgment of the need for some cultures to dress modestly. Obviously, with the Program, this education policy *of your own department* is brushed aside and rendered meaningless, because some pupils’ right to modesty mandated by this policy is completely ignored.

“Now we’ll move to laws. On the Department for Education website, we noticed this statement: ‘A school must have regard to its obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998.’ So we looked up that law and here’s an excerpt of some significant sections:

*Schedule 1, Part I, Article 8:*

1. Everyone has the right of respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society ... for the ... protection of health or morals...

*Part II, Article 2:*

No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.

“You can see again, that the observing of private beliefs are enshrined in the law as are religious and moral convictions...”

“Excuse me, young man,” Mr Eldridge, the Program committee solicitor, interrupted, “that item

states ‘private and family life’ but the Program is run in schools, not in private.”

“That’s a very narrow and limited interpretation of the term ‘private,’ sir,” Jeremy rejoined. “I want you to notice that it says ‘private *and family* life.’ Not ‘private family life.’ That shows that the two are considered distinct and unrelated. That also means that ‘private’ must be understood as being something different from ‘not public’ and one carries his private life wherever he goes, even to school. Also, ‘private’ has a whole range of connotations; I’m sure you’re familiar with the term ‘privates’ or ‘private parts.’ That’s the genitals. The body parts that aren’t supposed to be seen by the public.”

Chuckles from the group.

He went on, “We’re fully justified to read that item in the law to mean that one’s privates deserve respect, that is, not subject to public exposure, let alone groping. I’m sure a judge or jury would agree; it’s basic common sense, after all. By the way, the exact same wording is found in the Council of Europe’s ‘Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms’ in Article 8. The U.K. is a party to that convention. Since we’ve moved into human rights and international law, let’s continue there. My next few slides are excerpts from a United Nations treaty. It’s a treaty which the U.K. has signed, the ‘Treaty on the Rights of the Child.’

Article 3 Section 2: Parent/guardian: ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being...

Article 5: States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.

Article 14, Section 1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Article 16, Section 1. No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.

Section 2. The child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 19, Section 1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Article 34: States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

Article 36: States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.

“Notice that the parent or guardian is charged with determining what is proper for the child, not the state or school. Also refer to the treaty’s prohibition of sexual exploitation and abuse. The Program objectives specifically state that part of the goals are sexual in nature and not only does official abuse occur, so does exploitation. The Program is intended to mold—you can read that as ‘exploit’—children to achieve the state’s special societal goal. That’s exploitation.

“That’s enough on human rights now. The next area is criminal law. Using force on children is a violation of the Children Act 2004.”

Jeremy displayed that slide.

“That same prohibition can be found in the education code of laws too, in the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Here’s a slide of that part of the law:

#### Section 93

Reasonable force can be used to prevent pupils from hurting themselves or others, from damaging property, or from causing disorder. Reasonable means using no more force than is needed.

Examples of situations where reasonable force can and cannot be used. Schools can use reasonable force to control disruptive children in cases where a risk to the child’s or another’s safety or health would occur or stop behaviour that disrupts the behaviour of others. Schools cannot use force as a punishment.

“Related to use of force are laws that cover the use of restraints; the Program booklet talks about using handcuffs on children but your legal people never thought to check your law codes, like the Education Act 1996, Section 550A which is titled ‘The Use of Force to Control or Restrain Pupils,’ which specifically doesn’t allow restraints.”

He displayed that slide.

“The Program book says the school officials may cut a pupil’s hair if it is used for concealment of their nudity. One could argue, probably successfully too, that this is a violation of the Human Rights Act 1998 which establishes important protections from abuse by state organizations or employees. Article 3 prohibits ‘torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.’ For a young teen girl, cutting their hair would definitely fit as a ‘degrading treatment’ violation.

“And finally, there’s the general criminal code, the Criminal Justice Act 1988, which covers assault and battery as crimes. Now, how did the government, with all of its legal resources and plenty of solicitors, fail to see all of the places where the Program violates so many existing laws?”

There was a smattering of applause and one of the MPs exclaimed, “Young man, that was a masterful survey of the legal codes. Mr, um, Eldridge, is it? Yes. If a secondary school pupil

could tear apart your Program rules like that, what does it say about the care your group takes with its other duties?”

“We’ll have to look into all of Mr Porter’s legal citations, sir,” Granville broke in. “And Miss Hadad’s information too. Apparently our staff didn’t consider those issues—they’ve never been raised before.”

Amelia raised her hand. “Sir, that’s what Jeremy meant when he said that we’d show you how those problems could have been prevented. Almost every one of them happened because no one looked at the existing laws when they designed the Program.”

Kevin stood up. “Amelia’s spot on, you know. And we Yanks weren’t immune from the idiocy either. Every bad thing that happened here, happened there, except for the tragedies involving the Muslim girls, and I suspect we were just fortunate that such things never came up. Now Denise will tell you about some studies which examined the societal effects of the Program in the U.S.”

Denise stood. “Hi there. I’ll follow the precedent set at our meeting’s start and jump right into my topics. It seems to me to be patently clear that when the authorities in the U.K. decided to run the Program here, they simply copied everything from the U.S. version and tweaked it in places to use the Queen’s English and British terminology. But you folks never noticed, when you copied the U.S. version of the Program booklet, that some of the rules in it didn’t quite match up with your Parliamentary act. No matter; once you had adapted those Program documents, it seems you never looked back at the States to see how our own experiment was faring.

“I’ll describe two retrospective studies which were published, one in a peer-reviewed article in a well-known education journal, and another as a sociological survey in a university journal. The data for both studies came from self-reporting of Program participants and teachers in schools which were running the Program. The data sets were sufficiently large to allow the results to have a very high degree of confidence. These slides show the effect of the Program on average student academic performance, by classes, not individuals.”

Number of classes where academic performance was analyzed: 487 in 373 schools

Program severity: There was a wide difference in the Program climate across these schools, ranging from poor staff control resulting in abusive treatment of students to tight, orderly Program operation where few students suffered traumatizing consequences. A scale of 1 to 5, a “Program Severity Index,” was developed, based on the stringency of student compulsion and other negative factors the reporting teachers had identified, where 5 represented the greatest degree of student distress at that school and 1 the least.

Analysis of the results showed little correlation between “severity index” and change in student grades; most grades changed the same amount regardless of the “severity index.”

The study’s result showed that the national average decline in grades for students in schools running the Program was 9.8 percentage points.

This decline is equivalent in most schools to almost a full letter grade: for the overall

grades nationwide, where a B average existed before the Program, it became a C average under the Program.

The study's conclusion was that the Program produced significant damage to the students' academic performance, even if they never participated by being forced to be naked. The performance of the entire class declined as a group.

“So you can see the dramatic effects of the Program on academic performance overall. Not only were the dubious Program objectives called into question, the negative effect on student academic performance was quite clear. Yes, you have a question?”

“Yes. How were the data collected?”

“As I said, self reporting and surveys. Basically a survey was sent to teachers in a large number of schools. They reported their class grades for the same subjects in the year before the Program began and in the year or two following when it was running. The study protocol was analyzed and vetted by Avery's School of Education faculty, so it was properly designed. Okay? Good.

“The next item is a study on social costs to the country. We can argue about how much children are affected by the Program, but is there a societal cost? This study investigated that question. There were 37,482 narrative reports of Program incidents which were analyzed and grouped into seven social categories. These slides show a summary of the results.”

Categories: suicides or attempts, rapes and assaults, hospitalizations for psychological reasons, professional medical treatment for injuries, usage of medications for psychological or emotional support, teacher and staff maltreatment of Program students, and arrests or other legal action for other Program problems.

Results and discussion:

Three suicides and eleven attempts. Inconclusive for many reasons because of the reporting method. However, national data showed that the suicide rate among teens went from about 11 per 100,000 in the years before the Program began, to about 15 per 100,000 starting in the year after the Program was running. This might imply a 35 percent increase in teen suicides.

Rapes and assaults. 632 actual prosecutions for rape; 13,588 assaults. For rapes, this represented ten to fifteen times greater than the general population and over fifty times greater among high-school students. Might be under-reported since some rapes could have been plea-dealt to sexual assault. Lesser sexual assaults occurred at a rate about eighty times greater than the matched demographic in the general population (high-school age).

Psychological hospitalizations. 6,247 cases. This represented a rate of about fifty-five times greater than the matched demographic.

Medical treatment not included in above. 9,873 cases. Included items like internal injuries

or infections caused by sexual molestation of genitals or rectum, reactions to the mandatory Shot, sports injury from being forced to play sports while nude without protective gear, cold exposure, etc. Difficult to match with national data but at least double the injury rate in the demographic, a 100 percent increase.

Usage of psychotropic medications. 1,267 reports. Students taking anti-anxiety medications to get them through their Program week; not included in psychological category above. Can't be reliably nationally matched, but if one assumes zero need in the absence of the Program, this is an almost 1300-fold increase.

Teacher/staff abuse. 15,387 reports. Not tracked for national comparisons because such behavior rarely becomes public; cases are settled and closed with no publicity.

Other legal actions. 8,862 reports. Not tracked since there is no comparability to other non-Program social issues.

“You can clearly see the huge, huge cost to society created when the Program is running,” Denise continued. “Even if half of these reports are discounted, the costs would still be staggering, and statisticians have examined these results and declared that they are valid. Think of the increased medical expenses that the country and the victim have to bear. Think of the legal costs that must be covered—for prosecution as well as plaintiff or defense. Think of the long-term psychological damage the victim has to bear which will also have an effect on society as a whole. The study's authors didn't try to quantify these costs, but later attempts by others put a monetary price tag on these social problems in the range of two to three *billion* dollars over a five-year period. And the Program only ran in the U.S. for about five years, with the first year being at only a few schools.

“I think that as soon as the British public learns about these costs, you Parliament members will have to disconnect your phones and email; you might even be lynched for passing that act,” she joked.

Kevin rose again. “This is the information we plan to widely publicize, in addition to our going to court to end this annoying Program impasse which your Committee had created.” He pointed to the screen. “Think of the public's reaction to learning about all of the terrible things your ill-advised and poorly researched Program has done to your country's children and to their health and to the general economy. Tell me, what would happen to your government? Precipitate a new election? Then what happens to your political offices and to your jobs? Consider what your choices are here, people.”

As he returned to his seat, the Program Committee members, stunned and stony-faced, were staring at the screen. Then Granville looked around. The MPs were glaring at him.

“Mr Eldridge, I don't recall that any economic analysis was done...” he began.

“Bugger that!” called one of the MPs. “Erm... sorry for the outburst. This... this... god, what a disaster. Miss... uh... Roberts. You hit right where it hurts us politicians, right in the public's pocketbook. Is there any chance those numbers could be wrong?”

“Well,” Denise mused, “maybe it wouldn’t be so severe here. We’ve got a far more litigious society over there, you know. Lots of people tend to be libertarian in philosophy, too, much more than here. Most Brits are very stoic. Perhaps you won’t get lots of lawsuits. But medical and psychological—just look at the newspapers for the past year and see the number of abuse cases that the tabloids are reporting. I’d say you’d still have a high price tag if the Program goes on as it’s been going. Could your medical and legal resources adjust to accommodate an eighty-fold increase in sexual assaults and a fifty-five-fold increase in psychological admissions and long-term care?”

A lot of somber faces stared at the screen as Denise pointed to those items.

“Bloody...” muttered a MP. “I’m putting in for an investigation of the DfE over this rot.”

The other MPs nodded. One asked, “Where does this leave us now?”

All eyes in the room turned to look at Kevin as he stood again.

## Chapter 15

Kevin spoke, “All right, we saved this part of our presentation for the last because after that death-blow Denise just administered to the viability of your Program, we’ve got what perhaps could be a lifeline. You folks on the Program Committee couldn’t offer a way to do the Program here at Norwich Academy basically because there *isn’t* one. I asked this question before: what do you think would happen if the information we just presented became public. I’m also sure that the publicity surrounding a trial wouldn’t make the DfE look so good, am I right?”

The people around the table nodded solemnly.

“Also consider the number of arrests of school personnel during the last week—one of the tabloids is even running a tabulation chart now; I’m sure you’ve seen it. Today it stood at 63 arrests of teachers and administrators for sexual abuse, and the numbers rise daily, don’t they? Don’t think that your government offices will protect you folks from finding yourselves in the legal crosshairs, too, unless you take immediate and decisive action to stop all of that Program abuse. And my team here might just have a way to help you keep from getting buried in a legal and political morass. Shall I present our plan?”

Now the committee members and the MPs were calling for Kevin to continue.

“This will take a bit of time to present because the background is complicated. We are dealing with a discredited social-educational program which not only fails to achieve its objectives, it injures its subjects. My team just showed you the proof of that statement. But what if we try to take off the blinders and look at the Program’s objectives in a completely different way? Have a paradigm shift?

“You all probably have the text shown on this slide memorized. It’s from the Program booklet introduction and a paraphrase of the preamble to the Human Sexuality Promotion Act. But I’ll put it on the screen anyway; these are viewed as the Program’s kind-of ‘objectives’ but they aren’t that really, they’re more a statement of principle.

The Program has been carefully designed to help you become more comfortable with your body and your sexuality, to treat others in natural balance as both individual people and sexual beings, to learn to harness your natural energies, and to behave in a more mature and morally conscious manner. By becoming more comfortable with your body and sexuality, it is hoped that your sexual tensions will be in general diminished but more focused when appropriate. This is your opportunity for rapid personal growth.

“Nowhere in those principles do I see the word ‘nude’ or ‘naked.’ If you do, please show it to me. ‘Sexual’ does not mean ‘naked.’ Most animate life, vertebrates in particular, are ‘sexual beings.’ They are by definition, because they come in two sexes. Notice that the wording distinguishes between ‘individual people’ and ‘sexual beings’ as if these are two discrete, independent entities. Wrong, wrong. Life is much more complex; let me illustrate. Humans reproduce through a process called ‘sexual reproduction.’ We all know that; a male and female are both required to produce a child. Certain animals much further down on the evolutionary

scale can reproduce asexually—they produce offspring without another parent’s genetic contribution. Can anyone in the room tell me if *asexual* reproduction can occur in *humans*?”

There were many blank stares, then Dr Seetis ventured, “Well, human gametes are haploid, they only have half of the needed chromosomes... don’t you need the chromosomes from both male and female gametes? I don’t see how...?”

Kevin grinned at her. “What about identical twins, triplets, or larger multiples?”

“I... ah! Of course! Binary fission is a form of asexual reproduction.” She turned to the others. “The zygote—from the fertilized ovum—splits into two, or even more, they develop, making two or more babies from one single fertilized egg cell. There’s only one fertilized egg cell but it becomes one of what’s called the ‘daughter’ cells,” she explained.

Kevin went on. “Precisely. My point is that in life, nothing can be pigeon-holed. We are all sexual beings but sometimes, and not infrequently, we can reproduce asexually. Another pigeon-holed social issue mentioned in the Program principles is ‘morally conscious’ behavior. Whose morals are we choosing to emulate? Different cultures harbor different sets of moral values and legally imposing one group’s moral or cultural values on another is a form of totalitarianism. And so, out of such dictatorial roots, sprang the Program.

“The major source of the idea for a naked-in-school program seems to come from two academic fields, psychology and sociology, and some ideas from these fields were merged to address a theorized social problem. Adults seem to think that most of society’s ills can be cured by fixing the problems of adolescents, so academics spend lots of time studying youth to see where some tinkering can be done to solve their problems, believing that any good effect will carry on to adulthood. I found an article from 2004 by a professor from a university near mine, Georgia State, S. Talburt was her name, who said that people in general have a fixation on the need for adults to watch over and guide teens to achieve progress in socialization because adults tend to project onto teens their own desires and expectations—and also anxieties. In fact, lots of researchers use the term ‘dangerous passage’ to describe adolescence, since society views this age group as being susceptible to many kinds of temptations and negative influences, especially where sexuality is involved. So this became an area of social concern, giving rise to the idea to channel teenagers into a controlled environment where their sexuality could be shaped into some kind of standard. That’s what the Program’s statement of principles seems to try to establish: a social goal.

“The way I read these principles tells me that their author is attempting to use language that advocates the breaking down of artificial social barriers. This author wants the subjects of his social program, our children, to connect with the essential being of their peers and to learn how to interact with them in constructive ways. This suggests that there is something of an existentialist philosophy operating in those words of principle.

“Let’s explore that idea. According to the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, interpersonal relationships don’t operate through rational thought. He suggests that in a face-to-face encounter,

one person feels or senses the other person addressing him, not as a physical entity, but as an abstraction of thought. In his work *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas imagines the other person not as an individual but an idea—an expression connoting defenselessness, vulnerably, and yes, even a form of nudity, which is concealed by the cloaking of social convention and normal propriety. In his view, such interpersonal encounters demand one’s attention and in some way burdens the two individuals with a form of responsibility for one another.

“So in interacting with other people, we assume a certain responsibility toward them, in Levinas’ view. We actually can feel this connection, a kind of bonding, especially if the conversation becomes intense, in our interactions with others. Then the barriers which divide the two interacting people tend to drop, revealing the uncloaked essence, the nakedness, of each other. This is the ‘nakedness’ that the principles of the Naked in School Program seems to refer to. It’s the nakedness that results from the exposure of one’s essential being to another by sharing interactions.

“Jean-Paul Sartre is another existentialist who used nakedness as a metaphor for the exposure of one’s vulnerabilities. Sartre’s views on nudity have been thoroughly discussed by many authors; it’s well known that he was most uncomfortable with his own body. In fact, he expressed his belief that people lose their tie to civilization when their clothes are removed. His lover Simone de Beauvoir wrote in her book *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*, that he told her ‘In disrobing, one leaves behind not only one’s clothes, but also civilization itself.’ That is clearly seen in the case of children, who are not yet fully civilized in that their impulse control is not yet fully developed, when faced with a naked, vulnerable child and given free license to take physical liberties with him or her, tend to react in ways which result in humiliation, persecution, and even physical abuse. William Golding exploited this very idea in his novel *Lord of the Flies*.

“Sartre even discussed voyeurism in his book *Being and Nothingness*. He described how the watching of a naked person who has no control over being observed not only constitutes a power imbalance over the naked person but also objectifies them in the most extreme way. From this Sartre deduced that this voyeurism somehow then affects one’s own concept of his own person, his existence, in ways he can’t control. This idea, observing and being observed, is a main theme of his play *No Exit*. In the play, Hell is not physical torture; it’s actually the pain caused to the naked male protagonist by his being forced to ‘see,’ in French, *voix*, thus ‘voyeur,’ the nudity of his two naked female companions and for him to realize that they must ‘see’ his own nudity as well. Sartre feels that this objectifying ‘seeing’ destabilizes human relationships and, indeed, that’s precisely what happens among high-school children when they are placed into situations where this imbalance of the watcher-controller person and the observed-objectified person occurs. It’s actually psychologically damaging for both parties and Sartre’s insight shows us why the objectified person can suffer a kind of hell.”

“Mr Coris, I must interrupt,” Dunton broke in. “Just what is your background? That is one of the most insightful analyses of some difficult works from a major philosophical school—existentialism—I’ve ever heard as applied to a practical social problem. You seem to be too young to have an advanced degree, but your analysis was compelling and shows a real depth

of knowledge. I teach education at my university and I'm sure my colleagues in philosophy would love to hear your ideas."

"Sir, I'm a senior at Avery University in Atlanta. I took several philosophy courses and became interested in existentialism, so I'm familiar with Sartre's and Levinas' work. I think it was the way they viewed the human body and my opposition to the Program, that got my interest. Then I thought of the connection between their views of public nudity and the Program problems we had in the States when preparing for our meeting tonight. May I continue?"

"Hmpf. I wish just one or two of our own students were as erudite as you. Please proceed."

Kevin resumed his lecture. "The Program was supposed to be based on academic research which supports the idea that being 'sexually balanced,' if such a thing exists, results in 'personal growth.' I'm completely unclear what it is exactly that is supposed to grow, though."

Chuckles sounded.

"But I and my friends, who looked hard for details, could never find any such studies, just reports of naked encounter groups which sprang up during the sexual revolution, lasted through the mid 1980s, and gradually disappeared, at least reports of them in the psychological literature did. Reports from participants spoke of how they became more open and accepting of other people, how their personal horizons were expanded, and how good the sessions made them feel. I wonder though, if it was not the nudity but was really the pharmacologic assistance which was typical of these groups, that helped with their expanded horizons."

Laughter.

"Anyway. The next academic work I'd like to mention is a study of the effects of sexuality—not necessarily nudity—on the perceptions of the validity of a social cause. There were several papers published on this topic but the one I want to mention in particular is called 'When Sex Doesn't Sell: Using Sexualized Images of Women Reduces Support for Ethical Campaigns.' The title says it all. The authors, Renata Bongiorno and two co-authors, sought to determine whether images in these ads improves the acceptance of the cause. A large number of subjects, men and women, many of college age, were interviewed. The authors first interviewed their subjects to learn the extent that the subject supported the goals of the cause. Then they showed ads which contained images of naked or almost-naked supermodels along with the models' statement of their support for the cause. After showing the ads, the researchers asked each subject how strongly they perceived the credibility of the model as a spokesperson for the cause. This slide shows the authors' conclusion as published in their article.

Overall, these findings are the first to demonstrate that sexualized images that dehumanize women reduce concern for ethical behavior in a domain unrelated to gender relations and sex. This extends research showing that women's dehumanization is associated with increased tolerance for unethical behavior towards women—specifically men's attitudes towards sexual harassment and rape. These findings open the way for further research to explore whether similarly negative effects would occur if sexualized

images of women were used to sell [any] ethical causes... for instance, in promoting action to address poverty.

“It was interesting that similar results were obtained from both male and female subjects; their sex had little to do with their opinion. What message can we draw from this study? Possibly that viewing unclothed subjects, when one is not similarly unclothed, may tend to objectify and dehumanize the subject. When that occurs, it’s a short step to self-justification for the abuse of the vulnerable person, and the conditions in schools provide just those opportunities. Small wonder for the statistics showing the large number of assaults which Denise covered earlier.

“Going back to my original premise, how can we achieve the principles stated in the introduction to the Program booklet? Without bringing nudity into the mix, that is. This was a question which one of our close friends wrestled with when she was assigned a class project in her college education program. This was a problem which was difficult to work on, since the Program had recently been discontinued at the local high schools, but the professor was unwilling to change the topic since all of the topics had been screened and approved by the curriculum committee in the education school. Now I’ll show you some brief video clips of the program her group designed. It incorporates all of the Naked in School Program principles without the need for nudity.”

Kevin started the video player program on his laptop and began narrating the scenes.

“These scenes take place in the late spring. The children were eighth graders who would be entering high school in the fall and came from three feeder middle schools. Most kids didn’t know each other,” he said as he started the video.

The scene showed children filing into a room and looking around.

A voice instructed, “Please go to a mat and sit down, six people to a mat.”

The scene shifted; mats on the floor in the room were filled with seated children.

The voice called out again, “How cool; I see boys hanging with boys and girls with girls. Wonder why. Oh, I’ll bet you all wanted to sit near someone you were most comfortable with.”

Some children laughed in the video as Kevin spoke, “This is the ice-breaker period. We used light humor with the kids, who were nervous.”

A new voice spoke. “I’ll also bet each of you know someone else on the same mat you’re sitting on. Am I right?”

There was a chorus of yeses.

“And some kids you don’t know too. Right?”

More yeses.

A man walked into the camera’s view now and stood in the middle of the mats. “Well, guess what? In a few short months you’ll be in high school; you’ll be in the big leagues. But in high

school you'll meet batches of new people, all potential friends. How will you find new friends? How will you know how to meet new people and become friends with them? Today we'll begin to show you a little about making connections with the kids who'll become your new friends. I want you all to move into a circle on your mats, facing inward. Take the hands of the kids on each side of you. Now, one person on each mat begin and start telling your new friends on your mat your name, age, and your middle school; going around the circles."

Kevin paused the video. "Notice we used touch right at the start. Body contact is absolutely essential to these bonding techniques. Now watch what happens next as we throw a little uncertainty at the group." He restarted the video.

A woman walked into the circle of mats, took both of the man's hands, and admonished him, "Don't hog your time with these kids! I want a turn too!" and jokingly pushed him out of the circle as the kids laughed.

Then she held up a card. "See this? You got one like it when you came in. Find your card." The kids dug their cards out from wherever they had put them. "See the number? Look up at the ceiling—there are numbers up there! A number over each mat. Go to the mat which matches your number and sit down."

The scene shifted; kids were seated on their new mats. The woman spoke again. "Hey guys, look at what happened. Three boys and three girls on each mat. It's like magic! You don't think?"

There was some laughing and some uncomfortable shifting around.

"Now boys. See the blue dots on the mats? Sit on one. Girls, move to sit facing a boy on your mat. Uh uh, not on the opposite side of the mat... Sit closer, closer, good, now take each other's hands in your own and look at your new friend. Or maybe not new; this could be an old friend too. Now introduce yourselves as you did a few minutes ago in the circles and this time tell your new friend something about yourself, like a sibling or a pet or a favorite music group."

Kevin paused the video. "Notice how reluctantly they began holding hands when it became one-on-one compared to when they were in a circle. We've stepped up the intimacy a hundred-fold just by isolating couples."

He resumed it and the scene jumped slightly. The couples were sitting fairly close now and the woman was speaking.

"Now, both girls and boys, close your eyes and keep them closed. I want the girls first, reach out and take your partner's hands; touch them all over—palms, fingers, wrists, backs. Get to know their hands. Run your fingers and palms all over them, as much as you want, and try to memorize how they feel."

As the children began doing that, Kevin remarked, "It's a theater trick. It helps actors who have to play an intimate scene to break the ice. The hands are a major erogenous zone and this exercise is actually very powerful. Listen closely to the video."

On the video, the girls were stroking their hands over the boys' hands as they were told and within a minute little sighs of pleasure from the children became audible. Then the scene changed; now the boys were stroking the girls' hands. The woman began speaking again and there were sounds of disappointment from the children.

“Don't open your eyes yet; keep holding hands. Boys, keeping your eyes shut tight, no peeking! tell your partner something about what you noticed about her. What she's wearing, about her hair, how her hands feel.”

Kevin spoke over the video, “Then the girls get to tell the boys something about them. But look at the body language now.”

The children were leaning into each other and some were almost close enough to embrace. Hand holding was now mostly replaced with stroking partners' hands and forearms as the children whispered to each other. Kevin stopped the video.

“I edited out our instructors' demonstration of how to sit very close, so in this next scene from a few minutes later, you'll note how kids who were strangers fifteen minutes ago are now acting like they've been friends for years.”

He restarted the video. Now some couples sat facing each other, cross-legged, knees touching, while others were sitting with their legs spread and the girl's legs lying across the boy's. Their chests were within a foot of each other. Their forearms were resting on each other's shoulders, arms touching along their lengths, looking into each other's eyes.

The man was at the center of the mats now and he spoke. “Close your eyes, everyone, and lean closer and listen to your new friend's breathing for a minute.” The video played for twenty seconds and then shifted. “Now, still keeping your eyes closed, let's have each boy whisper to his new friend what he thinks the scariest part of high school will be. It's all right to tell her, even though we all know that there's nothing that can really scare a boy, right?” The children broke out in laughter. “Guys, since nothing scares you, then tell her something about high school that has you, well, just a bit *concerned*, okay? Girls, I want you to remember that what your friend tells you is a total secret, okay?”

There was a lot more laughter.

The woman's voice was heard from off camera. “Okay, that's great; now gals, eyes still closed, tell your friend something to make him feel better, more confident, how you can help him, or why he shouldn't be concerned.”

The whispering was now very animated and most couples were virtually in an embrace. Kevin let the scene play for about thirty seconds, and then it shifted again. The woman was speaking.

“Very good, now everyone, still eyes closed, let's switch roles and girls, tell your friend about something about high school that you might find scary.”

Kevin paused it again and his audience sighed in disappointment. He winked at Denise and she

smiled back. The people in the room, to a person, were thoroughly enthralled, sitting on the edges of their seats.

Kevin went on, “In this next scene the boys are telling the girls not to worry and how they would help them and I’ll point to some children you’ll want to look at carefully.”

He started the scene and pointed to a few girls, in sequence, and the viewers around the table could see tears in some of their eyes while the susurrations of the children’s voices sounded gently in the background.

“Let me jump ahead a few minutes; we’re almost at the end of this round,” Kevin remarked. “At this point in the session, the children were asked to tell each other about the happiest thing that ever happened to them, their favorite music group, song, best holiday they ever had, all kinds of happy things.”

He started the video. Now the girls were sitting between the boys’ legs, their backs were resting against the boys’ chests and their heads were leaning together, while they held and stroked each other’s hands and were whispering to each other. It was a powerful, intimate scene. Kevin stopped the video.

“So that’s our bonding process,” he said very softly, and the people in the room leaned back as one and exhaled in a long, deep sigh.

“My goodness,” sighed Mrs Stokeston, “that was very intense. I never saw anything quite so moving in a school. Is that video available?”

“I’m really sorry,” Kevin said. “The videos are part of our raw research data and we don’t have parental releases; I trust you understand. Denise and I were contributors to the work and instructors in this program so we were able to get the DVD set with the assurance it wouldn’t be further disseminated; the scenes I showed were from where we were teaching the actual teachers how to do the bonding class. This was a recording of a class session late in the study; the research team—we were all college students—developed the program and taught it as a demonstration project. This particular class I showed is only a small part of the entire program; it’s the ice-breaker. If you thought this class was intense, other parts of the program are even more so.

“And that was only round one of the first class; after the last video scene you saw, the children rotated partners and you can only imagine how much grousing that caused! The partners had become very attached. But after ten minutes of working with their next partners, the intimacy level had ramped right back up again.

“I mentioned there are more parts of the program. The other elements cover different social skills. There’s team building for joint, cooperative problem solving, both in a physical education environment and in a classroom setting. There are sessions on trust-building—these involve both verbal and physical trust issues. The verbal part uses role-playing to demonstrate how damaging gossip and rumor-mongering can be to trusting relationships, while the physical part uses something like the bonding exercises you just saw to show girls how to set their personal limits

for intimate contact. This is the most controversial part of the program but preliminary results show a dramatic result—to date no assaults or similar disciplinary problems have been reported among children who have been in this program. Another module, which the kids really enjoy, teaches them basic massage techniques done over their gym clothes or swim suits. It shows the children the joys they can achieve by bringing pleasure to someone else while continuing to develop their understanding of physical trust.

“While we were testing the program, we frequently asked the children about their experiences and they were all extremely enthusiastic; most of the kids wound up becoming very close friends with over half of the groups they were in. In the group from the first year, almost all of the members of that entire class were so close that it was astounding. Teasing, rivalries, bullying, all of the usual high school angst, were almost unknown.

“The study was written up and published. That’s here.” He passed a paper to the group. “This is the project bibliography. All the references for the primary study, followups, and evaluations are also there.”

“Young man,” one of the MPs spoke up, “that was a stunning summary of one of the most moving classes I’ve ever seen. I absolutely, definitely would want my grandchildren to be enrolled in a school that uses that program you developed. Why haven’t we heard about this?”

“I can’t say, sir. Back home, states are so gun-shy about the Program that they’re afraid to try something which, when you read the description, looks very much like the Naked in School Program. I think maybe ten or so school districts around Atlanta are now are trying it. It takes a lot of up-front training to make it work right. To learn it, teachers currently need to go to a school where it’s run to observe. The teachers also have to be sensitive and adaptable.”

Denise broke in. “Kevin, mention about the touch-shy children.”

“Ah, I was about to ask that, Mr Coris,” Dr Seetis interjected. “A significant number of children have difficulty with close touching, let alone showing affection as your video highlighted so admirably. That’s a common developmental problem that we psychologists deal with and can be a symptom of other difficulties in forming intimate relationships as well as other problems. In fact, this was precisely why the Program was started here. Amongst the primary issues which we wanted the Program to address were overcoming the reluctance to accept others’ touch, addressing social anxiety disorders by promoting body acceptance and improving self-image, and creating an environment where trusting relationships could form between the children. I hate to say it, but obviously the Program is failing at achieving all of those things. But getting back to my question—did you encounter children who exhibited a reluctance to be touched by their peers?”

Kevin nodded. “Absolutely. As you said, that’s a real problem. We did have some reluctant kids who resisted close contact. Here’s what we found worked. Adults, as threatening authority figures, virtually never succeed in making breakthroughs. Older peers—a year or two older—we called them ‘mentors’—worked best. It really worked magic when the mentor was a hot, good-

looking guy or gal...”

There were a few chuckles.

“... but we had to be extremely careful not to allow a fixation to develop—in either direction. You might be surprised at this; touch-shy boys were more common and were harder to work with, too. But have a pretty girl take interest in them made them take note. Denise could tell you some very funny stories. Anyway, the boy mentor would work with the reluctant girl and vice versa, first by holding them very loosely and softly urging them to relax and let themselves be touched. Let the shy child take the lead in initiating closer contact. It sometimes took several days, but the joy we saw when the breakthrough happened was wonderful. And then the word gets around and the next touch-shy child is more receptive when he or she sees that the touching poses no threat. There’s no pressure from the mentor and from the group, no teasing. In fact, there’s almost always a lot of group support; the other kids want the reluctant one to feel happy too. The training for doing this is hugely time intensive but the rewards are astounding.”

“Again, I’m staggered by this presentation,” Dr Dunton said, shaking his head. “Academic careers have been built on lesser accomplishments. You said this resulted from a *class assignment*? And it was done without faculty involvement?”

“Yes, sir,” Denise said modestly. “It wasn’t Kevin and me, though, our friend—she lived in an apartment in my mom’s house—it was her idea. We were in the high school where she ran the project and we were the original mentors and created that role. So the part that Kevin and I developed was the protocol for working with the reluctant kids. We got our experience in working with reluctant kids after we got picked to be in the Program. We couldn’t stand seeing how terrified some kids were when they were chosen, so we stepped in and helped them to manage their fears and not panic when they had to get naked and go into the hall for their first time. That gave us a real education in practical psychology and gave us our first insights into how seriously the Program was damaging our youth. It was then that we decided that the Program had to be stopped.”

Hanford laughed. “And they did just that. I checked with their schools in the U.S. and these two people, as teenagers, and three other teens—they all worked very closely together, ended the Program in America.”

Dunton looked at Denise. “The student whose project this was who? Was she one of the five of you who stopped the Program?”

Denise shrugged. “Yeah. Cynthia Denison. She’s totally amazing. She graduated this past spring and is in med school now. She came up with all the ideas for those education studies and this project too, and basically ran it. Kevin and I actually got master’s degree credit for our research and contributions to it while we were still in high school. We remained on the project when we continued on in college, and we’ve already earned a master’s degree in educational program development, but haven’t even gotten our bachelor’s degrees yet,” she giggled.

“What about Miss Denison?” Dunton asked.

“Cindy actually got an Ed.D. along with her bachelor’s. She’ll also get royalties from her program when Avery University publishes the teacher’s materials for it. It’s called the Avery-Denison Program.”

“This is all very fascinating but we need to get back to the reason for this meeting,” Granville interjected. “I would very much like to see how this program would work in...”

“Hear hear,” called two of the MPs, who had been conferring quietly. “We’re willing to support whatever you need to set up such a program,” one remarked.

“Mr Hanford, subject to my superiors, would you be willing to host such a project here?” Granville asked, receiving a nod in response. “Mr Coris, I don’t want to make an unwarranted assumption, but I presume, since you presented this program in such a compelling way, that you would be willing to work to set it up here—again assuming, of course, that you have the rights to do so?”

Kevin nodded. “Yes, sir. That was our intent. If we agree to do this project here, then, will it relieve Mr Hanford from having to run the Naked in School Program?” Granville nodded affirmatively. “Good. Also, as Denise mentioned, this is very teacher-intensive and I don’t know what resources the school has to put toward what will be a major undertaking, since we’ll have to build from basically nothing.”

Abberle spoke up. “I’m afraid we don’t have any uncommitted funds in our treasury...”

Both Granville and Luft spoke at once, “We can get...” Granville motioned to Luft to continue.

“Yes. We can get the funding you need. The Education Funding Agency currently provides your pupils with the bursaries parents use to defray pupil tuitions. We can make grants for projects which improve school curricula. I think that Dr Granville’s agency also provides funding for certain kinds of pilot projects.”

Granville nodded. “I’m not sure how to proceed, then; this is a most unusual route to propose an educational initiative. Studies are proposed by the Department or by university sources...”

Kevin looked at Denise. “In anticipation of our success, Denise was planning to suggest an idea for getting this off the ground.”

“Yes, I guess I’m an optimist and couldn’t see how our presentation could fail,” she grinned.

“Kevin and I were involved from the very beginning of the Avery project, even before it was run in our school. I asked Cindy if she kept her preliminary notes and she did. She kept all of her emails with our principal where she told him all of the plans, including how to set up the room and the materials she needed. I made a list of these, together with some suggested schedules. I’ll get those docs to Mr Hanford.” She turned to him. “Could you work out the costs from lists like that?”

“I don’t see any difficulty,” he replied.

“Okay, that’s the easier part. The staffing part is harder, but my idea may solve a number of

different issues if this project is successful. Let's involve a university ed school, specifically the one I'm attending. I know a number of students there now and they all seem to be intelligent and motivated. If you set up a cooperative program with the dean, Mr Hanford, I'll bet you can get some free committed staffing while they get course credit. Then you get a core cadre of new teachers who've worked with this program going out to their new schools already trained."

Dunton was listening, shaking his head. "What an outstanding idea," he enthused. "I'd love to have some of our students involved, too, but we're a bit too far away. You mentioned, I think, that you attend London Liberal Arts and Ed?"

Denise nodded.

"Have you met the dean, Preston Phillips, then?"

Denise laughed. "I'm afraid that he's the one I had my Program showdown with, actually. When I found that they were running the uni version of the Program..."

"Yes, yes," Dunton grinned. "Of course you met him. We know about that ruckus. Dean Phillips contacted our committee after your, as you say, showdown. Whatever talent it is you have, Miss Roberts, use it judiciously. I think the expression is 'able to sell refrigerators to Eskimos.' Not only did you put him 'in his place' as he put it, as far as not thinking of the effects and risks to his students, you also organized them so effectively that within days, his university's program simply fell apart. Prescriptions for clothing, indeed," he chuckled. "I'm certain Dr Phillips would be interested in your idea. I believe his background is educational psychology. And you'd be the perfect person to sell him on the idea," Dunton finished, laughing. "Serve him right. Bring him full circle, too."

So it was arranged. The group began to break up. The four MPs left first, extracting promises to be kept informed, followed by the Program Committee members, who were sincere in thanking and praising Kevin's group. Dunton was especially enthusiastic, saying that overseeing the Naked in School Program was rapidly becoming a burdensome job for the committee and he wanted to be able to keep in close touch with Denise and the school project.

Kevin asked Granville and Dunton to stay for a minute.

He asked them, "Gentlemen, getting back to what we discussed at the outset of our meeting—the serious legal problems about to become unleashed against your department—you'll need to do some serious damage control, won't you? You'll need to get in front of your problem and set the narrative, else you'll wind up with a pretty nasty situation. You need to take immediate action in all the other schools where the Program is running and children are suffering. We realize that you just can't stop everything all at once. Could you do a video broadcast, say, from your committee to the head teachers, to tell them what you learned here? The abusive parts of the Program could be stopped almost overnight without changing a single written document, actually. All you need to do is carefully define the troublesome terms, as we pointed out this evening."

Granville nodded. "Mr Coris, we can, and I was intending on doing something like you suggest,

but your idea is better than the method I was thinking about doing. Thank you again for your eye-opening presentation.”

They left, leaving just Kevin’s group and the school’s governors, who were apparently eager to talk. Abberle was first.

“That was a masterful job and the governors can’t thank the four of you enough. I’m gratified that we won’t have to go through with our threat to sue. I did notice how nervous a few of them looked each time the threat of legal action was made, though, so that was a good strategy to use. Do you realize what you’ve done for our school? You not only rescued us from the burden and disgust of having to run the Program, but this idea will bring our school the renown of being an educational innovator, even moreso getting the promised education grants and university cooperation.”

The other governors also praised the group, and Mrs Luddington was particularly complimentary about Amelia.

“You were just stunning, my dear,” she told her. “You tore into them like a wildcat. They had no chance; you set up those stuffed shirts and gave them a passionate scolding. Then the other three of you just wore them down with your own amazing talks. Thank you for everything you’ve done for our school, all of you.”

Kevin thanked her and the other governors, then he turned to Denise. “What’s next, sweetie?”

“I guess I’ve been elected to see Phillips,” she grimaced. “I actually have a course prospectus I can give him. This is good timing; we probably can get something set up for the spring semester. That’s about six weeks from now and that gives us time to get some ed students signed up. Mr Hanford, I think we should begin here with the year eights and nines, they’re 12 to 14 years old, right?”

“Yes. They should be more forgiving for any little problems you encounter in setting up the class. How much of the school day will this take?”

Denise looked at Kevin. “Don’t you think it should be spread out? Not all in a week like we did at the intros in Atlanta?”

“You’re right. And that way we might be able to get to the older kids, the tens and elevens, later in the term,” Kevin replied.

Denise turned to Hanford. “We’ll do it in their PE classes. You run double periods for some classes, right?”

Hanford nodded. “Yes.”

“So schedule PE for the spring to allow for some double periods, twice a week,” Denise told him. “There are parts of the Avery program that require fairly intensive physical activity, using the body as well as the brain.”

“Starting spring term? That’s January 5,” he said.

“Well, at uni it’s January 15. We’ll need the extra time till then,” she mused. “We’ll need to work that out. Oh, also we’ll need to find older kids who’ll be good as our mentors and train them before the beginning of the term. Can you let Jeremy and Amelia find some candidates? They should be sixth formers who are respected by the younger kids. Maybe like your prefects.”

“Okay,” Hanford agreed. “They can see Mrs Cassidy, our assistant head teacher. She knows our pupils very well and is in charge of the prefects.”

Then the remaining group began leaving the school.

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Amelia was eagerly waiting for Denise to arrive home late Tuesday afternoon; Denise had sent her a text telling her she had met with the dean but gave no details. She looked up from her laptop as Kevin came in the door.

“Kevin, what happened with Denise’s meeting?” she asked as soon as Kevin took off his coat.

“All I know is that she met with him. Got a text,” he replied.

“Oh, I got that text too.”

“Well, we need to wait for her then. Let me see about making dinner. Anything exciting in school?” Kevin asked.

“The word got out about the Program being changed to something else, so everyone was kinda celebrating that. But then a rumor started that the new program’s supposed to be worse,” Amelia giggled.

“Really. Worse than walking around the school naked and getting groped?” Kevin asked as the sounds of banging kitchenware rang out.

“Kevin, you know kids and their imaginations. The whispers were going ‘it’s something worse’ and everyone goes ‘Ooooo.’ Jeremy said he was gonna try to start a rumor that the teachers were gonna be naked but I wouldn’t let him,” she giggled.

Kevin laughed. “Yeah, now that would be MUCH worse, right?”

She giggled. “You bet! I’ve got about a half hour more to do on this essay and I’m done for today. Need any help in there?”

“No, ma’am, I’m fine.”

Several minutes later, Denise arrived, and the two descended on her as she was taking off her coat.

“Brrr,” she shivered. “This cold is getting to me.”

“Yeah, my sweet southern belle,” Kevin kissed her. “Growing up in North Carolina must have

been tough. So tell us what happened. Amelia was crushed when I told her I didn't know anything."

"Okay. Let me see what you're doing in the kitchen. I'll tell you while we work."

A few minutes later, she began relating her day's events. "On my way in to classes this morning, I got Phillips' reply to last night's email I sent him. I had marked my message 'high priority' and asked to meet him about a 'significant matter' for the ed school. After my two meetings with him, I figured saying that would grab his attention and it really did. His email said I could come to see him after my classes.

"He had a really serious expression when I came in and I had to control myself to keep from laughing; I guess he was wondering what awful thing I was gonna spring on him now. So I gave him a brief rundown on our project, explaining that our school was partnering with the National Program Committee to develop a replacement for the Naked in School Program, that I had met with the committee, and since I was a student here, I had been chosen to ask if he would like his ed school to collaborate. He looked like he had been pole-axed. Then I gave him the prospectus and told him that grant funds would be available to support faculty and student involvement.

"Magic words, those. As soon as I said 'grant funds,' he lit right up. That's when he started peppering me with questions, first about how I became involved with the Program Committee. I told him that was a bit complicated and wasn't important; he'd find out soon enough. I gave him Granville's contact info and told him Granville would be expecting his phone call. Then we went over the prospectus and I told him what we needed from the ed school: ten student interns who had some student teaching experience and strong evaluations plus one or two faculty members as a liaison for the ed school.

"I told him specifically that the faculty would not be in charge of this project at Amelia's school; that they would have to accept that you and I were the project leaders. But after we led one full term of the project with the interns, his faculty would then take over and expand the project to run in additional schools. I gave him the criteria I wanted for the faculty, that they needed to be flexible and adaptable and be willing to allow us to run the show—even if they thought we were young. When I mentioned that we both have education master's degrees from Avery he looked kinda amazed. Seems he didn't notice the master's on my transcript, probably because my class registration was for courses for my B.S. degree. He told me he'd call Granville and get started.

"Then he called me on my cell a few hours later and had gotten a lot of things moving. I'm supposed to meet with him Thursday; apparently Granville will be there together with several faculty members who are interested. So that's what happened today."

"I guess it's off to the races, then," Kevin grinned. "Hang on, Amelia, it's gonna be a fun ride."

## Chapter 16

Several weeks passed; the new year had arrived. Earlier in December, the Program Committee had taken Kevin's suggestion and sent a video message to every school's head teacher. In it, the narrator reviewed each term found in the Program booklet which could be misinterpreted or had become controversial, explaining the terms' precise meanings. The committee members had paid attention to Jeremy's blog articles, too, so the video narration properly and unambiguously defined the terms in question. The video also reviewed the other types of Program abuses which Jeremy had mentioned and told the head teachers that those situations must be avoided.

Also in December, Denise had met with a few ed school faculty and found two who were enthusiastic and whom she thought would be good as eventual project leaders. Together they had interviewed a number of students, third year and master's candidates, and settled on eight, four male and four female, who appeared to be motivated and had the best qualifications. One of the things that the Avery project study had found was that most classes worked best when led by a male and female team.

Over Christmas, the Porters invited Kevin, Denise, and Amelia to celebrate the day with them and any embassy staff who had no place to go for the holidays. Amelia got Jeremy a sports watch and Jeremy gave Amelia a charm bracelet with little charms which represented some of the things she loved—a tiny laughing-weeping mask for theater, a football-soccer player, a floral bouquet, a little book for her love for reading, a heart engraved with "I love you," a bicycle, and a few other charms. She was thrilled and delighted with the gift and the thoughtfulness behind Jeremy's selection of each charm.

So it was now a few days before school resumed at Norwich and Denise and Kevin had set up a training session for the eight education students to familiarize them with the project. They used one of the multipurpose classrooms at Norwich Academy and covered the floor with mats. When the group assembled for the first day, Denise greeted them and introduced Amelia and Jeremy.

"Okay, guys, you've met Kevin and we told you how we were involved in developing the Avery-Denison Program. Amelia and Jeremy have been our guinea pigs for the British version and have done all of the one-on-one exercises you're gonna learn here. Our program has three main parts: familiarization and bonding; building trust and teamwork; and developing empathy and connections to others. Each of these components has a general script and timeline but there's plenty of latitude to allow concentrating on things that work well or if there's a hitch, to try some alternatives.

"The first part that we'll start on now is the bonding. Any of you know each other?"

Of the eight, only three knew each other somewhat, but while most had seen each other on campus, they were all effectively strangers.

Denise continued. "Now comes what may be a difficult part. The children in the project classes wear their PE kits but for you, who will be what we'll call U.K.'s 'teacher primes'—you'll be the go-to people for all future Avery Program teachers in England—it's essential that you get the

most intense experience so you'll be able to project your enthusiasm to the teachers whom you'll be teaching. We told you to bring your swim suits and implied that we'd be using the pool. Actually, swim suits will be the official class costumes here. There are two doors over there, see? One has a paper sheet with 'M' on it and the other has 'W.' Go to those rooms and get changed."

Most began going to the rooms but one of the girls came to Denise and another hung back as if she wanted to talk too.

"Denise, I'm pretty shy about being in my swim costume—is that really needed?" she asked quietly.

The other girl came up. "Me too. I don't feel comfortable."

"Actually, it's really very important. We told you that this project is being evaluated to replace the Naked in School program, right? We found that the Avery program works well in meeting all of the principles of the naked program and showing a little skin is lots easier than total nudity. Could you have done the Program with the nudity?"

"No!" one girl shuddered and the other blanched. "I remember that they tried to start it at uni, beginning with the freshers. God, was I relieved when that didn't continue."

Denise grinned. "But we've anticipated you, in case some of you were modest. Go change and you'll find some coverups in the girls' dressing room you can wear. Okay?"

"Oh yes," they chorused.

Soon the group was reassembled and Denise and Kevin led them through one round of the bonding exercise, using Jeremy and Amelia as their models. It turned out that one of the modest girls was touch-shy, too. Kevin led her over to a corner of the room, behind a screen, and began working with her while Amelia took her place with her partner.

Denise then had the group change partners and midway through the second round, Kevin emerged from behind the screen with his partner, who was red-faced but radiant.

"Um, can I take Amelia's place now?" she asked shyly.

"Sweetie, why don't you finish this round with Jeremy right here, okay? Then the next round you can."

The group ran through a third round and Denise called a halt for discussion.

"Well, judging by all the sighs and giggles and whispering, I'm guessing that some ice was broken," Denise said as she looked around, smiling.

Several couples were sitting together, holding hands.

"What emotions did you feel hit you the strongest? And which of the exercises was the most emotionally intense?" she asked.

A spirited discussion began, with the universal opinion that it wasn't a single exercise; it was the

psychological buildup that caused their intense emotional experience. Janet, the girl who had been with Kevin, was glowing about her breakthrough.

“Kevin was... my god, just amazing. Girls, you gotta do a round with him. He was like a security blanket; I felt just enveloped by his aura and I forgot that I was shy. Kevin, can you teach us to do that?”

Kevin grinned. “You can all learn it. Jeremy has the same talent; we developed it in studying the Eastern martial Arts. You’ll find that about 5 to 7 percent of the kids you’ll be teaching have some degree of touch-shyness. The milder forms are common and are easy to work with, while more serious forms can be a manifestation of what’s called ‘social anxiety disorder’—remember that from your psych classes?”

They did.

“There are more severe forms too, but those tend to be somewhat rare and you can spot kids like that fairly readily since those kids exhibit other behavioral issues. Denise and I worked up a coping protocol to be used with touch-shy kids in the Avery Program. Janet, not to embarrass you or put you on the spot—you told me you could tell this to the group—what did you feel happen with me?”

“Well, I don’t really have a serious aversion to being touched, but I do feel kinda anxious when someone gets too close, gets in my personal space. A lot of people are like that, I think. Kevin was... it was amazing how he knew what to do. We sat at arm’s lengths and he leaned in and took my hand. It felt okay. Then he told me to close my eyes and feel his hand all over and then he gave me his other hand. He told me to memorize how they felt—you know, the stuff we just learned. Then he asked me if I knew how blind people read other people’s expressions, face reading with the hands.

“I knew about that and said so. He told me to keep my eyes closed and tell him what emotion was on his face, and leaned forward so I could reach him. We went through a bunch of expressions and then he asked me to open my eyes. I didn’t realize that I had moved way closer to him and now we were sitting so, so close! He slowly reached out and stroked my face and asked how it felt. It was okay. Then he asked if I felt okay moving even closer to him and I found I could.

“Kevin told me that my moving toward him was my allowing him into my space; I gave him permission to be there because *I* had initiated the movement. I never knew! Then he led me through the exercises, letting me be in control about how close I came to him. He was incredibly gentle and soothing and when I closed my eyes, I just felt comforted and secure. And that showed me that I could cope with my feelings when I’m threatened by someone getting too close to me. Oh, Kevin, thank you!”

“Geez, Janet, I’m glad I helped. I’ll get my bill in the mail to you tonight.”

Everyone cracked up laughing.

“Guys, we didn’t expect to do the advanced stuff, like the psych-connected items, so quickly in our intro,” Kevin went on. “This is a terribly sensitive area and you have to tread very carefully, like avoiding giving the child the impression that they’re somehow to blame for their feelings. Another major danger to avoid is having the child becoming fixated on you emotionally, but you also need to keep your trusting connection with them and never seem aloof. When we get to describing what the peer mentors do in the program, you’ll see how this potential problem becomes very significant. Any questions before we continue?”

“Yeah,” one of the guys said. “Do you always do girl-on-boy and vice versa with that?”

“Oh yes we do, Mitchell,” Denise answered. “And I know your followup question. What if the child has a gay or lez orientation.”

“Right.”

“It’s complicated and I won’t venture deep theories; it just works,” she replied. “I’ll tell you my hunch. It’s likely because these exercises explore sensuality and not sexuality. Does that make sense?”

Nods.

“In my sophomore year in college I knew a girl, a committed lesbian, whose very best friend was a guy,” Denise went on. “They were very close; they hugged and kissed each other. But they were both committed to their significant others, she to her lover and he to his fiancée. It confused me until they told me that they made each other feel good and were delighted that their partners liked each other too. Also, we all know women or girls who have close, even fairly intimate relationships with a female friend. But there’s nothing sexual about their relationship; they just mesh. It happens between opposite-sex friends too, like that girl I knew—not a romantic attachment, but one based on a different kind of mutual attachment. So there’s more to close relationships than sexuality. If a boy treats a girl in a respectful, considerate manner, being gentle and nonthreatening, she’ll respond to him regardless of her sexual preferences. Is that answer meaningful?”

“Oh yes... wow, that’s ace...” he mused.

“One thing we’ll need to figure out, though,” Denise continued, “is how we’ll include really observant Muslim girls—maybe even boys too—in this class. If their faith won’t permit them to have extensive touching contact with the opposite sex, we’ll need to adapt for them. This never came up in the States so we’re on our own here.

“Before we continue, then, does anyone else have thoughts to share about their experience so far?” Denise asked.

No one spoke.

Denise grinned. “I think there are some budding friendships forming. Might I be correct?”

Some chuckles.

“Well, let’s shake it up a bit. Here are your next partners.” She read off four pairs of names to a chorus of groans. “After doing this for three rounds, you all probably know the exercises, so I’ll just prompt you for each step. But we’ll be adding two new exercises this time so watch for them.”

The added two exercises first had the boys sitting behind the girls and gently kneading their necks, shoulders, and upper backs, and next by sitting in front of the girls with the girls embracing them as they stroked the boys’ hands and arms. They completed two more rounds and paused for another break; then Denise told them to just chat among themselves for five to ten minutes. Then she left the room with Kevin to set up their lunch.

Now instead of couples sitting together holding hands, all eight were sitting or lying together in a single large group with everyone mostly leaning against each other, reveling in their close contact.

After a few minutes, Denise returned. “Any new comments?” she asked. “I see you’re all pretty comfy with each other now.”

Chuckles.

“Before we continue, remember that this program was conceived as an alternative to the Naked in School program. That program had a few basic principles which I’ll summarize. First, you’re supposed to become more comfortable with your body and your sexuality. Second, you’re to treat others in natural balance as both individual people and sexual beings. Third, you’re to learn to harness your natural energies. Fourth, you’re to learn to behave in a more mature and morally conscious manner. I wrote those principles on the board up there.

“‘Sexuality,’ as used here, could be interpreted in both of its senses, that is, eroticism or simply gender identity. Humans, by their very nature, are sexual beings; being animals, we have sex imprinted genetically in every cell of the body, so presumably erotic sex shouldn’t be a required component of the Program. But that’s how it turned out when it was put into practice.

“Now about your reaction to these rounds of the bonding exercises. Do you feel the connection to your partners? How strong it is? How do you characterize it, sexual, romantic, or other kinds of feelings? Use the principles on the board to think about your answers.”

One girl raised her hand. “Denise, the feelings I got each time were very strong but also very confusing. I can’t pigeon-hole them. They made me feel close to my partners, not romantically—sorry, guys,” she giggled, “I think I know; I don’t have a brother, but maybe it was like I’d feel with a sibling—that kind of bonding.”

“That’s fairly perceptive, Judy,” Kevin said. “You recognized that feeling early in our program, but it’s exactly the same kind of bonding that happens between military people who train together and learn to trust and rely on each other. They become ‘brothers in arms,’ as the phrase goes. So you felt a hint of sibling bonding. Very good. Anyone else?”

A guy looked hesitant. “Hey Gary,” Denise said. “Don’t be shy, even if you didn’t feel anything

much.”

“Shit, Denise, just the opposite! I got hit every time, and hit hard. Erm, yeah, that was a double entendre, sorry...”

Everyone laughed.

“Yeah, hard. I got so turned on, but it was more of a protective feeling than anything else, innit. The feelings I had were like, she’s someone who needs to be watched over, to be protected, kept from harm. Sort of like a parent for a child, I guess.”

“Yeah,” another guy said. “That’s kinda how I felt, too.”

“You know?” a girl spoke. “I had a feeling like Ron’s, but it was more maternal. Not protecting, but nurturing.”

“Very good, Stephanie,” Denise nodded, “but did anyone have romantic feelings or overt sexual ones? Don’t be shy, no one will think less of you for that—this exercise is meant to be fairly intense.”

No one thought their feelings were especially romantic, although there was certainly arousal for both boys and girls but it was a subdued kind of arousal. But they all agreed that the experience was life-altering and thought that the group would remain close friends, especially if the group continued to work together as they had.

“Okay, one last thing before lunch,” Denise grinned. “I noticed a wardrobe change about a half hour after we started the session this morning. Anyone know what I’m referring to?”

Everyone had blank looks and looked around at each other.

Denise walked over to a mat and picked up a coverup, then grabbed a second one off another mat.

“OH!” exclaimed the two girls who had claimed modesty at the class’s start.

“You don’t have to explain, but you might find it helps if you two want to share your thoughts,” Denise prompted.

Janet was blushing. “You know? I totally forgot I’m only wearing my swimming costume now. Yeah, I felt so comfortable after a while that I took the coverup off. Judy, I noticed that yours was off before my session with Kevin was done.”

“And the funny thing is, I have no recollection of taking mine off,” Judy mused. “Wow, if all this happened to us in one morning, what happens to the kids if they get it for a whole term? Are they brainwashed?”

Denise grinned. “Maybe. There aren’t any published studies yet but our American contacts tell us that among the groups who’ve been in this program, the entire group has completely cohered. No serious rivalries, bullying, fighting. Sounds almost too good to be true, so we’ll see in the longer

term. Look at your friends here. How long does it feel you've known them?"

The group looked around at each other and then looks of shock appeared on many faces.

"Shit..." one of the guys muttered. "Unbelievable..."

Kevin grinned. "So tell us."

"Damn. I was gonna say I've known them since I started uni, and then realized... Hell, this is dangerous shit..."

Kevin looked at the group intently. "And you're exactly right. Very dangerous. As was the Naked in School Program. We've fucked with your emotional core, your essential being. We've burrowed under your psychological defenses and exposed your naked sensitivities. Back in the ancient days, late 1970s and 80s, after the sexual revolution but before the AIDS epidemic began, there were these so-called 'encounter groups' in the States—I don't know if they had them in Britain then. Psychologists are still examining, discussing, and arguing about the results of those encounter groups; the reports of what they accomplished are so confusing, but it's generally agreed that participants underwent some mind-altering changes. These groups did exercises like we showed you. Not the same ones, but still they were ones which evoked the same emotions as the exercises we showed you. We developed these particular exercises we showed you today using ideas taken from the Eastern tantra philosophy.

"So we want you to experience the power that these techniques can have on someone. You have to watch the kids to be sure the intensity doesn't become overwhelming. Later on, we have some videos to show you and you'll see how kids react to doing these things together. It's powerful stuff. One of the major criticisms our little anti-Program group back in the States had about the Program was that when kids' nascent hormonal eroticism was unleashed, allowing them to indulge in wanton promiscuity, most of their moral inhibitions were lost. This caused much misery, as attested to by all the cases of abuse and humiliation that've been documented. Well, enough philosophizing. We've had lunches delivered and we've set the meal out next door. Let's go eat."

During lunch, Denise took Jeremy and Amelia aside. "Guys, you still comfortable working with the others in the group? You actually looked like you were enjoying that."

Amelia nodded enthusiastically. "Oh yeah, this is so cool. I'm having a great time."

"So am I," Jeremy agreed. "This group's brill. I feel so close to them all, too. And they treat us like adults, not condescending like."

"Good, the next activity you guys haven't done yet, so have fun."

They rejoined the group and after lunch they went back to the classroom.

"You saw a bit about how our program suggests dealing with the shy child this morning," Kevin said to the group after their lunch break. "We have two important guidelines that seem essential to succeeding in overcoming their shyness. First is to never, ever, exert any authority or give the

child the impression that ‘doing this is good for you.’ Second, never invade the child’s space. Let him move toward you. You can encourage closer contact but never initiate it. Invite it.

“Another factor is fairly important but we aren’t sure if it’s as essential as the others, and that’s how successful an adult would be compared to a peer, someone close to the child’s age—or perhaps it’s just that the person isn’t an authority figure. This is a question that we hope that our project will answer.

“Something we learned is that the children respond pretty well to empathic—well, call it ‘projection.’ You’ve heard of the idea of a person’s ‘aura’? Good. Well, it’s not imaginary. In Eastern philosophy it’s known as the *qi*, or *chi*, it’s the body’s internal energy, but some people can actually project it so others can sense it. I’ll bet you’ve felt people’s auras before—ever encounter someone with a ‘magnetic’ presence? Sure, it’s real.

“People learn exercises to try to get in touch with their *qi*; it’s best accessed through meditation. A quick way to connect with other people is by using your eyes. By mobilizing your energies and focusing your thoughts on the emotion you want to show another person, like empathy, support, or even love, you can try using your eyes to project the emotion and get a feel for how your body works in letting your energies flow. Kind of enveloping the other person in your aura. Now we’ll show you some basic meditation techniques. This takes faithful practice to fully master but learning it is immensely rewarding. Not just for this project but for your lives.”

For the rest of the day, the group worked on meditation techniques, and Kevin added a new twist: meditation as a couple. He had pairs work together sitting face to face on the mats, hands on their partner’s shoulders, looking into each other’s eyes and trying to get their partner to sense the emotion they were trying to project.

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The session on the following day began with a round of the bonding exercise; then the group shifted to the team-building activities and moved to the gym.

“Okay, now we’re a team, not couples,” Denise announced. “This element of our program involves the body as well as the mind. When the weather’s warmer, we plan to include some really physical problem-solving outdoor activities that require teamwork to solve. All these exercises are designed to emphasize group cooperation, listening and communication, and problem solving strategies, as well as helping children develop patience when failures cause frustration. You’ll see that many activities stress physicality and physical proximity.

“Let’s start with the ‘All Aboard’ game. See that tarp?” She pointed to a one meter square tarpaulin on the floor. “The object is for all of you to go stand on it; first the boys, then the girls go join them.”

There was much laughter and jostling as they all tried to fit; two of the guys hoisted their partners onto their shoulders to make room.

“Very good,” Kevin complimented them. “Now, you need to flip the tarp over—with no one

stepping off it onto the floor.”

“What!” “How can we?” “Oh shit!” rang out.

“Figure it out!” Denise laughed. “Think teamwork!”

After a few minutes of conversation and negotiation, the ten of them began getting the tarp turned over.

When they finished, Kevin asked, “Not too easy?”

“That was intense,” one of the guys responded and the others agreed.

“Let’s do another one,” Denise said. “This is the ‘Magic Talisman’ game. See the black stripe painted on the floor here?” she pointed, “and there?” she indicated a second stripe nine meters away. “Now pretend the area in between is filled with boiling lava whose fumes are poisonous. The object is for you all to cross the lava. To protect yourself, you need to have the magic talisman—this ostrich feather—with you as you cross and each of you may only carry the talisman one time going one way; it can protect who it’s with while it’s being carried over the lava. Also, you obviously can’t throw the talisman to anyone. Let’s start.”

The group got ready to start; then Judy took the talisman and began crossing to the other side. After ten steps, she stopped.

“What... how do we...?” Judy asked, looking at the talisman in her hand, and then at her starting and ending point in confusion. “We can’t...”

Gary asked, “Um, unless... can two people use the talisman at the same time?”

“Let me repeat the rules,” Denise said. “You can do anything except violate the rules.” She repeated them. “Now figure it out.”

The group huddled and suggestions flew; after several false starts they were becoming frustrated; a few were getting annoyed.

“It’s impossible,” Janet grumbled. “Tell us, there’s no solution. This is to show how to accept failure?”

Kevin grinned. “Good try, but you’re wrong. Keep trying.”

Suddenly Simon shouted, “Hey! We can carry someone over and... erm...”

“Yeah, that’s it!” a few others exclaimed. Gary turned to Denise. “Is carrying allowed?”

“Does that violate a rule?” she answered.

Within a few minutes of heated discussion, they worked out a possible strategy.

“But don’t you need to carry two people?” Stephanie wondered.

This problem was worked out and after assigning the boys to do the carrying, soon completed the

task. They were laughing at the quite intimate contact the boys experienced and at the “carrying” creativity they used while the boys ferried the girls across to the other side. During the review session, they all agreed that they had overlooked the teamwork objective of the exercise, and thought that it was an extremely challenging activity, physically as well as mentally.

“Now we’ll do the ‘Shark’s River’ challenge,” Kevin grinned. “Remember what you just learned. Your team has to cross a shark-infested river. A storm washed away the bridge, just the bases from the old bridge’s roadway are left. Those are the three two-meter-square low platforms over there. You have a two-meter long plank to use to get from one platform base to the next one; the plank can’t touch the water, obviously. Starting on the first platform, cross the river. You can’t move the platforms, by the way.”

Mitchell took the plank and stepped onto the first platform and the group followed, jostling for room. He began to stretch the plank out to the next platform. It was about fifteen centimeters too short.

“Huh,” he muttered. “Too short. Um. Okay, guys, try this. Someone stand on this end and I’ll walk out, then step over onto the next platform.”

He tried, only to find that the plank started to tip when he got less than halfway across.

Gary said, “Wait! We need a lot more weight at this end!”

That idea worked; they were able to get three people to stand on the part of the plank resting on the platform, which allowed the girls to cross, their being lighter. When the first guy started across, however, the plank started to tip, and they stopped.

“Not enough room on the end here for four people,” Simon observed, looking down.

“Hey, there is if you hoist me up in a fireman’s carry,” Gary said.

One boy was able to cross with the weight of four counterbalancing him. Then they were stuck again.

“Pass the plank over,” Susan called. “We’ll stand on the end here.”

They did, but the girls couldn’t quite keep the plank from tipping when Gary tried to step on its suspended end.

“I know,” he said, and knelt down, his knees at the platform edge. “Ronald, hold my lower legs down,” he said, and levered his body out over the plank, resting his hands at its center, and sliding onto it until he could pull himself upright.

Now, with the weight of two guys holding two girls on the plank’s fixed end, they were able to get the remaining guys over. They repeated that procedure and all moved to the next platform.

“You got that pretty quick,” Denise praised them. “Good job.”

“Let’s do another one,” Kevin grinned. “Remember, these exercises need you to use your heads!”

This one is called ‘Frenzy!’ For our small group, we’ll just use eight, so Jeremy and Amelia will sit this one out. Jeremy, please bring five of those hula hoops over and lay them on the floor in a square ten meters apart, the fifth one goes in the middle of the four of them. Amelia, get the basket of tennis balls and empty it into the middle hoop. There are fifty balls. Pair up into twos. The object is for each pair of you to attempt to get all of the tennis balls inside the hoop nearest you; once you get all the balls inside that hoop, you’ll be finished.

“There are only three simple rules. The balls can’t be tossed or thrown. You can steal balls out of other hoops but only after all the balls have been removed from the middle one. Finally, you can’t defend any hoop from being robbed. Questions? Okay, start.”

In a flurry of activity, everyone was rushing around, gathering balls and carrying them to their hoops. Within a few minutes the center hoop was emptied and then the four teams were trying to scoop balls out of other teams’ hoops. After several minutes, all activity ceased, and everyone began looking at each other and their hoops.

“Gaaahhh,” Gary groaned, panting, while the others tried to catch their breath too, staring at the partly-filled hoops.

“How about some group strategy?” Kevin called.

The pairs of competitors began whispering to each other, then went into action again, this time trying to hand balls to their teammate to speed up the transferring. It quickly became apparent that no one was making any progress.

“Is this the impossible one?” Janet complained as the others stopped in frustration. “‘Frenzy’ is a great name, but no one’s making any progress.”

“This game is certainly possible to do,” Kevin assured them. “Here’s a hint. Try learning from each other.”

“Huh?” Gary said, confused. “Hey, I know... If you other three teams will let us, can we take all your balls?”

“Yeah, right,” smiled Mitchell. “Fat chance.”

They all looked at each other and then at Kevin.

“Maybe another hint?” Susan pleaded.

“Denise told you when we began today’s session, and I’ll quote, ‘Now we’re a team, not couples.’ That’s your second hint,” Kevin smiled.

After a few hurried whispers among the eight, Gary looked up. “Um, we can work together?”

Denise grinned at him. “You already got two hints.”

“Ah-hah!” Stephanie exclaimed. “But that won’t work, unless... erm, can we move a hoop?” she asked, uncertainly.

“What did the rules say?” Kevin asked.

“Nothing about that... YES! Guys, we can ALL win!” Stephanie yelled. “Move the soddin’ hoops!”

She picked up her hoop and put it on top of Mitchell’s and Janet’s hoop, then began moving her team’s balls into the circle within the two hoops.

“C’mon, we all win,” she called, and the others went into action. Soon all the balls were inside the circle made by the four stacked hula hoops.

“Sneaky, sneaky,” Janet chided. “Damn, these exercises are way cool, aren’t they.”

Denise laughed. “Teamwork involves cooperation rather than competition. If everyone can win, that’s way better than having one winner and a lot of losers, right? That’s what we want to show. Cooperation is as important as competition in many tasks, so always keep an open mind and look for opportunities for cooperative teamwork when faced with a difficult task. Another essential life skill is effective communication and communication takes two parties: the source of the information and its recipient. Communication is one of the keys to solving problems. One of the goals of this program is to get the kids to be good communicators.”

Kevin picked up a canvas bucket filled with tennis balls. “Okay, here’s your next challenge, so listen carefully.

“This one is called ‘Improvised Objects.’ Look at that length of rope that Jeremy’s stretching out over there, parallel to the other one he just set out, fifteen meters away, over there. Now imagine that the ropes are the edges of cliffs, the cliffs have sharp dropoffs and you can’t climb down them. Basically, no one can stand anywhere between the two ropes, even if they could climb down cliffs. Here’s a bucket of tennis balls. Your objective is to get this bucket, with all the balls still inside, to the other side and no throwing is permitted. That pile of objects over there is for you to use to help you with the challenge. You can use whatever you want of those objects, as many or as few as you need, just get the bucket of balls onto the other side of the far rope.”

The group went to the pile of objects and looked it over. There was a two-meter long wood plank, a coil of rope three meters long, an inflated bicycle inner tube, a meter square tarp, a cricket bat, a bag of balloons, a broom, a hula hoop, a volleyball, and an empty one-liter plastic water bottle.

Ronald bent down and picked up the inner tube. “We can’t throw it; maybe we can launch it? Like using this tube and the plank as a guide?”

Judy looked at the bucket. “How do we keep the balls in, though?”

“Maybe with the balloons...” Simon mused. “Blow them up and stuff them in the bucket somehow. Hey, maybe put the tarp over the bucket’s top to keep them in and wrap the rope around.”

“Good idea!” Stephanie exclaimed and they set to work, inflating the balloons.

They wrapped the rope around and around the bucket until it seemed secure.

“Um, this is kinda heavy now...” Ronald muttered, hefting the bucket.

“Okay,” Gary said as they set up the plank. “How do we do this? The tube is a little too firm to stretch very much, we need to let some air out, don’t we.”

They figured out how to deflate the tube but ran into a problem over how to attach it to the plank. Simon figured out that he could use the broom, holding it against the underside of the plank with about ten centimeters of the handle end protruding past the plank’s end, to make a projection to loop the tube around. This allowed the inner tube to be stretched back with the bucket being set into the opposite end of the loop formed by the tube.

“Ready, guys?” Ronald, who was holding the bucket against the stretched tube’s tension, called. “Give me some elevation—not that much! Down a bit... Okay, bombs away!”

He let go and the bucket flew off to the cheers of the group, which quickly turned into sounds of dismay as the bucket fell short and disgorged its contents, balloons and balls flying everywhere.

Kevin gave them the go-ahead to pick everything up and try again.

“Guys, I wrapped that rope as tight as possible,” Ronald assured them. “It stayed together during the launch; it was the landing that popped the rope off. Let’s try it again—but I don’t think we need the balloons this time—they didn’t help with anything.”

When they repeated the launch the balls stayed in the bucket but it still fell five meters short. The third attempt had virtually the same result.

“Maybe we’re overlooking something,” Janet suggested. “I’m not gonna suggest this is the impossible one, either, but I don’t see how any of that other junk can help.”

They all inventoried the pile of objects again, scratching their heads.

Mitchell grinned at Kevin. “Okay, a little hint, maybe?”

Denise spoke. “Remember, I told you when we introduced this challenge, that effective communication is an important part of problem-solving. Kevin will read the instructions again; *listen to every word* he says, and you can do *anything* that the instructions don’t forbid.”

Kevin repeated the instructions, word for word, while the group listened with puzzled expressions.

“Humpf. Sounds the same to me,” Mitchell grumped. “Some hint.”

“No... no...” Janet said slowly. “*Anything* that’s not forbidden...right?”

“But we can’t just walk over there,” Simon objected. “That’s forbidden.”

Judy shouted, “YES! Kevin said ‘imagine’! *Imagine* that the rope is a cliff... so we’ll just stop imagining it. There is no cliff—so we can carry the bloody bucket over to the other rope—it’s

just a rope.”

Mitchell grinned, “Cool!” and picked up the bucket, beginning to walk toward the rope.

“Wait, guys,” Kevin called. “In the rules, it says, and I quote, ‘Basically, no one can stand anywhere *between* the two *ropes* even if they could climb down.’ Not cliffs—ropes. No imagination needed to see that they are still ropes.”

They all groaned and looked at one another again.

“Judy, that was a great idea. Have another one?” Stephanie prompted. Judy shrugged.

Then Stephanie slapped her head. “Holy shit. Guys, remember the solution to ‘Frenzy’?”

They all looked at her blankly.

“WE FRIGGIN’ MOVED THE HOOPS!” she shrieked at them. “C’mon,” she called to Gary, “grab that other end there and let’s move this soddin’ rope.”

She picked up one end of the rope and, holding it in front of her, walked over to the other rope and set it down right next to it as Gary copied her movements. Mitchell followed with the bucket of balls and carefully, triumphantly, set it down on the far side.

Then they turned to look at Kevin and Denise expectantly.

Denise smiled broadly. “Good communication means effective listening, too. Nice job, guys.”

They cheered and all gathered around Stephanie and hugged and kissed her, praising her thinking, and then turned on Judy and gave her the same treatment.

“You guys are totally fuckin’ evil, you know?” Simon grinned at Denise and Kevin.

Kevin laughed. “We sure are. So let’s try another mind-breaker.”

There was a chorus of groans as the group got ready to hear their next challenge.

## Chapter 17

The afternoon session consisted of role-playing scenarios about the results of breaking a confidence, gossiping, and bullying. Two group members were given scripts for each scenario and acted as the protagonists while the others were asked to react to try to mediate or repair the situation.

Before the group left, Kevin told them about the following day's activity.

“We’ve arranged for a massage training session for tomorrow at 10 am. Here’s the address and directions to the studio. Bring your swimmers; guys, no board shorts tomorrow. Bring briefs, okay? A major component of the Avery program is building trust with personal touch and one of the best ways of performing sensual but non-sexual touch is through learning simple massage techniques.”

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The following day saw the group assembled at the massage center. After changing, they moved to the group training room and soon the instructor entered.

“I’m Samantha. Hey, we have to move you guys next door. We need this room today and the smaller group room will fit the twelve of you just fine. I also need to take care of another gal’s clients in an hour and a half, so I’ll get you started. Then you can practice on each other and then I’ll be back to answer questions. I understand from your workshop request that you want to learn some basic techniques,” she said. “Anything special?”

Denise replied. “Our group is learning to teach a new program in the schools. Part of the program covers the development of respect for one’s partner. Knowing how to give pleasure through touch, using massage, is part of the program. We don’t want to learn therapeutic massage; this is for pleasure and relaxation.”

“Like a light Swedish massage, then?” Samantha asked.

“I don’t know what that is,” Denise said.

“It’s what everyone thinks of when ‘massage’ is mentioned,” Samantha replied. “The basic moves involve rubbing the muscles with long, gliding strokes that go in the direction of blood returning to the heart. It also includes applying circular pressure with the hands and palms, kneading of the muscles, and some bending and stretching of the arms and legs.”

“Okay,” Denise said, “I remember that some of those techniques were used in the introduction to tantric massage class that I attended here two months ago. Is it like those techniques?”

“Is tantra what you wanted? Yes, there’s a lot of overlap, but tantra concentrates on the sensual and sexual. You’re not planning to do tantric massage with school children...?”

“Oh, no, not the sexual part, no,” Denise said. “We want to teach the kids how to give pleasure using relaxing touch—showing how pleasuring another person can make yourself feel good too.”

“Ah, yes, and that *is* one of the goals of tantra. So if I cover the techniques we showed in that intro workshop, that would work for you guys?” Samantha asked.

“Yes. My group will be leading classes of kids in doing the techniques, so learning a very basic set of them would be just fine,” Denise agreed.

“That’ll work.” Samantha nodded. “So you were at our tantra workshop; tell me, how much of that do you remember?”

“I’ve actually been to several tantric massage sessions and Kevin and I do it with each other pretty frequently,” she replied. “I remember all of the stuff that was covered in that class.”

“Good, then when I have to leave, you can keep your group on track.”

“Sure, that should work,” Denise agreed.

Samantha then turned to the group. “I’m going to start the girls first for a change. It seems that the boys always do the massage on the girls first and the girls never get the practice. The giving of a massage is as good as the getting, though, so we’ll let the boys get worked on first now.”

She led them through the sitting massage techniques, then doing the hands and feet. Then the group switched around and the boys worked on the girls.

“The next part is the prone and supine massage positions. This time we’ll have the guys do the girls first,” Samantha told them as the boys finished working on their partners’ feet. “Any questions about the foot massage?”

Denise did. “I remember being told that the feet mirror the entire body and that’s why you feel the effects of a foot massage all over.”

Samantha answered. “That’s true. From the toe to the heel, the foot mirrors the *chakras* of the body’s core. Beginning at the head with the crown *chakra*, which connects to the pineal gland, its foot correspondence lies at the tip of the big toe. The base *chakra*, which is actually called the first *chakra* since it’s the most powerful, relating to the ovaries and the testes, has its corresponding point located at the back of the calcaneus bone of the heel. Stimulating those foot reflex points will mobilize the energies of their corresponding *chakras*. And there are many additional, but minor, reflex points on the foot too.

“Okay, let’s have the gals lie on their fronts, a low pillow under their chest and one under their hips. The guys will kneel at their feet and we’ll do the leg massage.”

Susan was looking uncertainly at Denise who nodded to her in encouragement to speak. “Um, I don’t want to be out of line, but I’ve had massages occasionally; I used to go with my mum. We never wore anything... um, this is embarrassing. I’m uncomfortable being rubbed over this swimming cozzie. I can’t really feel Simon’s hands....”

“Honey, do you want to take off your swimsuit?” Denise asked her. “You sure? Is that okay, Samantha?”

Samantha nodded, “Oh, sure, just about everyone gets naked for massages here with our practitioners; there are towels to cover your bits on that table by the door if you want.”

“I don’t mind, actually; I go to Brighton in Sussex—it’s a clothes-free beach,” Susan said, glancing at Simon, who was looking like he had won the lottery.

Susan grinned and winked at him. She stood up and got a couple of towels, then Denise did too.

“I feel the way you do, Susan,” Denise said. “If anyone else wants to, ah, go natural, please do.”

“If you take your swimming costumes off, then you can use the massage oils; they’re over there,” Samantha put in. “I suggest, erm, ‘going natural’ as Denise put it, because it’s better for both recipient and provider.”

Denise and Susan pulled their suits off, followed by Amelia, while Samantha brought over a stack of towels and handed them out.

The other three girls glanced at each other; then Stephanie shrugged and removed her suit too.

Samantha had the girls get into position, prone on some low pillows, and led the group through the leg massage. When that was done, she began the instructions for the buttocks massage.

“You’ll find that this doesn’t work well over a swim costume, I’m afraid,” Samantha said, “so you other guys will have to try to follow along with these massage techniques as best as you can.”

Judy sighed. “All right, Gary, let me up... I want to see how that feels too.” She blushed as she pulled off her suit. “This massage has me feeling so dreamy,” she sighed, explaining. “I guess I’m getting more comfortable with exposing my body,” she giggled. “I never thought I’d do this.”

“I think I’m on the spot now,” Janet mumbled uncomfortably.

“Hell—no you’re not, Janet,” Kevin exclaimed. “One of the things our program emphasizes is that no one is ever to be shamed or coerced into doing something beyond their comfort level. Peer pressure can be very damaging, destructive even. Remember this, everyone, so you never make your students feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. Janet, listen to your feelings and follow them. You’ll be fine as you are.”

Mitchell, her partner, leaned down and whispered in her ear. She nodded and smiled at him.

Samantha resumed her class, leading the group in showing them the massage techniques for the buttocks and back, and then had the partners switch, asking the men to lay down now.

“If you men want to join the ladies in removing your swimmers, feel free now,” she told them.

“If you do, the ladies will be able to use the oils for your massages and it’ll feel much better.”

There was a flurry of whispered questions from the guys, most of the variety, “You won’t mind?” and their partners telling them to go ahead.

Gary whispered to Judy, “But I’m kinda... erm...”

She giggled, “Yeah, turnabout’s fair play, stud. You got to see all of me; my turn now.”

Remaining seated on the mat, Gary, blushing, pulled down his swim tights; his penis was standing at attention.

“Mmmm, nice,” Judy said appreciatively.

At the same time that Gary and Judy were whispering, Simon was red-faced as he spoke to his partner.

“Susan, don’t be offended but I’m turned on so bloody bad...” he groaned.

“Sweetie, I’ve seen them all at the nude beaches. Hard ones, soft ones, little ones, and... erm...” she stopped, gasping as he slid his tights down, “bloody nora, oh shit... *BIG* ones, wow. Simon, just wow... Oh crikey, I need a feel of that thing...”

She gently took his erection in her hand and stroked it as Simon groaned, then he pushed her hand away. “No, please,” he pleaded, shuddering from her touch.

“Later...” she murmured to him.

Meanwhile the other two guys quickly slipped off their suits, hiding their erect penises as best as they could while their partners gazed intently at their groins.

Denise giggled, “You lot are like schoolkids! Haven’t you ever seen an erection before?”

Samantha laughed. “Guys, just let ‘em hang. We’re used to males’ reactions; it’s totally normal. In our tantra classes...” Just then there was a knock on the door. “One sec...”

She went to the door, cracked it open, and a voice whispered to her.

“Hey, guys and gals,” she said, closing the door. “I gotta leave now for an hour or so. Denise and Kevin know the techniques they want you to learn. The room is private, so feel free to enjoy,” she grinned at them. “Denise, you can take them as far as they want; the guys look awfully randy,” she murmured to her. “The gals do too... Use the lock on the door,” she winked and grinned as she slipped out.

Denise turned around and saw every eye in the room fastened on her. “What...? What’s up?”

“God, Denise,” Janet breathed, “you’re so, so gorgeous...” The others in the room added murmurs of agreement. “Oh hell, I have to get this friggin’ thing off!” she huffed and pulled her suit off.

Denise smiled at Janet and looked down at her own nude body, blushing slightly. “Hey, thanks. Good genes, I guess... Okay, we’re private now, so let’s get back with the program. Boys, on your bellies—use the pillows to get comfy—and gals, let’s see if you learned how to give a leg massage.”

They went through the leg massage and then moved to the buttocks.

Janet took some oil, rubbed it on Mitchell's ass cheeks lovingly, and began kneading them as he groaned.

"Mitch, I bloody love this..." she sighed to him as she kept gliding her hands around his tight, muscular buttocks, slipping them sensuously into the crevasse between his cheeks. "Oooo, your bum is fuckin' fantastic... you're my callipygous stud..." she snickered. "God, I'm soooo turned on!"

"Oooff, Janet, your friggin' hands are doing unbelievable things to me. I'm so fuckin' randy... can't think..." he murmured back.

The other couples were whispering to each other too, and both Denise and Amelia were working on their men too. After moving up to the back massage and completing it, Denise had the guys turn over. Several of them grabbed towels to cover their raging erections but the girls would have none of that, pulling off the towels.

Stephanie took Ronald's cock in her hand as it twitched and he groaned.

"Denise?" she asked. "You said you had some tantric massage lessons. Can you show us the lang... um, dick massage I heard they do?"

"Sweetie, the penis is called the *lingam*. Is that okay with everyone? You know we're way off topic for what you'll be doing with the kids, right?"

"I don't fuckin' care," gasped Susan. "I'm gaggin' for it—so randy now it don't matter!"

"Okay then, I'll tell you gals what we learned," Denise smiled. "First, judging by the amount of pre-cum I see, you boys are gonna cum as soon as we begin, so we need to lighten up the sexual tension first. Boys, lay back down on your back, pillows under your heads and another under your hips. Spread your legs wide apart too. Snuggle in and get really comfortable; you're going for a ride now.

"Girls, sit or kneel next to your guy's hip and place one hand on the middle of his chest and your other hand on his tummy. Both of you breathe together while you look into each other's eyes, and like our couples-meditating exercises, relax into each other. Gals, whisper to him how you feel about him and what you like about his body and take a minute or two....

"Okay now, girls, remember how you learned to allow your *qi* to flow into your partner; just let the boundary separating your physical bodies disappear. Both of you, meditate like that till I tell you our next step...

"Now guys, close your eyes and keep doing those deep, relaxed breathing exercises you learned. Keep your breathing deep and regular and try to sink into your meditative state. Since this is tantra massage, we won't be trying to get you off, but if everything goes just right with you and your partner, you'll learn something really incredible about your body that will make you an awesome lover.

"Gals, while your guy's sinking into relaxation, gently massage his legs, tummy, thighs, chest,

nipples, and over his pubes but don't touch his cock; you're just helping him to relax even more. Gentle stroking is all you're doing, and keep it up for a couple of minutes....

“Okay, let's begin now. Oil your hands and stroke them up and down between his thighs, up near his groin, and gently stroke his groin crease where his legs meet his crotch. Move your hands up and down, making little circles with your fingertips, and stroke his perineum—the taint—the area between his balls and asshole.

“Keep massaging the area around the sides of your guy's testicles and move around to where the base of his cock meets the pubic bone in the front, down to the inner part of his thighs, and back to his taint. Use both hands, making little circles with your fingers. Press firmly but not hard.”

There were grunts, gasps, and sighs from the guys as their partners followed Denise's instructions and the girls noticed pre-cum again oozing from their partner's erect cocks.

“Get more oil on your hands now and let's move to your partner's balls. Be really careful here 'cause the guys can be different in how much pressure they like. Guys, let your gal know if something's not comfortable. Cup his balls in one palm and use your fingers to fondle them; with your other hand, gently, slowly roll them around as you massage them. If you want, drag your fingernails gently over his balls, or try pulling on them slightly as you stroke them.”

The guys were groaning and jerking their hips now and panting.

Denise grinned. “Slow down a bit, gals. The boys are about to erupt. Go back to your taint massage for a bit now and guys, remember your deep breathing. Gals, just keep them on edge...”

“I'm fuckin' on edge myself,” groaned Stephanie.

There was a chorus of agreement and Janet moaned almost inaudibly, “Ooooo, my poor pussy's flooding...”

Denise waited until the men looked less agitated. “Now it's time for the main act. Your man's been thoroughly teased around his cock and he's clearly wanting more, so let's move to his shaft. Get oil on your hands and wrap them around his cock. The idea is to vary your grip from lighter to harder and to vary your strokes between straight up and down and a twisting motion. Use either or both hands and begin your strokes slowly and ramp up to a faster speed, then take it back to a slow pace again.

“Remember, variety is everything; keep changing your speed, pressure, rhythm, and stroking methods. Switch hands too and use the full length of his cock...”

Susan sighed, “His *full* length... Oh yeah...” and licked her lips.

The others glanced over at Simon and a few gasped. Janet exclaimed, “Oooo! It must be a foot long!”

Simon husked, “Uuunnhh, only nine inches, I think...”

Susan choked, “Can't even wrap one hand all the way around it, too... It's wonderful...”

Denise went on, “Gals, if you feel his groin start to tense, he might be close to cumming, so remember this trick: squeeze the head of his cock hard, you’ll push the blood out of the head and the cock’s upper end for half a minute or so until you feel his tension relaxing. Guys, when she squeezes, try to keep relaxed and continue your deep breathing. Try that—see what happens.”

The guys grunted as their members were squeezed and two of them even began to go soft.

“Good! That’s it!” Denise praised them. “Get them hard, then soft, then hard again—that’s how tantra’s supposed to work. Okay now. Another massage technique is to use a twisting motion along his shaft from the base to the corona of the glans, going up and down. Remember to alternate hands because it lets you last longer and your guy gets a different feeling too. Okay, next. We learned a few *lingam* massage techniques that have names, so try these. The first one is called the ‘milker.’ Wrap your hands around the shaft at the base and slide them all the way up past the head, doing this over and over, going up, milking his cock. Try that one....

“Uh oh, Stephanie, look at Ronald. Look how he’s breathing—look at his hips. He’s gonna cum. When you see your guy get to the edge like that, slow down whatever you’re doing and move to the taint massage while reminding him to breathe deeply and try to ride out the approaching wave of orgasmic feelings. In urgent cases, use the squeeze method to bring him down. How’re you doing there, Ronald, buddy?”

“Aagghh, uh, shit... I swear it felt like I had a cum but I didn’t shoot!” he groaned. “And I’m still rock hard...”

Kevin groaned. “Wait, Denise... fuck, stop... you’ve got magic hands; let up on me for a sec.” He shook his head to clear it. “Ronald, yeah,” Kevin grunted, “you probably did have an orgasm. In tantra that can happen... it happens to me too; sometimes I orgasm without ejaculating. You’re lucky that happened so soon because you saw that it’s possible. Now you know you can do it, so you can learn how to let your body do it again. Guys, it’s actually possible to become a multi-orgasmic male. Tantra helps you to learn that shit and it’s fantastic. Everyone thinks that orgasm and ejaculation are the same thing but they’re really two different things that you can learn to separate. Also, you can get better at it as you learn meditation, I’ve found.”

“No shit...” Ronald muttered. “Way cool.”

Denise looked around. “Everyone doing okay?”

There were murmurs of “Ohh...kaaay...”

She resumed. “So the next one, this is the ‘milker’ in reverse, is called the ‘anvil.’ You stroke the shaft down from the head all the way down to the root, using alternating hands. Try doing that one. Remember to use the oil. Do five of them and then five milkers.”

More groans, grunts, and sighs from the guys.

“Here’s another one and it drives Kevin nuts so I have to reserve it for the end. It’s called the ‘corkscrew’ so you can guess that it’s intense. You hold his cock’s root with one hand while you

use the other to stroke up the shaft to the head, spiraling around as you go, and corkscrew or twist your hand off his head. Try that one but watch that you don't bring off your guy."

The moaning was quite loud as the girls tried that technique.

"There's one other thing that I recall learning and this one's really intense. Prostrate massage."

There was a loud murmur from the group.

"The prostate's a little organ that sits between the cock and bladder. If it's massaged properly, most guys find it very pleasurable. We won't do the internal stimulation here for obvious reasons; primarily because the guys need to be clean inside their rectums, but there's a way of massaging it externally. The external site is called the 'sacred spot.' You can find it on a lot of guys by locating a slight indentation in the taint; sometimes you need to press in a bit, gently, to feel it. Can you? It's a little innie depression-like area.

"Okay, you can massage the prostate externally by pressing in with your fingers or even your knuckles, then letting up and pressing in again or by using a circular motion on the sacred spot. You can do that while stroking his cock with your other hand. Try that."

"Oh shit, oh fuck," Gary groaned as Judy massaged and stroked him.

Suddenly he stiffened and Judy stopped and gripped his cockhead hard.

"Breathe deep, darling," she whispered to him.

Gary relaxed and began breathing deeply again.

Ronald groaned in lust; his hand reached out, found Stephanie's crotch, and began fingering her slit.

"God, you're so wet, you're gushing," he murmured to her.

She knelt over his chest, bent down, and kissed him and suddenly the two grasped each other passionately.

"I need you bad, lover," Stephanie groaned as she threw her leg over his hips, straddling him and in an instant had impaled herself on his throbbing cock as he gasped from the intense sensation of his cock driving into her hot, slick depths.

Meanwhile, Susan had been worshiping Simon's impressive tool, working on it using the corkscrew stroke, when suddenly he reared up and wrapped her in a bear hug. Their lips sought each other's and they began kissing lustfully, tongues dueling together, as Susan rolled onto her back, pulling Simon onto her.

"Stick that magnificent thing in me, you wonderful stud," Susan demanded, as she pulled on Simon's hips.

Simon notched his cock at her pussy lips and pushed; he felt resistance immediately.

“Shit, are you...”

“It’s okay, just do it,” she groaned. “I’m fucking dying to be rogered by that thing. I’m safe too.”

“Don’t wanna hurt you...”

“Just do it!” Susan husked. “I’m bloody horny!”

Simon grasped his cock and rubbed its head over her vulva, picking up her copious secretions, and positioned himself again at her entrance.

“You okay?” he breathed.

“Yeah, just shove it in,” Susan grunted. “I can take it.”

Simon pressed in, feeling her hymen gradually yield but then he was stopped.

She grunted, “Oooofff, ooowww... do it now!”

He pulled back and thrust hard. He felt her yield as he slid in a few inches.

“Yoowwwhhh...” Susan gasped as tears flooded her eyes.

Simon looked down at her with compassion. “Sorry, darling...”

“Unh! No! I’m okay,” Susan choked; then she reached up and pulled Simon down onto her chest, locking her lips onto his. She pulled her lips away and murmured, “Just hold me till I adjust... I feel your thing all the way to my throat.”

“Okay darling, but I’ve got a lot more to give you... feels like I’m only halfway,” he muttered.

“Oh shit, really? Uuunnfff... Oooo, nice... I think... uff... I’m ready; you can try moving now.”

Simon pulled back and thrust forward; Susan gasped in renewed lust.

“Oooohhh shit, so fuckin’ good...” she sighed. She heaved her hips up at him. “Oooo... Now I really feel that thing... crikey... I’m being split in half!”

Soon they were pounding into each other, oblivious to all the other activity in the room.

Four of the other couples were now noisily fucking each other while Mitchell had his face buried in Janet’s crotch and Judy was licking Gary’s rampant erection.

Janet was grunting in passion when she pulled Mitchell off of her pussy. “Lover, I’m so bloody hot for you, but I’m scared,” she panted to him. “I don’t want to get hurt...”

“You’re a virgin?” Mitchell wondered. “But you don’t have a cherry, I’m sure I didn’t feel anything there.”

“Oh, when I was younger, I did gymnastics and tore it. I thought some of it was still there, though.”

“I put a finger in you and didn’t feel it get blocked,” Mitchell explained. “Here, see? Tell me if

this hurts.”

He kissed her while sliding a finger, then two, into her vagina.

“Shit, you’re gushing wet,” he marveled. “That didn’t hurt? So you shouldn’t feel pain then. Want to... ooofff... try?” he grunted as Janet crushed him in an embrace as she locked her lips on his.

“Oh, darling, you’re so gallant... I want you to be my first. Will you be gentle, please, sweetie?” she implored. “I’m dying of lust and look at everyone... there’s a bloody orgy happening in this room and I need your cock in me so fuckin’ bad.”

“Shit, you’re so goddamn sexy! Aaahhh... I’m a virgin too, darling. We can learn together,” he said as he eased her down on her back.

Lying over Janet, he fumbled around with his hips trying to let his cock find the mark. Janet giggled and took his shaft and moved it to the right place.

“Push now, lover,” she husked. “But go slow...”

Mitchell felt like his cock could drive nails as he began to slide into Janet’s hot, flooded channel. Both gasped at the sensation and pressure of his hard meat thrusting into Janet’s welcoming pussy. Meeting no obstruction, just the firm resistance of her yielding tissues, he quickly bottomed out and their pubic bones mashed together.

“Uuunnhhhh,” Janet whimpered. “OhGodOhGod, soooo good... soooo full.... oh, darling, I’ve fallen in love with you... oh shit, this is the blindin’ best ...”

“Ahhhh, you’re bloody tight, darling, oh, this is the best cock massage yet...” Mitchell grunted.

He pulled back and thrust in again. “OH YES! Like that! Again! Do it again!” Janet whimpered. “Do it hard!”

“Let me try this...” Mitchell groaned as he pulled Janet’s legs up onto his shoulders and began driving his cock down into her like a piledriver while she panted his name over and over in ecstasy. Very soon she was thrashing her hips in a massive orgasmic spasm as Mitchell shuddered and unloaded volley after volley of cum into her vagina.

As they came down from their passion and recovered their breath, they looked around the room.

Denise was rocking in Kevin’s lap, clearly impaled on his cock as she gyrated her hips in his lap. She was making little mewling noises as their tongues flickered in and out and they nibbled on each other’s lips.

Amelia was riding on Jeremy’s thick, long shaft; she was whipping her head back and forth in passion as Jeremy pounded up into her body. Then they noticed Gary and Judy. She was bent over a pile of pillows, ass high in the air, as Gary thrust into her from behind.

Judy was chanting, “Harder... more... harder... more...” and Gary was grunting with each thrust,

his ass cheeks clasp as he rammed against her bottom and his balls bounced against her groin.

“Uuunnn... Cumming... Judy...” he moaned.

“No wait...” she gasped. “Not there yet...”

He reached under her hips and began rubbing her clit as his hips sped up their pace; Judy went rigid and then jerked hard.

“Gaaahhhhhh,” she exhaled in a gasping shriek as her body spasmed in a massive shiver.

“Uuuunnnhhhh,” Gary grunted as his orgasm washed over him and he sprayed Judy’s innards with pulse after pulse of hot cum.

They both slumped to the mat in exhaustion as the sounds of other couples reaching their own climaxes rang out. Couples lay together on their mats, gently kissing and stroking each other as their breathing returned to normal, and after a few minutes, several began sitting up and looking around in mild embarrassment.

“Bloody hell, what was that about?” Mitchell wondered aloud.

Kevin was still sitting with Denise snuggled in his lap, but his limp cock was in view between her legs. He looked around at the group.

“That was about tantric sex, that’s what,” he grinned. “We never meant this to go that far, but in a way I’m happy it did. You’ll be the nucleus of this new program here and you can see just how powerful the emotions we’re playing with can be. When we were in the Naked in School Program in high school, Denise and I saw how the uncontrolled sexual stimulation that the Program created could lead to the same kind of group orgies. Sometimes when that happened, it wasn’t a problem, but only if it was fully consensual. In lots of cases it wasn’t at all consensual and people got hurt. Now you can see that you have to be very careful with the kids to avoid letting the sexual intensity to get to be too great. The problem is greater with small groups like this, so Avery classes are designed for no fewer than eighteen pupils. Twenty-four is best.”

Meanwhile Denise had slid off of Kevin’s lap.

“I hope you’re comfortable—well, maybe ‘not upset’ is a better term—with what happened here,” Denise said. “Two days ago we asked you what your feelings were about your partners, remember? After the bonding session, I asked if anyone had felt any romantic feelings or overt sexual ones. Clearly something’s changed now. Any comments?”

Janet nodded and then the others began agreeing.

“Janet?” Denise prompted. “Share your thoughts?”

“Erm, as the group’s certified shy girl, um, I’ve been getting so friggin’ turned on since that first session and the massage stuff today was the bee’s knees. Maybe I was repressed or something, but that’s changed now, everything we did made me so... bloomin’ randy! ... and I think I’m romantically in love with Mitch...” he squeezed her hand, “... but I also love Simon, Gary, and

Ronald too. Mitch took my virginity but I think I wouldn't say no if any of you wanted to... erm..." Tears started flowing down her cheeks.

Mitchell embraced her as she continued, "No, no, I'm okay, just overwhelmed. Is it possible to love more than one person? Mitch, you're special, but I love the others—the girls too—erm, I don't mean it like that..." she ran down.

"Janet, I think we understand. You're on an emotional high now, too, dear," Denise said soothingly.

Susan spoke. "I kinda feel the same way. Simon was my first too and I felt doing it here with all of you was special and right. Maybe getting shagged with the whole group around me was weird but it just felt proper, like I was making love to all of you. But I think I partnered with Simon this morning because we've drifted closer these past two days. And my feelings are definitely romantic *and* absolutely sexual too. But any of you other hunks could jump my bones and I'd love it. Maybe we should have a group marriage?" she laughed. "You're all very, very special people to me now."

Denise chuckled. "There's a name for this kind of group love: polyamory. Our team, in working out the Avery-Denison Program, discovered some signs that it could occur in the younger kids too. So, as Kevin said, one of our guidelines for the program is to make certain that we never work with small groups of kids. We think eighteen to twenty-four is optimal but never fewer than eighteen. Now you see the kind of bonding this program creates with the kids—it happened with you guys after only a few days; the kids will be doing this for a full term. Now, you boys, you have any comments?"

Mitchell did. "Janet was so shy, she was so lovingly vulnerable and bashful that I immediately wanted to be her protector. So I had that attraction to her from the beginning. But Stephanie is a live wire, and Judy is so intense, and Susan is so confident and assured... I'm in bloomin' love with all of them. But Janet is really special. And she loves my bum, too, oh man, that was a smokin' hot bum massage she did to me. Say, darling, you called it a pig-something back then?"

Janet blushed, then laughed. "Oh, you'll think I'm such a nerd. I love the Greek classics. I called you 'callipygous' because it means 'beautiful arse.' Maybe it doesn't refer to guys, though, since it originally was used to describe a statue of Aphrodite, but I don't care 'cause it fits you, darling, your bum is—ohmygod—just the dog's bollocks!"

They all laughed.

They spent a few more minutes talking about their feelings for each other and their lovemaking; then Kevin reminded them that their time at the studio would be up in about twenty minutes. The girls were wiping up their crotches and making faces at the mess when there was a tapping at the door.

Denise unlocked it and Samantha came in. She looked around and smiled.

"I take it you had happy endings?" she grinned.

Denise chuckled. “We did indeed, thanks for the privacy.”

Samantha nodded. “It’s expected that our clients get kinda messy when we offer tantra, Denise. We have a shower room, so you can use it to clean up the oil—and anything else too,” she laughed.

Susan asked, “Can we all fit? Erm, well, I mean...”

Samantha smiled at her. “Yeah, twelve will fit if you’re friendly, it’s unisex. Don’t take all day in there, though!”

They all laughed.

The group shower was a wonderful end to the morning session, with all of them pitching in to wash each other, everyone getting a chance to make certain that no body part was left unclean. Then they dressed and left for Amelia’s and Jeremy’s school.

After eating lunch, Denise spoke to Jeremy. “We’re starting the curriculum stuff now—I’d like you and Amelia to call the mentors we picked and remind them to come in tomorrow morning. Then could you guys take the notes from our problem-solving games and write up the lesson plans for the games like we discussed last night? When that’s done you’ll be free till tomorrow.”

“Okay, Denise, see you when you’re finished here.”

Once back in their usual room, Kevin began the afternoon session.

“Now that you’ve been through all of the exercises and activities that you’ll be doing with the students, we need to begin the planning and scheduling of the entire course that you’ll be running this spring. We’ll need to work out schedules that fit with your classes too. Since the Avery University group hasn’t put together a standard curriculum for this program yet—I hear they’ve applied for grants but are still waiting to be funded—we have to go it on our own. This means you’ll need to do all of our lesson plans using the standard format, you know, the whole lot—overview, background, objectives, materials, educational goals, class activities, notes, and summary.”

They all sighed.

“Yeah, we know, but this is a special topics course you’re taking for credit, no? But it’s fun too... I bet you never thought you’d take a uni course where you got to fuck for credit?”

They all roared with laughter.

“So we’ll be spending a lot of time, beginning now, breaking down everything we’ve shown you into discrete class units. Then we’ll assemble the units into larger modules to come up with the course curriculum. That’s another thing that the Naked in School Program totally lacks, by the way—a standard curriculum. So let’s begin, starting with lesson planning for the familiarization and bonding sessions. We need to look at every little element we showed you and write some suggested scripts that teachers can use which cover what to say to the kids to keep the class light

and non-threatening. We have video clips for you to watch to see how these sessions worked with several classes of middle school kids. Take notes on what you see and we'll use your notes to put together our lesson plans.”

Kevin started playing the first DVD which contained an unedited, full-length video sequence from the Avery project, not the short extracts he had used at the meeting with the Program Committee members, and the group began watching. They spent the afternoon analyzing the video and noting various important details, including how individual situations with kids were handled, to be used as teacher's notes in the final lesson plan.

## Chapter 18

The following day, the kids who had been chosen as the student mentors began arriving right after Kevin and Denise got to the school. Jeremy and Amelia had recruited a number of candidates to apply for the slots and Denise had chosen those who she felt were the best for the role—eight sixth-formers to make four mentor teams. After everyone had assembled in the classroom and introductions were done, Denise reviewed the jobs which the mentors would be doing.

“Guys,” she said, “your jobs are very fluid, but fall into two areas. First, the teacher will use you to demonstrate how we want the kids to sit and work together; we’ll show you what you need to know. Second, you’ll work with kids who need individual attention and again we’ll show you this as well. You were chosen because you seem to be charismatic and empathic; both characteristics are essential for what you’ll be doing. Now, for the next hour, our teachers will lead you through the exercises where you’ll be assisting them. You’ll learn how we want the kids to sit and if they need to be shown, you’ll show them how. Now, pair off and sit on the mats here.”

The student-teacher group began leading the mentors through the bonding exercises while Amelia and Jeremy demonstrated the postures and positions they needed to learn.

“We don’t want you to get involved with the pupils unless a teacher asks you to,” Denise mentioned at one point. “We want the kids totally concentrating on their partners. I can tell you’re enjoying your own concentration on your partner now, right?”

She got a strong affirmative in reply.

“So don’t break their moods; just demonstrate the things the teacher asks you to do.”

At the end of the session, the mentor trainees were very enthusiastic.

“That was brill,” one girl gushed. The others agreed.

Another girl asked, “So this lot is gonna replace that sodding Naked Program, you told us?”

“Yes, those exercises and a whole bunch more activities, too,” Denise said. “The other part of your job is the most critical, now. I think you’ve probably come across some kids who are reluctant to be touched or held like we just showed you.”

They all agreed that they knew of kids who were like that.

“Your jobs will be to take those kids away from the group, and in a more private setting, work with them to try to overcome their reluctance. Amelia and Jeremy have learned some of the methods to do that which we found work, based on past trials of this program, and they’ll take over your orientation now. I’m sure that I don’t have to remind you, but I will anyway, that for this project, they are to be considered your teachers too.”

Denise and the others left at that point and Amelia and Jeremy took over, showing the mentors

how to use the project's techniques of dealing with touch-shy children.

The next three days were spent in much the same way. Amelia and Jeremy worked with the mentors, role-playing a number of touch-shy situations and showing them the exercises for basic meditating and projecting emotion, while Kevin's and Denise's group brain-stormed the development of additional physical problem-solving activities which could be done indoors and ones which could be developed to be run outdoors. They devised role-playing activities to illustrate handling of moral dilemmas. They spent a lot of time on designing the classes where the massage techniques were to be used, trying to test the limits of how far the pupils could be allowed to go in intimate touching—doing that planning, which involved lots of touching, proved to be particularly enjoyable for the group.

After several more days of work, the teachers' group had a term's worth of classes programmed with classes to be given three days per week; two double periods and one single period. As they had planned, year eights and nines would take the classes first, and since the year nines were equivalent to the middle school groups that Kevin and Denise had worked with in the States, they would be able to gauge these students' reaction to the program as compared to the students in Atlanta and adjust methods or content if needed.

Kevin and Denise were amazed at how quickly the promised grant funds had been provided to the school and to Denise's university; during the week that they were doing their project orientation, renovation work had begun in the school to set up two classrooms for the project and included video-recording capability and an observation room with one-way mirrors set up between the rooms to be used for new teachers to observe the classes without causing a distraction.

Then within a week of the beginning of spring term classes, the Avery Program was started with the year-eight children. For the first week, most of the university teacher education students were present for at least some of the class sessions and either Kevin or Denise were available or present on site as well, until the startup jitters had passed.

The teachers and Kevin and Denise were delighted to find that the children loved the classes and were so enthusiastic about them that they had the rest of the school's children jealous and clamoring to be included too.

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By early March, the project was well underway with the year-eight class and the project team had now turned their attention to starting the classes with the year-nine class. Jeremy, together with Dr Dorothy Connors, one of the two university faculty program leaders, were watching Susan and Simon as they led one year-nine class through the bonding exercises when a Norwich teacher came into the observation room.

"Mr Hanford asked me to tell you to expect some VIPs in a few minutes," she whispered. "The PM is here with the education secretary and two others."

“Oh, goodness, the prime minister?” Connors exclaimed. “Whatever are they here for?”

The teacher chuckled a little. “Haven’t you noticed that this project’s turned out to be a big deal? The year-eight pupils have been raving to their families about how brilliant it’s been for them and the word’s spread that something wonderful is happening at Norwich. You know we’ve already been visited by a number of MPs and Mr Hanford told the staff that they were impressed by what they saw.”

While she was speaking, Amelia, who had been in the classroom working with the two mentors, slipped into the observation room.

“They’re okay now; it’s been sorted,” she whispered to Jeremy.

The teacher looked at her curiously. “Something wrong?”

Jeremy explained, “There’s a really traditional Muslim girl in this group. We’re trying to see how we can help her to accept being touched by a boy during the bonding exercises. Amelia noticed that the mentors seemed to be pushing her a little too aggressively and had an idea so she went in to tell them. Say, Amelia, the PM’s at the school now and is coming here for a show.”

“Really? Oh my!” she exclaimed. “Brilliant; are we that popular?” she giggled.

“Looks that way,” the teacher said. “As much as I’d love to stay, I have to go now.”

Five minutes later, Mr Hanford entered the room, ushering in a distinguished-looking woman with graying hair, followed by three men.

Jeremy turned away from the one-way mirror and grinned at her. “Hallo, Mrs Grayson,” he said quietly. “Welcome, but please, everyone, keep your voices low.”

“Ah, Jamie—no Jeremy! Jeremy Porter, well, it’s certainly odd seeing you here and not at your embassy. My goodness, are you involved at this school too? I seem to recall an incident last spring with you at Central School ...”

“Yes ma’am. But I switched schools to come here. Dad told me that Mr Wixom had rung you, so you must remember what I thought of the Naked in School Program when I was at Central. I’m sure Mr Hanford filled you in about what we’re doing here at Norwich to replace the Program and I’m chuffed to be part of this project. My friend here is Amelia Hadad, a project co-leader, and this is Dr Dorothy Connors from the London Ed School faculty.”

“Hello, Dr Connors. I’ve heard a lot of very good things being done by your students here; you must be proud of them.”

“Thank you, Prime Minister. We are certainly proud of our student teachers, but the credit must go to Miss Roberts and her team of magicians. They’ve taught our students most admirably.”

“Indeed,” Grayson said. “So, Jeremy. You’re part of the project’s leadership? My curiosity is piqued; I’d love to hear more about how a sixth-form pupil became involved in such a major undertaking. We’re getting such good reports from all sides of how this project’s progressing, so

much so that I had to come see for myself.”

“Ahem,” Hanford tried to interrupt politely. “Let’s introduce everyone, please. Then our guests can watch for a bit. We can resume the discussion later, I think. Do you agree, Prime Minister?”

“Certainly, Mr Hanford,” she said, smiling at Jeremy.

The prime minister’s companions were Mr Roderick Cassidy, MP, education secretary, and Dr Stuart Gardner and Mr Lionel Coventry of the Department for Education.

They turned to watch the class and spent about fifteen minutes with Jeremy or Amelia answering the group’s occasional questions.

Jeremy looked at his watch as the period-change bell rang; Dr Connors excused herself as she had to leave.

“Mrs Grayson, did you want to see one of the problem-solving classes too?” Jeremy asked.

“There’s one starting now with the year eights. The kids really love those classes ‘cause they’re intense and high activity.”

“Lead on, Jeremy; that is, if your head teacher concurs,” she told him, smiling at Hanford.

“By all means,” Hanford grinned. “Mr Porter all but runs this place now, it seems.”

They walked to the gym and up to its balcony and as they walked, Hanford whispered to Jeremy, “Son, please address her as ‘prime minister.’”

He whispered back, “I see her at embassy affairs and she’s told me to call her Mrs Grayson, sir.”

Hanford nodded, “That’s fine, then.”

As they reached the balcony, the class entered the room. Then they watched as the class was divided into teams and began working on their problem-solving exercises. The observing group chuckled and then laughed aloud as they watched when the kids’ initial frenzied movements died down when the children realized that speed or brute force wouldn’t solve their problem.

Watching the children’s reactions when they finally grasped the problem’s solution was even more entertaining; even more so was seeing their joy when the kids celebrated their successes.

“I can see now why the children report their love for these activities,” the prime minister laughed as she watched one exuberant celebratory display. “Watching them is actually making me feel like a kid. Jeremy, could your group put together a program like this for us older folks?” she chuckled.

“Ma’am, what an interesting idea,” Jeremy nodded. “Perhaps one of your ministers might be able to suggest a sponsoring agency?”

“Ha, ha, very good, son,” she laughed. “You came right back at me, turning my suggestion into a problem for me to solve—a true diplomat’s response. I’m impressed. Head Teacher, is there somewhere where we can chat? I’d like to talk further with your two young school ambassadors

here.”

“Yes ma’am, we can use our conference room. If you’ll follow me?”

After the group was settled in the conference room, the prime minister looked at Hanford.

“Mr Hanford, I agree with my sources; even from my quick visit I can see that this project is becoming a great success, particularly after seeing your pupils’ enthusiasm. I’ve looked over the project’s objectives and based on opinions of our experts in the Department for Education, all of the requirements of the Human Sexuality Promotion Act are met by this initiative. But I’m fascinated by young Mr Porter’s involvement here. Jeremy, how did you come to get involved here after what happened at Central School?”

Jeremy smiled. “A whole bunch of amazing coincidences, Mrs Grayson. Where can I start? Okay, I guess after the awful stuff that happened at Central, ending with the head teacher’s car being firebombed, my folks switched me to this school. Then the LEA decided that the Program had to be run here, and that’s how I met Amelia and learned that her guardians—that is, while she’s in London this year—were Kevin Coris and Denise Roberts, who are long-time friends of my family. Kevin’s mother was a U.S. diplomat and close friends with my father...”

“Wait, wait. My head is swimming. That’s the Miss Roberts who’s running this? Denise Roberts? And Kevin Coris.”

She looked at Mr Cassidy, her education secretary, who had his head buried in his hands, shaking it slowly in dismay.

“I see I’m not the only one who knows those names,” she said carefully, looking at Cassidy. “Tell me, I believe that they are Yanks, yes?” she asked Jeremy.

“Yes, ma’am...” Jeremy said uncertainly. “What’s wrong?”

“And they were involved with dismantling the Program in the Colonies... erm, the U.S.?”

“OH! Is that what you mean! Yes, that’s right, they did, but they also proposed this project—the Avery-Denison Program—to the National Program Committee. Amelia and I had been writing about human rights issues and they drafted us to help in the Program Committee presentation. Kevin’s known me for more than nine years; he was almost part of my family when I was growing. And I met Denise several years ago when she and Kevin were in South Korea on an educational exchange mission through the State Department.”

The prime minister was looking pained. “Jeremy, please slow down... I need to assimilate this... So we owe the success of this new project to two people who just happened to come to the U.K. after dismantling the Program in their home country and then came here to do the same. I see.” Then her mouth twitched into a smile. “It was reported to me that your friend Denise, in a half-hour meeting with her university dean, single-handedly wiped out eighteen months of work of the Department for Education on the development of the university curriculum for new teachers learning how to supervise the Naked in School Program.”

Now Mr Cassidy was looking even more pained but the two aides were trying to suppress grins.

The PM chuckled wryly. “All of that happened just before your president was in Europe for an economic summit, so when I was there with him, I gave him an earful about the Colonies exporting their rebellion to the homelands.”

“Yes, but Mrs Prime Minister,” Amelia broke in, “that Program was so awful, many kids were hurt in it, and Denise and I showed your Program Committee how high a social and economic cost England would have if you kept running it.”

“Yes, Amelia, I saw that report,” she smiled. “Several MPs descended on my office the day after they attended that meeting with the Committee at this school and demanded to know the reasoning behind the DfE deciding not to undertake a similar social and cost analysis before sending the Act up to Parliament for adoption. I was stunned when I saw the numbers from that study that the Committee was told about.

“Enough of that, now. Just how are you and Jeremy—you’re both in sixth form?—what makes you qualified to be co-leaders in a project of such potential importance? I’m not challenging you; I’m just very curious and amazed that two secondary school pupils could contribute to such an endeavor, let alone help lead it.”

Amelia looked down at her hands. “Ma’am, Denise thought I would be perfect as a mentor trainer...”

She had to explain what the mentors did.

“...and she said that I had a lot of empathic feelings that my acting skills allowed me to project—I’m in this school for its theater program—and I know how to get other kids to relate to me too. Denise and Kevin created the mentor role when they were in high school and I guess they saw I had the same... um... personality type? And Jeremy is, well, he’s got this way of looking into your being and making you feel good about yourself, I guess... Jeremy? Help?”

Jeremy smiled at her. “You’re doing okay, Amelia. Yes, Mrs Grayson, actually Kevin taught me my Eastern meditation skills; he was my *taekwondo* instructor back in South Korea and I learned how to use those skills to focus myself to project my—call it ‘aura’—to others.” He grinned. “It works well when I’m trying to convince someone that my point of view should be considered.”

Hanford snorted. “Is that how I find that I frequently let your cheeky behavior pass? No one other than you gets away with some of the things you persuade me to do.”

“I guess the secret’s out, sir,” Jeremy grinned. “But it was all to a good cause, don’t you agree?”

The prime minister was watching the exchange, then she shook her head.

“I see it. Jeremy, you’re so very self-assured and confident—so very much like your father; I know he’s extremely proud of you. Amelia, you’re a simply charming young lady and I really do feel drawn to you in some way; you have a presence about you, a modest and endearing charisma, I’d describe it. The way you explain the mentor role, I can see exactly how you’d fit

doing that. But trying to teach others to do that?"

Amelia shook her head. "No ma'am, not 'teach.' Jeremy—and Denise and Kevin—we can tell if people potentially have that skill and show them how to use the skill where it's latent. That's how we picked the mentors for this project. We worked with them first, so they could feel it on their own, and then watched while they worked with other kids. So we don't 'teach' it; we bring it out of them instead."

Mrs Grayson was listening raptly, then she turned to Dr Gardner. "Stuart, your educational psychologists in the DfE need some training in practical and applied psychology; these youngsters seem to have you way outclassed, don't you think?"

"Prime Minister," he answered, "Dr Seetis, the Program Committee psychologist, was telling me about how these four youngsters had so strongly impressed the Committee at their meeting, and about what Mr Coris and Miss Roberts accomplished with their colleagues in the States in developing that Avery Program. We've gathered that they all appear to have an innate understanding of psychology; the fact that somehow they all coalesced into a group as they did, and came up with practical ideas about teaching children about developing personal interactions, appears to have produced an unprecedented advance in educational psychology. And from the references that Mr Coris provided to the Committee, it appears that a program similar to the one being tried here is succeeding in a number of schools the U.S. too."

"So where do we take it from here?" Grayson asked.

Coventry responded, "This is a pilot project that we funded with several emergency grants, but from the financial details we are collecting as the project progresses, we see that the costs to expand it would not be all that significant. The greatest cost would be in training teachers quickly; that could be done through the ed programs at the universities, funded by some grants if need be. This project's purpose was two-fold; first, as a feasibility study and second, to develop a working curriculum. I think that the first purpose has been proven already and the second should be completed by the end of the term. Where next? There are eight student teachers working with classes in this school; they will form the core cadre to teach more students and teachers too.

"We shouldn't rush, however; I think it's more important that we stress quality of teaching over trying to push it out to many schools too quickly."

Jeremy broke in, "Denise said that even after there's a written curriculum, teachers need to personally experience how pupils react and behave in all of the program's modules. This can't be learned out of a book."

"I agree," Gardner said. "Mr Hanford, looks like the Norwich Academy will be the model school for the Avery Program for some time."

Hanford nodded. "I'm delighted to accommodate that role. After all, we *are* a performing arts academy, and teaching is definitely a performing art."

They all chuckled.

“What about that infamous Human Sexuality Act?” Grayson asked. “Do we need to ask Parliament to rescind it?”

Jeremy shook his head. “No, ma’am... How about simply amending it? By changing its name and some of its wording very slightly, you’ll wind up with a prescription for the Avery-Denison Program, after all.”

Grayson broke out into a broad smile. “Son, spoken like a true statesman. That’s an outstanding suggestion. My goodness, it’s actually happened; the Yanks have truly exported their rebellion here. And the agents of rebellion turned out to be Mr Coris and Miss Roberts, just as President Gerston warned me they would be. I think we’d better leave those two fine people alone so they keep attending their uni classes, before I lose another of my government agencies,” she chuckled wryly. “Thank you, Head Teacher, and many, many thanks, Amelia and Jeremy, for your extremely insightful and entertaining orientation about this project. I have yet to meet Mr Coris and Miss Roberts; I believe I shall have to have my office arrange for it soon. I’d love to meet that intrepid pair—perhaps it should be in neutral territory; don’t want them to get any untoward ideas about changes they’d like to make in other governmental departments,” she joked.

“Thank you for coming, Prime Minister,” Hanford replied. “We’re delighted you approve of what we’re doing here and we greatly appreciate the opportunity to have our school serve our country like this. Gentlemen, thank you too and we were glad to have you visit.”

They shook hands all around and Mrs Grayson winked at Jeremy. “You’ll hear further from me,” she said to him with a smile as her group left, joining her security detail, who had been discreetly following her in the building.

Amelia heaved a sigh. “What a nice lady,” she smiled. “I like her.”

Jeremy laughed. “She can be really charming but don’t annoy her. The PM has a reputation for being really tough if you don’t satisfy her orders, but yeah, she’s cool. Dad thinks very highly of her.”

“I guess I shouldn’t be surprised you know her, Jeremy,” Hanford commented. “I knew your dad was at the American embassy. I didn’t know that he was that important there; the PM appears to know him well.”

“Yeah, Dad does have an important job. But we don’t talk about that, you know, because of security issues, specifically my safety.” He glanced at the clock. “Um, we need to get to our next class, sir. Our ‘training’ periods are ending in a few minutes.”

“Go ahead. And you handled your little session with our visitors very nicely, young man; you too, Amelia, so thanks.”

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Amelia couldn’t wait to tell Denise and Kevin about the PM’s visit and was disappointed that it wasn’t a surprise to either of them. This term their university classes ended at about the same

time so they generally returned to the flat together.

“You’ll never guess who visited the school today,” Amelia began when they came in.

“Hmmm. Not the Queen; I think she’s traveling,” grinned Kevin. “So it must be the PM.”

“*KEVIN!* How’d you know?” Amelia stamped her foot.

Denise hugged her. “Hanford texted me, darling, just before the PM’s group arrived. The PM’s office called Hanford only about twenty minutes before her impromptu visit; she had made a spur-of-the-moment decision to go. Hanford wanted to know if either Kevin or I could get to the school quickly but we couldn’t, so I messaged back that Jeremy would be able to represent us with no trouble and that you could too.”

“Me? Really? You thought so? I liked her, Denise, and she said such nice things about me too, and Jeremy. She knew Jeremy.”

“So you need to tell us what happened, honey,” Kevin said. “Hanford texted us that the visit went well but gave no details.”

Amelia described the PM’s visit and then told them that she had said that she wanted to meet them.

“She knew your names immediately,” Amelia grinned, “and so did the others who came with her. The education secretary looked stunned when Jeremy mentioned that you were behind the project. Anyway, she said she wants to meet you and do it in a neutral place. It was ‘cuz she didn’t want you getting any ideas about her departments. What did that mean? I meant to ask Jeremy but forgot.”

Denise snorted. “I’ll bet she’s referring to how Kevin and I were involved in eliminating the Office of Social Awareness in the U.S. and stopping the Program there, and here in England, when they stop running the Program, that agency—the National Program Committee—will be history too. So it appears that we’ve gotten the reputation of shutting down government programs,” she chuckled.

“Oh, that’s funny,” Amelia laughed.

“So you observed one of the first year-nine classes today, right?” Kevin asked. “How was it?”

“Yeah, they were so pumped when they came in,” Amelia grinned. “All the buildup from hearing about the program from the year eights made them crazy. Simon and Susan had their hands full to get them sorted, but after they settled down, it went okay, really well. Oh, we had a girl in this group, she was a traditional Muslim; she was so anxious that she was shivering. She didn’t want anyone to touch her...”

Kevin frowned, “We did cover that; remember the letters we sent to Muslim families explaining that Islamic jurist’s ruling? He ruled that the kind of touching we do in those classes, so long as its purpose isn’t to provoke desire or temptation, is permissible for young girls.”

Amelia nodded, “Yes; first the mentors took her aside and the girl worked with her, showing her the holding and touching but then tried to get her to accept doing it with the boy. I had to intervene ‘cuz I saw she was still very nervous and wouldn’t let him near. I went into the room and got her to accept a compromise—she was willing to have the boy touch and hold her if the girl mentor was also sitting right next to her, holding her too, and letting the boy touch both of them at the same time.”

“Did that work?” Denise asked, awed at Amelia’s resourcefulness.

“Oh yeah,” she said happily, “she liked that idea right from the beginning and went through all the exercises. As she did, I noticed after a while she was concentrating more on the boy. But at the end of the class session, she was totally relaxed and very comfortable with both mentors. I found the mentors later in the day and they told me that she was nervous about how she’d feel having a boy touch her and didn’t want to have any ‘impure’ thoughts, but she found that the only feelings she got were ones of, in the girl’s words, ‘kinship.’ Close feelings but not romantic ones. She said that she was gonna tell her friends not to be scared when they do the program.”

Kevin beamed at her, “Amelia, that was amazing! How did you come up with that idea?”

She blushed. “I’m not really sure, Kevin. Somehow doing that seemed right to me. I think it was like you did with Janet, remember? You let her come to you? I guess I tried to let that girl come to the boy in what she felt was a protected environment. On her own terms.”

“That was really brilliant, sweetie,” Denise agreed. “That’s a major breakthrough for a difficult situation. See, your contributions to this project are just as important as ours, you should be proud of yourself.”

“I guess. But I did tell the mentors to remember in the future not to push the reluctant kids like they seemed to be doing with her. That they should have plenty of patience, move in small steps, and watch the kid for clues about their personal limits,” Amelia explained.

“Perfect,” Kevin complimented her. “Great work, honey.”

“Thanks, Kevin. I love doing this project. I can’t wait till we can begin using the outdoor exercises.”

“Well, it’s time for some news of my own,” Denise smiled. “Dean Phillips called me to his office. The Avery project faculty recommended to the ed school that I be awarded 12 credits of advanced research topics toward a master’s degree in educational psychology and that if I write a full paper on the project, the school would accept it as a master’s thesis.”

“Shit, darling, that’s incredible!” Kevin exclaimed, while Amelia squealed and hugged her.

She went on, “It appears that Dr Dunton, you know, from the Program Committee, has been in touch with the project faculty, and with Phillips too, and pointed out that the data derived from this project would be a major contribution to educational psychology. We’ll have to stay here a little longer, into the summer, if I’m to finish; there’s one additional class I would need to take.

Can we do that?”

Kevin hugged her. “Certainly. Hell, two master’s degrees before your bachelor’s. Wotta girl!”

“Can we go celebrate?” Amelia giggled. “Go to our sushi restaurant?”

Kevin laughed. “Nope. For this news, nothing but the best. We’re going to The Dinings in Marylebone—it’s the best sushi house in London. I’ll ring them now to reserve.”

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The following week, during Amelia’s weekly tele-visit with her father, Hadad asked Amelia to get Kevin to Denise to join the conversation. When they came into view, Hadad greeted them with a big smile.

“Okay, everyone, Amelia’s been giving me all of the great news about your London life. Kevin, Denise, I fear for my country if you stay there much longer. If you do, just keep your activities limited to reforming the education system, okay?”

They all laughed.

“I’ve got some news of my own now. Remember why I couldn’t take off the time to come to London last fall? The big grants? Well, they came through, majorly. And this is bigger than we thought, much bigger; it will triple the reach of the Coris Foundation and means we’ll be expanding into Africa too.”

“Wow,” Kevin exclaimed, “that *is* huge.”

Hadad went on, “Indeed. So this means a major change for the Foundation, so I’ll give you the quick summary.”

Just then Kevin’s “Aunt” Janet walked into view. “Hi, all of you,” she called.

“Hi, Aunt Janet...” “Hi, Janet!” the others called.

Hadad put his arm around Janet. “So I’ve asked Janet to marry me and we’re moving the Coris Foundation headquarters to London.”

There was a chorus of gasps from everyone and then a great clamor as everyone began speaking at once.

“Oh my god, what amazing news!” Kevin shouted over the babble.

Everyone quieted down, and then Amelia spoke, eyes weeping. “Papa, that’s so wonderful... I really love Janet, how she looked after me and all... now she’ll be my mum! Oh, I wish I could hug you both now!”

Denise was smiling broadly. “That’s super news... but what about the Foundation’s staff?”

Janet nodded. “Most will stay on. Our clinical and legal directors will stay and the office will too, it’ll be our Jakarta branch. We’ll be opening a branch in Africa too, and our headquarters will be

in London or a close-in suburb. Kevin, I didn't consult with you about these plans because everything was moving so fast after we got the grants, but you told me that I could make any decisions for the Foundation..."

"Don't explain, Aunt Janet," Kevin broke in. "You did the right thing. I would have told you to use your judgment even had you asked. Anyway, this is incredible news. How did the staff take it?"

"Mostly fine. Nothing will really change for the field workers and case managers. The financial staff, most of them, are willing to move—you know, three are Brits anyway, and we need to keep some program and financial managers in Jakarta anyway, so there'll be promotions and most everyone is happy for the recognition..."

"Hey," called Denise, "just like a man to ask business questions and not the important one: when's the wedding date?"

"Yeah, Papa, when's the day?" Amelia chimed in.

Hadad answered, "Beginning of June; I have to let your grandparents know too. It'll be in Jakarta so the staff can attend and I hope you can come as well."

"Oh, yes," Kevin answered. "We'll make sure of it. When are you moving the office?"

"Right after the wedding; I've got real estate contacts in London who know the NGO industry. They'll be looking at sites after we send them our requirements."

"I'll be glad to help if you need other local contacts," Kevin offered. "I don't know much about real estate, but I did locate a good legal services agency here, people who are highly regarded. They did excellent work for me, so if you need legal work, I can put you in touch."

"Oh, good," Janet replied. "That's a service we need to find too, but if you have a law firm contact, we'd be interested in talking to them."

"It'll be wonderful to see you, Papa," Amelia said, "and I'll send you a DVD of the spring play that I'm in; it's next week and I'm excited about it."

"What's the play, dear?" Hadad asked.

"Hee hee, there was a push by some people to put on 'Oh Calcutta' 'cuz it had a nude scene and we were supposed to have the Naked in School Program here. But we got the Program stopped so no nudity, which is just fine. Anyway, we're doing 'Our Town,' a real oldie, and I'm Emily; it's a fantastic role for me and I can really relate to the character. I feel just like Emily; she realizes that human life is precious, 'cuz it's fleeting."

"That's a leading role, isn't it? I seem to recall the play," Hadad replied.

"Yeah, Papa. I had a great audition 'cuz we were teaching some kids here how to project their emotions to others, so I did that during the reading for the part. I was so thrilled; they picked me right away."

“That’s my girl; I’m really proud of you. I wish I could be in the audience for your performance.”

Soon Hadad and Janet had to disconnect since it was approaching midnight, so they all said their good-byes.

“Wow,” Kevin exhaled, “things suddenly got really complicated again, but in a nice way. I look forward to seeing Janet again,” he said softly.

“I love weddings,” Denise sighed

“I’m getting a mama again,” Amelia whispered.

## Chapter 19

Amelia's play was performed three times, Friday and Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoon. Kevin, Denise, and Jeremy went to all of the performances. The Porters came to the Saturday performance with their younger children and many of the university teacher ed students came to one of the shows, too. As an arts specialty school, local papers sent reviewers to cover the play, and the reviews generally agreed that the acting was excellent and Amelia's performance was noted as being particularly impressive. "The haunting, hypnotic presence Miss Hadad imparted to the character of Emily showed a maturity in her performance far in excess of her age, elevating the play into an almost flawless achievement for this excellent performing arts school," one reviewer gushed.

The following Monday afternoon, Amelia and Jeremy arrived back at Amelia's flat much later than usual. Kevin and Denise were already home.

"Got your text that you'd be late," Denise said as she entered. "What kept you?"

Jeremy sighed. "It's tough hanging with a celebrity," he groaned.

Amelia giggled. "The video of the play was put up on VueTube and went viral; over 10,000 views since Saturday. The head's been getting calls all day from agents and scouts who want to talk to me. So after school he had me meet with him, Mr Davis—he's the drama teacher—two staff governors, and the school solicitor, to tell me about what I should do about contacts with those people, even before I left school, 'cuz there even were several loitering about the building waiting for me to go out.

"They told me not to talk to anyone and definitely not sign anything without a solicitor present and if you want to talk to someone about it, Mr Davis knows lots about the entertainment industry and I have his number."

"So how'd you escape the scrum?" Kevin asked.

Jeremy chuckled. "There were almost a dozen people waiting at the front of the building looking at the kids as they left—they had pictures of Amelia, it seemed, since they were looking at a paper and then the kids. I texted Mrs Thompson, my security person, to drive around to the staff car park and wait close to the staff entrance. We slipped out that way. We'll go in that way tomorrow too, I think. Mrs Thompson said it's a good thing Amelia's last name isn't like either of yours which means they can't find out where she lives. Say, whose name is registered to her mobile?"

"Oh, it's in my name," Kevin said.

"Good; they can't find her that way either. Head says these people are like sharks but have short memories. Only the really serious agents will persist and they'll be mostly polite."

"Amelia, how do you feel about this notoriety?" Denise asked.

"Um, it was funny at first but now I'm a little concerned. I never thought that something like this

would happen.”

“Well, your performance was a knock-out,” Denise told her. “As good as a professional, in fact. So you’re in demand as the hot new talent. Is that what you want as a possible career?”

“Ah, no... I love acting, but not as a career; it’s loads of fun, but I want to have a career in helping people, like you, Denise—and Kevin too.”

Denise looked at her sharply. “Tell me, sweetie, how you felt when you came out for your curtain calls and the audience stood and cheered and whistled and clapped? Some people feel exhilarated, feel a rush, even a tingling, like getting horny. Did you feel that?”

“Oh... um, not really... I felt, um, really happy that I did so well that people liked it and glad that I made them feel good. I think that was the scariest part of the play—all that emotion washing over me at the end was almost too much, really,” Amelia said, thoughtfully. “Why do you ask? Do people really get horny over that?”

“For sure they do, sweetie! Many actors get turned on sexually from audience adulation. They get a high, almost like a drug, and can get addicted to the feeling. You didn’t feel any of that? Or when you were in plays in Jakarta?”

“Definitely not, no. I liked acting ‘cuz it let me forget about my pain; I could be someone else—even when I was learning my lines it let me forget that pain ‘cuz I could be ‘not me.’ I could become the character I was playing. So the reward for me was being able to ignore my pain, not the audience’s reaction. Um, this time, I felt a connection to the play’s character and wanted to bring Emily to life ‘cuz the play’s message meant a lot to me. And it gave me great satisfaction that I could make the audience understand the play’s message. That’s how I interpreted the applause—not for me, but for Emily. She was the heroine, not me.”

Kevin smiled. “Amelia, that was beautiful, like your name. Very well said, and very mature.”

Denise hugged her. “Honey, you’re very well balanced, it seems. Many actors are egotistical, or exhibitionists, or approval-seekers, and feed on the adulation of their audiences for a psychological high. If you’re not interested in an acting career, that’s just fine; you won’t be tempted by all the fancy offers that’ll be thrown at you. But those people can be persistent; so you can just ignore them. Is that okay?”

“Sure, Denise.”

“And you won’t lose your talent, honey. Remember that; it’s a part of you that you can return to when you want. So if you ever change your mind, that’s a career option you can always go back to. You’re still young and’ll have plenty of choices to make as you get older.”

“Thanks, Denise. You’re the greatest,” Amelia whispered as they embraced again.

Kevin grinned at Jeremy. “Ever get the feeling that you’re superfluous, buddy?” he joked.

Jeremy grinned back. “Not every guy is lucky to have a celebrity as a girlfriend, so I’m content to

bask in her radiance,” he chuckled. “Besides, I make a pretty good bodyguard.”

Amelia looked at Jeremy. “You can guard my body anytime, you know,” she said and burst out laughing. “I hope you’re not annoyed with me, darling,” she told him. “For making our lives even more complicated now.”

“Oh no,” Jeremy grinned. “Mrs Thompson will have to earn her keep now on our school runs. Just think, you’ll get to see how covert operations are really run.”

Amelia tapped him in the chest. “You goofball. But you’re cute so I’ll keep you around.”

Denise sent an email to Hanford explaining that Amelia had decided that she wasn’t interested in any agents’ offers and to let any callers know of her decision. She also asked him to attempt to keep any stalkers at the school away from the entrances.

The following morning, Amelia and Jeremy decided to use the school’s main entrance instead of the staff one. After all, Jeremy pointed out, he could protect her. Mrs Thompson was a little dubious but agreed, telling them that she’d drop them off, but then cruise past the school’s entrance to ensure that they got safely into the building.

As they expected, there were a number of men loitering near the school entrance, but they were on the sidewalk, staying away from the immediate entry area. Jeremy and Amelia waited down the block from the school until a public bus arrived and then they joined the group of kids that disembarked, walking with them to the school entrance.

As they passed several men on the sidewalk, two of them called out, “Miss Hadad, please?” and began following.

She ignored them and continued walking but one ran to follow her. He caught up with Amelia and Jeremy at the entrance steps, still calling Amelia’s name. Jeremy turned to face him as Amelia continued up the stairs.

“You’re trespassing, mate,” Jeremy growled. “No one’s interested in your pitch.”

“What’s it to you?” the man shot back.

“Nothing, but if you’re still here this afternoon, the school will have you arrested for stalking, okay? Tell your mates that too; the head teacher asked us pupils to report any harassment to him and I’ll be reporting you now.”

Just then a police officer appeared and spoke to Jeremy. “Is this person bothering you, sir?” he asked.

“Actually, Constable, he’s begun stalking one of the pupils who attends the school, together with those other loiterers over there on the sidewalk. You might want to question them why they’re watching every girl going into the school. They even have pictures. Looks very creepy, wouldn’t you say?”

“Thank you, young man,” the officer said. Then to the man, “You, come along with me now,

away from the building. I want you to tell me..." his voice faded away as he escorted the man away.

Jeremy's mobile pulsed with an incoming text. He checked; it was from Mrs Thompson.

*"Rang bobbies, said kids being harassed at school,"* it read.

He texted back, *"OK, they came. We're good. Thx."*

Within a half hour, the sidewalk was empty of loiterers and they didn't return; however, Hanford received over a dozen phone calls about Amelia asking for her contact information. He refused to give any information, citing pupil privacy laws. One of the calls was from a person who threatened to sue the school for the contact information. Hanford just hung up on him.

After school, Mrs Thompson was waiting to pick up the two teens. They climbed into the car and she pulled out. After a minute, she muttered "Goddamn" and made a quick u-turn. Jeremy looked up.

"What's the matter?"

"Yeah," Thompson said. "We're being followed. I felt uneasy when I picked you up; there was an occupied car sitting across from the school and there's never been one there before. Okay, let's see if I'm right."

She sped up and then made a sudden right turn.

"Damn," she grumbled, looking at her mirror. "He *is* tailing us. Guys, I don't like this; this probably isn't just a dumb agent trying to sign up Amelia. Keep your heads down, okay?"

She thumbed her radio. "Olympus, Prometheus, code 16, 11-55."

"Go ahead, Prometheus."

"North 2214, 30 kph to Queen's Road, ETA one minute, target black 4-door Vauxhall Meriva."

"10-4. Wait one.... Metro unit 34 responding. 10-20?"

"20, Lausanne and Queen's."

"10-4. Unit 34 coming from northeast of you. Make for Fordham Park."

"10-4. That's in two minutes.... Almost there... Now turning left on Pagnell, northbound... 20, Pagnell."

"10-4, Pagnell."

"Olympus, target overtaking us... shit, forcing us to the side of street on Pagnell."

"10-4. Metro 34 advises ETA two minutes."

Thompson stopped the car. "Guys, keep down. Those blighters are getting out of their car."

“Prometheus, Metro 34 ETA one minute.”

“4. Two subjects approaching vehicle, could be armed.”

“10-4. Advising Metro 34.”

The men came up, one on each side of their car, and one of them tapped on the driver’s window while the other man tried the passenger door; it was locked.

“Open up! Get out!” the one at Thompson’s door called.

“Bugger off!” Thompson called back.

“Okay, we’re coming in!” The guy pulled out a pistol and slammed it into the window, then screamed as the window resisted his blow; he dropped the pistol, clutching his hand.

Just then a siren whooped and the two men whirled around. A police car pulled up behind Thompson’s car and an amplified voice called, “Freeze and get down on the ground now!”

Then a second police car came barreling down the street from the opposite direction and skidded to a halt.

The man at the passenger side of the car ducked down and pulled out a pistol.

“Git outta here or I’ll shoot them in the car!” he called.

An officer had exited the second police car and, using the Vauxhall as a shield, crept around its side. Meanwhile, the first man, who had dropped to the ground, reached for the pistol he had dropped. Suddenly there was a high-pitched zinging sound and the man on the passenger side screamed and dropped, hit with taser darts, while the cop from the first car shouted, “Freeze! You make a move for that gun, you’re dead!”

He lay still; Thompson looked out of the closed window.

“Olympus, tell Unit 34 that subject is still within reach of the pistol,” she advised dispatch.

“10-4.”

There was a burst of communication from the Unit 34 police car a few seconds later and then the cop called out, “Slowly roll onto your back away from the car and keep your arms where I can see them!”

Then two more police units arrived.

Two minutes later both men were in handcuffs and were getting stuffed into different patrol cars. Thompson opened her door and got out.

“Thanks, mates,” she called to the cops walking up to her. “What the hell, that was an attempted kidnapping, it seems. They pulled a pistol and tried to break the window. Protected glass doesn’t break so easily.”

One of the officers from the final car to arrive came hurrying over.

“I’m Sergeant Hutchins... you’re Mrs Wilma Thompson from the U.S. Embassy security section?”

“Yep, Sergeant. Thanks for your men’s quick response. Those blokes were tailing us and then decided to pull us over; I guess because they thought this was a quiet street.”

Hutchins looked over at her car. “Your passengers okay?”

Thompson grinned and looked back at her car. The two teens were wide-eyed, peering out of the side window at the scene.

“Sure. Maybe the young lady’s a bit shaken but the boy’s cool. I’ll see to them. You can book those two blokes for attempted kidnapping, but add all the other charges too, assault, weapons, motor vehicle, resisting, the lot. I’ll be doing a report for the embassy since this was a crime against a diplomatic dependent; if you send an investigator by later, I’d be happy to share it.”

Hutchins nodded. “Sounds good, ma’am. Let’s see if we can move the vehicles so you can get out of here.”

She watched while the cops shifted the cars; then she walked back to hers and got in.

“Okay, Amelia, you all right?” She turned to look at Amelia who sat there, goggle-eyed.

“Um, yes, Jeremy told me we were safe in here and this car was like a tank.”

Thompson snorted. “Well, not quite as secure as a tank, but yeah, it’s pretty well protected. Listen, do you need to talk about it? This can be pretty traumatic and I don’t want you getting bad thoughts or dreams about what happened.”

Amelia nodded, “Yes, maybe if we talk a bit so I know what happened. Jeremy was keeping me down on the car’s floor and I didn’t see anything.”

“All right. There are some shops about a half-kilometer away. I’ll park there and we’ll talk. We’ll be there in a few minutes. One sec, first I need to report. ... Olympus, Prometheus, Code 4.”

“Prometheus, Code 4, 10-4.”

Four minutes later, she parked.

“Okay, Mrs Thompson, please explain,” Jeremy asked. “I missed a lot of that too.”

“Sure. The DSS—Diplomatic Security Service—use the standard U.S. police codes because we operate all over the world. The Brit police don’t use them. So I called into dispatch that we had an unknown vehicle following us and told them where I was and my direction and speed. Dispatch alerted a nearby Metro Police unit and gave them the vehicle description and then told the police unit where I was headed. The police told dispatch where I should go to meet up with them. I didn’t expect to be pulled over like that, though...”

The radio beeped. “One sec...” She answered, “Prometheus, go ahead.”

“Olympus. MPS reports situation secure?”

“Secure. Be back in about 30 minutes.”

“10-4, Olympus out.”

“Prometheus out.”

“Wow,” breathed Jeremy.

“Yeah, this is why we’re really careful, kids. I first thought that those berks were following us to try to find out where Amelia lives to contact her, but it was way more sinister than that. We don’t know who they were after, but I suspect that it wasn’t Amelia. Maybe it has something to do with Jeremy’s actions in protecting you last fall, Amelia. Let’s get you home now. You staying with her, Jeremy, or going home?”

“As much as I’d like to stay, I need to get home myself,” Jeremy told her. “You be okay by yourself, sweetie?”

“Um, Denise should be home now, actually,” she replied.

Amelia had exciting news for Denise when she arrived home, and for Kevin later that evening.

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In school, the Avery-Denison project was progressing very well; the university faculty had been recruiting additional teacher ed students to learn the exercises; two teams from the original student group were training six additional teams of students at the university. After experiencing the various exercises as couples, the new teams visited Norwich Academy to observe the children in their actual classes.

Also, work continued on developing the project curriculum. Based on pupil observations made by Denise’s team, the curriculum was updated and expanded, and local secondary-school teachers were beginning to visit to observe the classes.

Several evenings after the day of Amelia’s exciting car chase, Warren Porter called Kevin.

“Hi, Kevin, it’s Warren.”

“Hi, how’s it going?” Kevin replied.

“The usual. Stamping out crises. And that’s the reason for my call now, not a crisis, but over your school project with Denise and the kids,” Porter remarked. “No one’s in trouble, but there’s a political matter brewing over how a couple of American college kids are revolutionizing British education.” He laughed. “You won’t believe the ruckus in Whitehall and Parliament over your project, which is getting rave reviews by the education experts, by the way.”

“So what do you need from us, Warren?” Kevin asked.

“Can you, Denise, and Amelia come to the embassy this Saturday afternoon? Ambassador Wixom and a few staff members want to talk to you about what you’re doing so they can speak intelligibly about your activities here.”

“Sure, we don’t have any pressing plans. Say, do you need anyone else, like someone who’s actually doing the teaching? Denise and I aren’t involved with any direct pupil contact anymore. That’s being handled by certified teachers and student teachers so we’re completely legal under the Brits’ education laws.”

“Good, trust you to have made sure of that. That’s a great point, thanks. No, this isn’t about specifics; it’s about your general role in bringing the Avery project to England.”

“What time do you need us—and is there anything else?” Kevin asked.

“I’ll send a car for you at 2 pm. Business dress, and plan to stay for dinner there. Charlie told me he has some entertainment planned but I don’t know about what he has in mind. Sometimes his sense of entertainment is a bit strange but he’s harmless, so you guys will have fun after we take care of business.”

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On Saturday afternoon, the embassy limo picked up Kevin’s group and drove them the short distance to the embassy. Amelia had never been in a major embassy before; Denise had been here before and also in the Indonesian U.S. embassy, which was like a large estate house, and in the embassy in Seoul. The London embassy was massive and modern and set in an imposing circular park near the river, and the Marine guards welcomed them with impressive ceremony.

Porter greeted them in the entry hall and led them to his office. “My staff would like to meet you guys; they’ve heard nothing but your names all month, so they came in today,” he joked.

When they walked into the deputy mission head’s suite, Jeremy came out of an interior door. Amelia ran to hug him.

“I was glad to hear you’d be here, darling,” she whispered.

“Well, they wanted to pump all of us for info about what we’ve been up to,” he smiled.

“Kevin said we’re not in trouble... but are we? This place is impressive... overwhelming.”

“No one’s in trouble, sweetie. Yeah, this is quite a place. Actually all of the government buildings in London are kind of spectacular.”

“Come on, folks, let’s go to the conference room,” Warren called.

They went into the room and there was a spread of light snacks set out; in a minute a number of people began coming in. Porter made the introductions and for the next half hour, they conversed among themselves. Then Ambassador Wixom entered with a woman. He came over to Kevin and Denise and took their hands.

“Hello there,” he grinned. “You’re our latest American celebrities to wash up on these shores. Since our last meeting, Denise, you’ve outdone yourselves in changing an entire country’s educational policies. Outstanding. Where is your ward, Amelia? I want to meet her... oh, over there with Jeremy. Two incredible teenagers, those are. I want you to meet Veronica Chambers, she’s the mission’s chargé.”

While Chambers began chatting with Denise and Kevin, Wixom walked over to Amelia; Jeremy saw him coming and took her hand to turn her to face the man.

“Amelia, let me introduce you to Ambassador Wixom, Ambassador, this is Amelia Hadad, my girlfriend.”

“Jeremy, you know you can skip the ‘ambassador’ stuff here—we’re informal now.” Wixom grinned at him. “Amelia, it’s a real pleasure to meet you—and you call me ‘Charlie’ too, you hear?” She nodded. “I saw the video of your play performance, dear, and you were simply stunning! And then you got chased by talent scouts trying to sign you up, and then around South London by some criminals who were after Jeremy,” he chuckled while Amelia blushed.

“Thank you, sir,” she said. “That was an exciting car ride, actually, like an adventure story,” she giggled. “Mrs Thompson was really cool, too, the way she handled it. They were really after Jeremy?”

Wixom got serious. “That’s what the police told us. Those two were friends of one of the guys Jeremy pulled off you, that time when you were attacked in your school, and they cooked up a scheme where if they grabbed him, they could get their friend off in exchange for letting Jeremy go. Stupid, stupid men. What a dumb idea.”

“Oooh, yeah. Very dumb. A revenge thing,” Amelia nodded and Jeremy squeezed her hand.

Wixom nodded. “I’m glad it wasn’t any more than that, dear. Anyway, I hear from Warren that you and Jeremy have been the on-site project leaders of that new program that Denise and Kevin introduced.”

“Well, there’s actually a number of us, the student teachers and their faculty...”

“Don’t be so modest, dear, my sources tell me of how much you do. Jeremy, how important is Amelia in the project?”

“She’s essential, sir. She’s had a number of significant insights into working with the kids and made some really important contributions to the curriculum design too.”

Amelia smiled at him shyly. “Thanks, Jeremy.”

Wixom grinned. “Well, folks, let’s get down to business and start our little pow-wow.” He raised his voice. “Okay, gang, we’re starting our meeting in five minutes. Let’s wrap up the chat and we’ll see everyone Monday. Thanks for coming.”

Soon the room cleared, leaving Wixom, together with Mrs Chambers and two other people. They

joined Warren and Barbara Porter, Amelia and Jeremy, and Denise and Kevin, sitting around the table.

“I don’t know if you got to meet Rosemary Turner earlier, she’s our minister-counselor for public affairs, and Marshall Royston, our Consular Affairs Bureau chief,” Wixom said, looking at Kevin, Denise, and Amelia. “They’ve been fielding many questions about you two, Denise and Kevin, from various people in British government. Many think you’ve been planted here by the U.S. government to sow rebellion,” he laughed. “Seriously, we do want to know how everything you’ve been doing here happened and not have to try to figure things out piecemeal as we’ve been doing over the past six months. I guess we first became aware that a U.S. undercover agent was active here in London at the beginning of September, correct, Rosemary?”

She laughed. “Oh yes. That story you told about the president and the PM—that was a classic. But Public Affairs had found out about a week earlier that something was up when we got a call from their education department about a U.S. citizen involved in some kind of college protest movement. At the time we had no idea who it might be, but when Warren reviewed our weekly incident report, I think he connected the dots. Am I correct, Warren?”

Porter grinned. “Yep, I recalled that Denise was taking classes there and about her anti-Program activities in the States. But I couldn’t follow up on that just then since the president was to be arriving to attend the summit the following week and we were so busy preparing. Then, in Brussels, when the PM mentioned the turmoil in her education department, I figured that Mr Gerston would appreciate the one-up over the PM, so I did a little teasing to instigate a fact-check. But I didn’t know that the PM’s staff had already actually identified Denise.”

He grinned at Denise, but she was blushing and trying to disappear under the table.

“Hey, honey, don’t be embarrassed... diplomacy is a game in one-upmanship all the time and you helped us in a big way. It’s nice to teach the Brits that if we in the Colonies do something really dumb, like the Program, we have smart people who can come forward to set us straight. And then they can come over here next, so they can set the Brits straight,” he finished, laughing.

They continued reviewing Kevin’s and Denise’s activities through their meeting with the National Program Committee.

Then Royston spoke. “That’s when I got some calls from a few of their MPs. They wanted to know how two of our citizens became involved in their education system to the extent that a whole state curriculum was being revised and redesigned by foreigners. We had to tread very lightly here because one of the foreign principals involved was the bloomin’ son of the deputy chief of mission! Fortunately, Jeremy was born here, and the Brits never thought to link him to Warren at that point—not until the PM saw him at his school. Hell, did we ever hear about that!” he chuckled.

“Yeah, Charles wasn’t in the office when she called,” Chambers put in. “I had to take the call. You know how Mrs Grayson can come on so strong—she began with a little tirade about Yanks meddling in British affairs but I sensed that she was pulling my leg. I told her that as a British

citizen—Jeremy has dual citizenship, after all—she should be proud of his contributions to British education. She began to laugh and told me how impressed she was at what she saw at the school. She said she was also getting favorable reports from her staff about public reaction too.”

“Okay,” Wixom prompted, “after that Program Committee meeting, what did you magicians do to mobilize their entire education system to do what even one city in the U.S. can’t even get going, let alone a state or even the whole country? Beyond a few schools, that is.”

The other staff members looked questioningly at him.

“I’m referring to that Avery-Denison Program,” Wixom explained. “They can’t even get any funding to get its curriculum development off the ground there, I hear. Applications for grants to fund it are being stalled and only a few schools have adopted it. With great success too, I hear. But Denise et al, in a meeting lasting just a few hours, mobilized a major branch of the British government, loosened some purse strings, created a college teaching program, recruited a pilot school, and trained a teacher cadre, all in the course of a month. Just one month!”

He turned to Denise. “What the hell did you do, and can you teach us how to do it?”

She grinned. “Well, to put it bluntly, I guess I scared the shit out of them. First we threatened a huge lawsuit and had the legal ammunition to make it sound intimidating. Then Jeremy showed them how their Program violated all kinds of laws on their books, international treaties too. Then Amelia showed them how their ignoring social minorities had caused terrible injustices and showed them that the public viewed the Program as a government evil. Then I showed them the data that scared the shit out of them. And finally Kevin showed them a lifeline, the Avery Program, and they grabbed it. The MPs who were there, they looked like they were pole-axed when we listed the projected social and indirect financial costs that a study of the Program revealed would result if it were to continue in schools here. So everyone began throwing money at us to get us to develop a version of the Avery Program for them. But even before all that happened at our meeting, Jeremy and Amelia had been running a covert anti-Program PR campaign for maybe two to three months, Jeremy alone was doing it even longer; surely you must have followed the anti-Program articles in the press?”

“Oh, yes. Most interesting,” Wixom said.

“Well, Jeremy, with Amelia’s assistance more recently, was *The Realist*,” she grinned.

“You’re kidding!” Chambers remarked. “We know about how that blog got the public’s attention.”

Denise laughed. “No, not kidding; Warren, you knew that Jeremy was doing a human rights blog. But you didn’t know it was *The Realist*, right?”

“No; I suspected it but wasn’t certain,” he grinned. “I told Jeremy to be sure that he kept secret his doing the blog so that it wouldn’t be connected with the embassy. Our security staff did keep tabs on his equipment, so we knew that was secure. And Jeremy certainly did keep his involvement secret—the blog’s author was never found, right?”

“That’s what the press said; they couldn’t find where the server was and then one paper even posted a reward for revealing the blogger’s identity,” Royston said. “But they never found out either thing.”

Denise agreed, “That’s right. Okay, so those blog articles softened the target, as our Marine friends like to put it, and turned public opinion strongly against the Program. The blog articles publicized our ‘Just Say No’ campaign and stiffened parents’ and children’s resolve, finally prompting lawsuits against schools and teachers—this was a whole campaign to wear the Committee members down before our meeting. We planned it just like a military campaign. Our friends in Atlanta had told us all about how they ran a military-style anti-Program campaign at their high school and got the Program stopped from running there. We just applied social psychology to make the Committee members receptive to our suggestions, after all.”

“Holy shit,” Wixom breathed as he sat back. “You guys are truly dangerous if you can manipulate people like that...”

Kevin broke in. “Not really... Manipulation—suggestion like that actually only works when people can sense that something’s greatly amiss, sir. True, we can play on people’s emotions and sympathies, but there has to be a valid social cause or else our messages would be ignored as irrelevant. Publicizing issues that condemns the deliberate injury of children definitely attracts the attention and sympathy of plenty of people, and that’s how we mobilized our support.”

“All right, then, so tell us what you did after the Program Committee meeting to get your project running,” Wixom sighed.

Denise told of Kevin’s sending for copies of the draft and preliminary Avery-Denison Program materials, her getting Dean Phillips’ support for his university’s involvement, her recruiting of the education school’s student teachers, and the initial training for the student teachers and mentors.

“We did all that over the break,” she concluded. “Then the student teachers began the classes, but because Kevin and I had our own courses to attend, Jeremy and Amelia were the on-site project leaders and they did an amazing job in keeping it on track until the student teachers felt comfortable and secure in how they ran the classes. Also, since they both are Brits,” she grinned at the two of them, “there was never any direct American instructional contact.”

“Remarkable,” Turner said, shaking her head. “That could have been a sore point with some sensitive British politicians, but you sidestepped that problem neatly. Tell me, was that intentional?”

“Oh yes,” Kevin remarked. “We wanted to keep our involvement at arm’s length. I’m sort of sensitive to that kind of problem; remember, I’m the son of a diplomat and saw the kinds of problems that can happen when there’s foreign meddling in a country’s internal affairs, even if it’s unintentional.”

Wixom looked around the table. “I think we can all agree that this was a remarkable achievement

that these youngsters brought about.”

There was a chorus of agreement.

“It would have been an amazing job for seasoned politicians and diplomats, even,” he went on. He shook his head. “Now I see why Harry... ah, the president... is so impressed with you two, Denise and Kevin.”

He glanced at the clock. “Okay, we’ve got about fifteen minutes before dinner. If anyone wants to freshen up? Barbara, you can show Amelia and Denise where the women’s lounge is and Warren or Jeremy, please show Kevin to the men’s facilities. We’ll meet in the reception hall for cocktails at 5.”

## Chapter 20

As the group gathered in the reception hall, a number of people appeared, entering the room from its main entrance. Kevin and Denise looked at them curiously, but Amelia grabbed Kevin's arm.

"It's the prime minister!" she whispered to him in shock. "The education secretary too!"

Wixom entered the room following Grayson, ushering in several other distinguished-looking individuals.

Grayson, with Wixom at her elbow, walked up to Amelia and took her hands.

"Wonderful to see you again, Amelia, dear; Jeremy too," she smiled at Amelia and shook Jeremy's hand.

Amelia gulped and nodded jerkily. "Likewise, ma'am."

Wixom smiled at her, then looked at Denise and Kevin. "Mrs Prime Minister, you've met Miss Hadad, but let me introduce Miss Denise Roberts and Mr Kevin Coris. Miss Roberts, Mr Coris, it's my pleasure to introduce you to the Right Honorable Eleanor Grayson, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland."

Grayson offered her hand and they both took it politely.

She smiled at them. "I've wanted to meet the two of you for months, ever since I learned about your role in disrupting the orderly workings of my government," she said, trying to keep a straight face but not succeeding. "I told Amelia I wanted to meet you in neutral territory, but I suppose the U.S. embassy will have to do. After what you did to Education, I dare not let you get close to any of our other departments. Speaking of which, let me introduce my ministers who are with me today.

"Missus Amelia Hadad and Denise Roberts and Mr Kevin Coris, I present you the Rt Hon Roderick Cassidy, MP, Secretary of State for Education, the Rt Hon Dr Gregory Williamson, MP, Secretary of State for Health, and the Rt Hon Patricia Bolling, MP, Secretary of State for the Home Department. My lady and gentlemen, I believe you've all previously met the Porters' son, Jeremy Porter..."

They all nodded acknowledgment and then shook hands all around.

"... and it may not be a surprise to you that our young Mr Porter is deeply involved in our education issue along with the ambassador's other guests. Mr Cassidy saw him at Norwich Academy, the pilot school, so he undoubtedly mentioned that to you," she finished.

Wixom smiled. "Yes indeed. Prime Minister, what you have at Norwich is a truly unique multi-national education initiative. Did you know just how many different country's education systems we have represented in these four young people?"

She looked at Wixom. "Okay, no. Please tell me."

“Our sole unilateral expert is Miss Roberts, but she was educated in two different U.S. states. That can count as different countries in some people’s eyes. However, she was on a special U.S. State Department educational mission to South Korea where she attended a term of high-school classes. Then I present to you Miss Hadad, who attended schools in London, Birmingham, and Jakarta, Indonesia. Next and adding some other countries, we have Mr Porter, whose first schooling was here in London, followed by Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and again London. And our truly multinational expert is Mr Coris. He attended schools in Indonesia, South Korea, Japan—help me, Kevin—China?”

“Hong Kong, actually. And Thailand,” Kevin answered, grinning. “And three U.S. states too. And London now.”

Wixom nodded. “Another item you might not know, Prime Minister, is that Miss Roberts and Mr Coris actually have been awarded master’s degrees in education based on their work on the Avery-Denison Program and Miss Roberts is on track for a second master’s from her university here in London. And that work on this degree is being done in her spare time.

“Also, these two young people have been honored in the U.S. for distinguished service; Kevin is the youngest ever to be awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom while Denise was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal.” He laughed. “So, my friends, you can see that your education rebellion is being handled by some highly competent experts, if that thought is comforting.”

Everyone laughed.

“Come, let’s have dinner,” Wixom invited the group, and they walked to the dining room.

At dinner, Kevin and Denise were seated next to the prime minister and had an engaging conversation about their experiences while living in London. Both Kevin and Denise loved the city. The PM asked if they had had a chance to explore the countryside; they told her that they hadn’t but did plan to do it after their classes were over.

After dinner, Wixom led the group to a conference room. When he walked in, Kevin noticed that one entire wall of the room was covered by a sheer curtain. After everyone found seats, Wixom leaned back, looked around at everyone, and smiled.

“Now, my British friends, I understand that you have some information you thought our two secret agents who we’ve infiltrated into your educational system would appreciate learning. But before you take the stage, there’s one more guest who’s asked to be invited who I’d like to welcome now.”

He nodded and Chambers pushed a button on a console on the wall near her seat. The curtain on the wall drew aside, revealing a large screen which took up most of the upper wall. The screen came to life and revealed President Gerston, who was standing in a room similar to the room that they were in.

“Good afternoon, Mr President,” Wixom announced to the smiling man. “We’re delighted to have you join us. You of course recognize Prime Minister Grayson, and her associates are...” he

introduced the others. “And of course you remember Miss Roberts and Mr Coris. And these two delightful young adults are Miss Amelia Hadad and Mr Jeremy Porter, Warren and Barbara’s older son.”

Gerston replied as he seated himself, “Yes, thanks, Charlie; Madam Prime Minister, so nice to see you again and under such pleasant circumstances. And Denise and Kevin, I’m really delighted we could meet again now even if it is only electronically—I’d like to rectify that when you return to the States; I hope that you’ll pay me a visit. And Amelia and Jeremy; I’ve heard such wonderful things about you both; I know the Porters are so very proud of you, Jeremy; and Amelia, I’ve relayed my appreciation for your work in London to your dad Elliott through my Indonesian ambassador. Congrats on your dad’s forthcoming wedding too, my dear.”

Amelia was blushing scarlet.

“Well, Charlie, you told me that for once we Yanks did something right,” Gerston chuckled.

“Yes, Mr Gerston,” Wixom nodded, “that’s my impression from the prime minister. Ma’am,” he nodded to Grayson, “the floor’s all yours. This isn’t exactly a neutral territory, but you’re not risking the loss of any of your agencies while we keep our agents in here and away from Whitehall.”

The others in the room chuckled while Gerston laughed. “Good one, Charlie,” he said approvingly.

“Thanks, Mr Ambassador,” Grayson said, nodding. “Normally I would assume my battleaxe persona and accuse you of meddling terribly with our government by sending unregistered agents into our schools and fomenting rebellion,” she chuckled ruefully. “But I find myself in the uncomfortable position of having to thank you for the attention these fine young people gave to our school situation and to the wake-up call their appearance presaged.

“I’ve already received a number of reports from my cabinet officials,” she continued. “I’m familiar with the information you’ll be given now, but I wanted to share it with you as our thanks for opening our eyes about the Naked in School Program’s problems. Mr Cassidy’s department has been working overtime, analyzing the data Miss Roberts so thoughtfully provided to our Program Committee, so let me have him tell us what they’ve learned.”

“Thanks, Prime Minister,” Cassidy responded. “Pleased you could join us, Mr President. The PM directed us to investigate the facts that Miss Roberts presented to the Program Committee; this is a summary of what we learned. When the recommendation for introducing the Naked in School Program in the U.K. was first proposed, the DfE never considered its academic effects. That’s because the Program was believed to function in the school curriculum similar to physical education classes; after all, both physical education and the Program involve activities involving the pupils’ bodies rather than book learning. I’m embarrassed to admit that we’ve routinely tended to ignore education studies conducted in the U.S. since the U.S. system differs from ours significantly. We plan to rectify that oversight.

“Thanks to the information Miss Roberts provided from the American study, we used similar study methods to review the data from our own schools, except that we didn’t have access to the kind of highly detailed class-by-class scores the Americans did. Instead, we chose the schools in the U.K. where the Program was run for at least two years and evaluated the overall average GCSE subject scores before the Program, comparing those scores to the results of exams taken while the Program was in effect and indeed, we noticed slightly greater than a 9 percent decline, by subject, in average overall performance of our pupils. This was comparable to the decline reported in the Avery study Miss Roberts cited. We believe that this similarity in results likely also validates our approach. Just as Miss Roberts told the Program Committee, the unavoidable conclusion of our result demonstrates that the Program has been a significant educational detriment to our pupils’ academic performance. Are there questions?”

“Do you know why the academic grades were so affected?” Gerston asked. “I’m embarrassed to say I never asked our own education officials that question; I was glad to be done with the Program here, especially after its scandal was exposed.”

“No, Mr President, we didn’t look into the reasons, but in hindsight I suspect that some could be theorized,” Cassidy replied.

Both Kevin and Jeremy raised their hands. Wixom smiled and looked at Gerston. “Mr President, which expert would you choose to speak first?”

Gerston laughed. “Thanks for giving me the hard choice, Charlie. Let’s see; both of you experienced the Program in your own countries first-hand. I suppose we should hear from Mr Coris first, since he’s close friends with the original study’s authors and may have some insights from them. Then Mr Porter. Do you have any ideas, Kevin?”

“Not directly from the study itself, sir,” he answered, “but from the data collected just before the study was designed. Denise, you reported that the results were just about the same for schools where the Program was really terrorizing the students and where it wasn’t so bad, right?”

“That’s right. The differences were statistically insignificant,” she answered.

“And that makes sense in a convoluted way, actually,” Kevin went on. “From personal reports of students in the Program, so many of the kids in the classes were disturbed by Program activities, like the Relief sessions—the public masturbation at the class’s beginning—or the disruption of using Program students in classes to have them perform jobs whose only apparent purpose was to humiliate them. Those things went on at every school and disrupted learning; the kids couldn’t focus on the lessons because they were either aroused, disgusted, or scared, thinking of what would happen to them when it was their turn to be objectified.

“Second, because no one participating in their Program week could concentrate on their schoolwork, they got a bye for work missed during their week. You know how difficult it is to make up a week of missed work? A third reason may be the increased use of anti-anxiety drugs by a significant number of Program participants. We assume that many more kids were drugged than were accounted for in the reports that were analyzed. It’s hard to learn if you’re drugged,

and we saw reports that many kids had to be on the drugs long after their week was over; they experienced PTSD from the trauma. For yet another reason, we saw significant numbers of cases where being put in the Program was used as punishment so those kids had more required naked time and more stress as a result.

“Finally, the atmosphere in the schools was one of dread, especially at each week’s beginning, when the selected students’ names were read. Kids spent their weekends worrying if they’d be called. That’s the wrong frame of mind for studying. Some teachers tried to make it easier for the Program kids, but a lot of teachers took pains to follow the hard line that the Program officials mandated. Basically, if kids are worried and scared about coming to school, it’s hard for them to learn. I suspect that all of those reasons were factors that caused the grades to drop.”

“Thanks, Mr Coris, that was an outstanding summary and makes a lot of sense,” Wixom said. “Jeremy, do you have anything to add?”

“Not that much more, sir. Kevin covered most everything I saw at my school. But I’d like to add that teachers went out of the way to change their lessons if a Program kid was in the class. That happened to me; in biology we were covering a unit in ecology when I appeared in class as a Program participant. Since I was naked, the teacher decided to drop the day’s lesson and use me to demonstrate a sexual act.”

The others gasped.

“Not what you think, pardon, it was a solo act. But we had the GCSEs coming up and he wanted to waste class time over something completely unrelated to ecology. The teachers in my first school did that a lot, so a fair bit of important lesson material was glossed over or even never covered because of all the time that was wasted on Program interruptions. And from what I experienced, my classes were much more unruly when a naked kid was in them; it was a real distraction for everyone. I hope that can explain it, Mr President,” Jeremy concluded.

Gerston nodded. “Thank you, both of you; those reasons make a lot of sense. Please carry on.”

“Thank you, Mr President,” Cassidy said. “Any other questions from my part? If not, next, Home Secretary Bolling can speak to the changes in school-related crime incidents we’ve experienced and then Dr Williamson of the Health Ministry will tell us of his agency’s projection of the health and social effects of the Program.”

“Thank you, sir. Madam Prime Minister, Mr President, distinguished guests,” Bolling began. “Miss Roberts reported on a number of anti-social legal problems associated with U.S. schools, particularly assaults and sexual crimes. There were legal actions initiated against schools and teachers as well, alleging abusive treatment. The Home Office reviewed British crime statistics for the past three years and found an increase in reported rapes and assaults, including sexual assaults. It was difficult to obtain exact figures so we opted to count only the crimes clearly linked to school activities. Even with this limitation, we found that the national incidence of reported teenaged violent crime, sexual assaults, assaults, and rapes, increased 63 percent two years after the Program was started here. There were also increases in reports of adult crimes

against children too and that number was unspeakable: there was a 118 percent increase.”

There were gasps from the group at that statement.

“These were only *reports*, not convictions, my friends. It could be that the heightened publicity of events surrounding the Program engendered a higher likelihood of an abuse being reported. And those numbers I mentioned don’t include those from the horrific flood of assault complaints which began after the tabloids began publishing the contents of an internet blogging site which covered Program abuses. Of course, these are all troubling numbers. Before we move to the Health Secretary’s report, do you have any comments or questions?”

“By ‘report,’ exactly what do you mean?” Wixom asked.

“It’s a complaint made against an alleged offender to a police agency that resulted in an investigation at some level, whether or not it advanced to laying charges,” she replied. Wixom nodded. “Anyone else? Next will be from the Health Secretary,” she concluded.

Williamson stood and glanced at the screen. “Mr President. Prime Minister and guests. Honored to share our report. Our contribution from Health was more difficult since we had to comb through medical data from reimbursement reports and make projections into the future. Of course we had no access to the kind of large dataset that the U.S. study had access to, even if it was composed of self-reported data, because for Program participants in the U.K., no such information was ever collected. However, unlike the U.S., the British health-care system is organized in a highly centralized way so we were able to go through the national medical reports and were able to identify reports showing a marked increase in delivering health services to youngsters.

“The study Miss Roberts mentioned covered a number of medical-related diagnoses which could be searched for in the national health-care reports, such as trauma or infection involving the genitals or psychological interventions, including the prescribing of psycho-active medications. Without going into specifics, in our teenaged population, medical treatments had increased some 50 to 55 percent in the two years after the Program began here. We also noted an increase in our teen suicide rate and the increases appear to be linked to schools where the Program was operating.

“In the past two years, the additional cost to our economy for the increased medical services was over £50 million and the Program wasn’t operating in all schools yet; it was just getting started in about two-thirds of the country’s schools. The Program was fully in effect in only about a third of the schools for the first year and a little over half in the second year. If we were to project costs for the next few years with all eligible schools participating, we reckoned the annual costs to exceed £150 to 200 million per year, and that represents just medical costs. So for Great Britain too, our projections appear to agree with the U.S. information that Miss Roberts presented from the study she cited. Any questions? Yes, Miss Roberts?”

“Thanks for mentioning the study I cited, sir,” Denise said. “I’m wondering if you saw any continued negative psychological effects on children who were forced to participate; I’m thinking

of my own reaction when I was selected despite a very specific medical exemption. Forcing my participation resulted in my hospitalization and required some further treatment for some years afterward. I saw reports of other children who were hospitalized too, but U.S. health-care reporting isn't as efficient as it seems to be here."

"I don't have the details about that, Miss Roberts. But I do recall that there was an increase in hospital admissions for psychological reasons to treat cases that spanned a wide range of problems including suicide ideation; neurotic reactions such as dissociation, displacement, or repression; or even pathological defensive mechanisms like psychotic denial or delusional projection. And yes to your question; many of these patients are still receiving treatment. Their reactions, based on the clinical reports, appear to be similar to sexual assault survivors, even though a vast majority were apparently not actually assaulted."

Amelia broke in, "Sir. I must disagree; they were most certainly assaulted! The very act of forcing someone to remove their clothes, even if some law makes that legal to do, is still an assault. And certainly the humiliation, embarrassment, and the groping of their privates that they were forced to endure over a weeks' time was absolutely a sexual assault. Can't you see that?"

"Erm, sorry, Miss... uh... Hadad, you're absolutely correct," Williamson hurriedly answered. "These cases are so unusual so it's difficult to place them in the normal clinical categories. The violence here was typically more psychological than physical, and the usual kinds of sexual assaults clinicians commonly treat is violently physical and occurs in a single encounter. Is that a better response?"

Amelia nodded. "Yes, that's better. Thank you."

The prime minister stood and looked around at the group. "I think that our presentation wraps up what we learned from our review of the dreadful financial and social results from our adoption of this misguided educational idea. And I have the support of my cabinet and the entire British Parliament in extending to you, Miss Roberts and Mr Coris, the thanks of our nation in averting further damage to our country's youth, not to mention the damage to our economy and social structures. And the two of you were so ably aided by Miss Hadad and Mr Porter, whose work complemented yours so well.

"Further, Miss Roberts and Mr Coris, not only did you show us where we were wrong in adopting the Naked in School Program, after which you could have shrugged off any further involvement with our schools and gone your own way, but instead you went on and offered to replace that discredited educational program with one which is promising to have unique benefits, and spent your own time and effort to design and launch that initiative. You did all of this with no regard for any personal compensation or recognition in a country not even your own. My government would like to express our appreciation to you all, the four of you, and will be inviting you to a reception at Buckingham Palace in mid-June."

The four looked at each other in amazement, then Kevin found his voice.

"Thank you, Prime Minister, we're very honored that you think so highly of what we did—you

do realize that at first, we were simply protecting our ward, Amelia? We had no designs on your educational system. Our involvement only grew out of our concern that if Amelia were made to participate in the Program, it would have caused her great injury, both physical and psychological.”

Grayson smiled. “Yes, Mr Coris, we know. Your activities did fall into two areas; however, only the first was defensive, I suppose, showing the Program Committee how the Program was wrong and about its costs to society. That prompted us to do our self-evaluation. But your subsequent work to replace the Program with your Avery program, which has great potential, was your second outstanding contribution. President Gerston has told me of your modesty, young man. All four of you are highly deserving of our expression of appreciation.”

Gerston was standing up now, and he spoke. “Folks, Prime Minister Grayson and all of you, I’ve got to sign off now, but I want to thank you all for having me attend this most informative session. Denise, Amelia, Jeremy, and Kevin, it’s been a pleasure seeing you all and hearing about your work. Keep it up, and I’m sure we’ll hear good things from you in the future. Please come visit me when you’re back in the States. Have a good evening, all!”

“Goodbye, Mr President.” “Farewell, sir.” “Good evening to you too.” The farewells were called out as the video connection went off.

The meeting began to break up at that point as the prime minister went to Denise and Kevin to shake their hands, and then she put her hand on Amelia’s shoulder.

“My dear,” Grayson said to her, “thank you for your outspokenness. I heard something of your history and I’m impressed by your courage and dedication. And Jeremy,” she said as she took his hand, “it’s a real pleasure to have spoken with you about substantive matters instead of just the social chat we’ve had at receptions. I’m looking forward to hosting you all in June,” she finished, speaking to all of them.

They all acknowledged her and then everyone began leaving, saying their farewells. Soon only the four remained with Wixom and Porter.

“I certainly didn’t expect such an exposé of their internal affairs,” Wixom commented. “They really went into some detail about the Program problems. You will be able to go to that reception?”

“In mid-June, yes,” Kevin answered. “We have a wedding on June 3 in Jakarta; Amelia’s dad is marrying my honorary aunt. We’ll be there for four days.”

“Well, good; congrats, Amelia,” Wixom said. “Okay, I guess it’s time to pack it up; thanks for coming and many thanks for your work in the schools. That has produced a tremendous amount of goodwill between the U.S. and England so I’m grateful; makes my job a bit easier,” he laughed.

As the four left Wixom and walked to the embassy exit, Jeremy was quivering; he was bursting with enthusiasm.

“Oh god,” he exclaimed, “we actually did it! The PM agreed that the Program was a colossal mistake! And in front of the president, too. Kevin, Denise—you really did bring the rebellion here...”

Kevin laughed. “Settle down, guy. You had as much to do with our success as anyone, after all, you began the psychological part of our battle with your blogging. That got the newspapers involved and the public got motivated to make their voice heard. Amelia, honey, I still can’t figure out how a self-proclaimed shy girl becomes a fireball and speaks her mind to a government minister, with the heads of state of two governments present.”

Amelia giggled. “Jeremy’s outrage over human rights abuses is rubbing off on me. I had to correct him; he was missing a terribly important point.”

Jeremy hugged her. “You were wonderful, sweetie.”

After saying their goodbyes, Wixom and Porter left for the chancery residence and Kevin, Denise, and Amelia took the embassy car to their flat.

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As the school year drew to a close, Denise and Kevin put the finishing touches on the Avery-Denison curriculum and Denise completed her report on its development, together with a preliminary evaluation of pupil progress on interpersonal relations, and submitted it as her master’s thesis. The assessment measures she used in the study included self-reported surveys and pupil evaluation reports; all were very favorable. The school’s year-end preliminary reports seemed to indicate that even pupil grades were improving and teachers noticed the formation of informal study groups with stronger students helping the weaker ones.

At the end of May, Kevin, Denise, and Amelia traveled to Jakarta for the wedding. It was a small affair; only close friends and associates of the couple were invited. Hadad’s parents came from Ghana and the Hadad family had a very happy reunion. After the festivities were over, Kevin and the others returned to London since Denise had to attend the final ed class she had been required to take for her master’s degree, while Janet and Elliott Hadad left for a quick honeymoon trip.

Soon the date for the reception at Buckingham Palace arrived. The week before the date, Porter called Kevin and Denise.

“Hi, guys,” he told them. “Your duds all ready for the event?”

They had been told that the dress was formal.

“Yes, all set,” Denise answered. “Do you know anything about what’s happening yet?”

Porter chuckled. “I suspect you’ll be honored somehow. Next week is the Queen’s official birthday; it’s usually held on the second Saturday in June and that’s when the government’s honors are announced. Then and at New Year’s. But we haven’t been told anything, except that the PM would like you three to come to her residence at Number 10 first, before going to Buckingham Palace. I don’t know what that’s about, but she asked Charlie and me to bring our

families there too.”

“Okay, I guess,” Kevin said.

“I think that’s when she’ll tell us what’s happening,” Porter finished. “I’ll send a car around to fetch you.”

He gave them the schedule details and then they disconnected.

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Denise looked at the building as their car pulled up. “Oh,” she exclaimed, “is this it? What an ordinary building... looks just like a block of flats, actually.”

“The door has a ‘10’ so it must be,” Amelia said. “Look, the zero is crooked,” she giggled. “Maybe it slipped or something. The door’s kinda pretty, though.”

“The entry door is sort of famous,” Kevin said, as they got out of the limo.

“Yes, sir,” the embassy driver agreed. “It is. And miss, you should ask about the zero. It was actually painted that way.”

“But the building’s so modest,” Denise insisted. “Not like the office and home of a world leader.”

The driver grinned at her. “Yes, ma’am, that’s supposed to be exactly the idea. We’ve been told it’s to make the point that the United Kingdom’s government chief is just like a common person. You folks enjoy your day, now.”

Apparently their arrival had been coordinated with Wixom’s, since the ambassador’s car pulled up behind them and Wixom, Porter, and their spouses disembarked, followed by Jeremy. As the groups greeted each other, the door to 10 Downing Street was opened and several people emerged. A woman approached them.

“Welcome to the Prime Minister’s offices,” she said. “I’m Jane Southington, the director of communications for the PM. Hello, Mr Ambassador and Mr Porter, ladies; good seeing you again. These are our honored guests? Hello, Jeremy; please introduce your friends.”

“Sure, Mrs Southington. These are my good friends Denise Roberts, Amelia Hadad, and Kevin Coris,” he said as each reached to shake hands with Southington.

She led the group into the building as she explained their schedule while the Wixoms and Porters went with a different official; Jeremy stayed with Amelia.

“We’re going to the White Drawing Room to meet with the PM. She’ll join us in about twenty minutes. We’ll be going to Buckingham Palace for the reception in about two hours.”

As they walked, Amelia asked her question about the zero painted on the door.

“Oh, I did hear about that but I forget why it looks that way,” Southington said. “Let’s see if I can

find out.”

She stopped a passing staff member and asked if anyone knew about the zero.

“Erm, I think Sir Walter is actually here today,” he told Southington. “Let me get him. You’ll be in the White Room?”

“Yes; thank you.”

They arrived at the White Drawing Room and Southington began introducing them to the people there. Several minutes later an elderly man entered and looked around; then started toward Southington.

She saw him approaching. “Ah. Sir Walter Semmis is the official historian and probably can answer your question,” she told the group as he came up.

“Hello, Sir Walter. Thanks for coming. Our guests—these are Miss Amelia Hadad, Miss Denise Roberts, and Mr Kevin Coris—asked me about the odd zero painted on the door.”

“Ah yes, our wonky zero,” he laughed. “Yes, people ask lots about that and there’ve been many explanations offered, mostly nonsense. The best one, one that’s probably correct, is that the design came from the so-called ‘Trajan’ alphabet from which an adaptation was made for the Ministry of Works from a book from the 1930s. That alphabet is based on Roman inscriptions from a Trajan period column where the zero is actually a capital ‘O’—the Trajan ‘O’ has that same left tilt—but the sign painter was a bit of a duffer; the zero’s right side is fatter and its edges aren’t smooth, making it look lopsided. Even the architect of Number 10’s renovation in 1963, when the door was designed, said that the lettering was beastly. And every time the number’s been redone when the door is repainted or replaced, they keep that exact look. But we like it because it’s distinctive,” he finished with a smile. “Does that answer you?”

Amelia nodded. “What an interesting story,” she said. “It’s funny how some traditions start.”

“Very true, young lady,” he acknowledged. “Very nice meeting you all. Now if you’ll excuse me?”

He nodded to them and left; soon the prime minister entered the room and gradually people left as she walked over to Kevin’s group. They greeted her.

“Hello, my friends; welcome to the United Kingdom’s executive offices and my residence,” she replied, shaking hands around, and motioned to the remaining people in the room to take seats. “Let’s sit and I’ll clear up the little remaining mystery about today. You remember my ministers from our meeting at the American embassy.”

Everyone acknowledged that they did.

She looked at Kevin and Denise and grinned. “President Gerston tells me that there haven’t been many ‘ordinary’ American citizens who have been official guests at the White House and Number 10 both within a few years,” she continued, making a quotation gesture with her fingers.

“I reminded him that you weren’t quite ordinary and he agreed.”

Denise blushed and Kevin shrugged. “It’s an honor and completely unexpected, Prime Minister,” he said. “In both cases. Thank you.”

“Well, the honor is mine—and soon to be yours. Mr Gerston frequently reminds me about your modesty, Mr Coris...”

Kevin moved his hand in denial. “Please, ma’am, just Kevin is fine.”

“...if you wish. Mr Gerston advised me to keep you in the dark about our intentions,” she grinned. “He said you’d flee from the country if you learned about our plans. Ah, speaking of whom...”

She looked at the opening door behind them. President Gerston entered the room with a broad smile, followed by the Wixoms and Porters with Mrs Gerston.

Kevin and his group gasped, then rose to their feet.

“Mr President!” Denise exclaimed. “My goodness!”

He walked over to her and embraced her lightly; then shook Kevin’s hand. Then he glanced at Amelia and reached for her hand.

“So delighted to meet you in person, Miss Hadad. And you too, Mr Porter; this is so much better than by video link. Has the prime minister told you yet? Ah, your blank looks tell me she hasn’t.”

“Let me break the suspense, Mr President,” Grayson grinned. “If we can be seated? Good. Well, Mr... all right, you asked that I be less formal. Kevin, Denise, Amelia, and Jeremy. All four of you were nominated for one of Britain’s high honors, commonly known as knighthood, and you’ll receive the honors from the Queen later,” she finished, smiling broadly.

Denise and Kevin sat there, stunned, looking at Grayson in shock while Amelia squeaked, clapping her hands to her face and Jeremy sat bolt upright in disbelief.

Grayson went on, “The honor of knighthood is given for a pre-eminent contribution to the nation, but normally these awards are reserved for those individuals whose contributions to society span an extended period of time. However, in your case, your contributions were so dramatic and far-reaching that our government officials can’t think of a better way to honor all four of you for what you’ve done.

“You might be aware that today is the Queen’s official birthday,” Grayson explained. “We announce honors on this day, also on New Year’s; our honors commission concurred with your nomination and the honor was supported by Her Majesty. The president is here to also receive the award of a knighthood.”

Gerston grinned at her. “Among a large number of former presidents, you might add, Madam.”

“We greatly value the friendship and support you’ve given to our nation, Mr President, as I’ve

told you,” she responded.

She looked back at the four youngsters, who had gradually collected their wits, and then she laughed.

“I see for once you’re speechless,” she chuckled. “I believe that means our surprise was complete.”

Denise nodded. “Oh my, yes. I really don’t know what to say... OH! Do we have to give a speech? I read somewhere...”

“My dear, no, you don’t,” Grayson soothed her. “We’ll tell you what to say to Her Majesty. You’ll give a very brief acknowledgment and you can say it in your own words.”

Then the dam broke and all four began asking questions, which Grayson and her cabinet officials answered. When the questions were all dispensed with, Grayson announced that they would have a light lunch and then be brought to Buckingham Palace.

Still in a bit of a daze, the four honorees-to-be went with the others to the dining room and following lunch, they took the short ride to the palace. When they arrived, they were told what to expect at the ceremony and how to address the Queen.

Mrs Grayson then took them aside before they went to the audience hall and gave some final instructions.

“Denise, Kevin—and President Gerston—since you aren’t subjects of Her Majesty, your awards are necessarily honorary. You don’t kneel and be tapped with a sword. And by the way, you don’t use the style of ‘sir’ or ‘dame’ in your names. On the other hand, Amelia and Jeremy, since both of you have British citizenship, your awards will carry all the privileges of the honor, but the acclaim—that’s the tapping of the sword—will be done only with Jeremy. Sorry, Amelia, it’s not done with ladies since it’s a carryover from an ancient military honor, the appointing of a member of a fighting force for the protection of the sovereign.

“And Jeremy can be known as ‘Sir Jeremy’ while Amelia can be called ‘Dame Amelia.’”

Amelia blushed and bowed her head.

Grayson smiled at them, then finished, “Watch the others who will come first; that’s the best way to see what to do. President Gerston, you’ll be called before Denise, as we’ve discussed. And remember the simple acknowledgment I told you. The Queen may ask you a question or two; simply answer—just like you would any person. Address her as ‘Your Majesty’ first and then ‘Ma’am’ after.”

Soon the ceremony began and a number of other honorees received their awards, then Gerston received his. Next the chamberlain called Denise. She gulped and squeezed Kevin’s hand; then walked up to the Queen and curtsied. The Queen smiled at her and put out her hand. Denise touched it as she had been coached.

“Miss Denise Roberts. What a pretty young lady and so clever too,” the Queen said. “You have done so many selfless things for our country and you have our heartfelt gratitude.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty, I’m greatly honored,” Denise replied.

“We understand you are to receive an advanced degree in education from one of our fine universities. We know you will have great success in your chosen field and we are grateful for your contributions to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.”

Denise murmured her thanks.

“Miss Roberts, you’ve honored our nation through the generosity of your knowledge and hard work. Accordingly, Miss Denise Roberts, we confer on you the honor of Dame Grand Cross of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. Let all present acknowledge this honor and let us accord Miss Roberts our thanks for her service to the Crown.”

There was polite applause and Denise said her brief words of thanks, to which the Queen nodded and smiled. Then Denise was escorted back to her position and Kevin was called.

The Queen made some complimentary remarks and asked Kevin, “We’re told that you are affiliated with the Coris Foundation in Indonesia.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“We’ve heard of the outstanding humanitarian work your foundation has done in the Far East over the years, and now we understand that it’s moving its offices to London. We hope that this means that you will keep your contacts with us in Great Britain and continue to contribute to our society and to the world as well.”

“Thank you for your kind words, Ma’am. That’s certainly my intention,” Kevin responded.

She nodded and smiled, then spoke, “Mr Kevin Coris, for the significant benefits of your contributions to our nation’s youth, we award you the honor of Knight Grand Cross of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. Let all present acknowledge this honor and let us accord Mr Coris our thanks for his service to the Crown.”

Kevin said his words of acknowledgment and was escorted away; then Amelia was called.

The Queen looked at her; she was trembling. “My dear, don’t be nervous, we don’t bite,” she whispered and winked. “Use your wonderful acting skills and think of this ceremony as a play, dear.”

Amelia gulped and smiled back. “Thank you, Your Majesty.”

“We are told that you were a highly able helper and a project co-leader of this wonderful educational initiative now being introduced to our schools. Do you plan education as a career, or acting?”

“No, Ma’am, not acting, but in a field to help people like Kevin and Denise are doing.”

“Most admirable, as also was your work in educating our nation’s youth. We are delighted that you are a citizen of our great nation, my dear. Miss Amelia Hadad, we appoint you Dame Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. Let all present acknowledge this honor and let us accord Dame Amelia our thanks for her service to the Crown.”

After Amelia’s words of thanks, it was Jeremy’s turn. On reaching the Queen, he knelt, but she motioned him up.

“Young man, before you receive our acclaim, we wanted to mention how unique this situation is; you are a British subject by birth and an American by parentage; a diplomat’s child. Our historian believes that this is a unique situation; none before you have been found in our records,” she smiled at him. “You have been an ardent and outspoken supporter of human rights, our sources tell us, and you helped bring the new educational initiative to our nation’s schools. By doing this you brought great honor on yourself and both of your countries. Do you plan to pursue such a career in your future?”

“Thank you, Your Majesty. I’m greatly honored by your words. Yes, I do want to have a career in an area where I can improve human rights in the world.”

“We truly hope you meet with success, young sir. Mr Jeremy Porter, please kneel to receive our acclaim.” He did so. “For your outstanding contributions to human rights and to the education of our youth, we hereby honor you as Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. Let all present acknowledge this honor and let us accord Sir Jeremy our thanks for his service to the Crown.”

Jeremy was escorted back to his place and several other people received their honors. Then the assembled people were invited to the reception. Amelia turned to Jeremy and crushed him in a hug; then the Porters came over and hugged him while Amelia hugged Denise, then Kevin. Gerston looked over at the group, caught Denise’s eye, and winked at her. She laughed, took Kevin’s hand, and walked over to him.

“Sir,” she said as he took her hand, “you knew all about this, didn’t you?” she accused him.

“I certainly did, Denise,” Gerston laughed. “But the honors were truly deserved.”

Kevin shook his head. “I guess we just keep falling into these situations, sir.”

“No, Kevin,” Gerston disagreed. “It’s what you do *after* you fall into them. You fix them. You find a way to make the right things happen; you have a wonderful gift and I hope you continue to use it well.”

As the group walked to the reception hall, Amelia was clutching Jeremy’s hand.

“I was so nervous with the Queen but she was so gracious ...” She told Jeremy what the Queen whispered to her. “What an awesome experience. And I’m ‘Dame Amelia’ and you’re ‘Sir Jeremy.’ God, it’s like a fairy-tale story!”

The group continued to talk among themselves, discussing their experiences and thoughts during

the ceremony. Then they circulated among the other guests for a while and even had a minute to speak to the Queen again when she made a brief appearance. As the reception was coming to an end, Grayson appeared with the president and they both came over to Kevin and Denise and their little group.

“I want to offer my congratulations again,” Grayson told them. “Denise, Kevin, as I mentioned earlier, you don’t use the ‘dame’ or ‘sir’ style with your name as Amelia or Jeremy can. But both of you, including you too, Mr Gerston, can use the post-nomial initials ‘GBE’ after your names if you wish; it stands for ‘Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire.’”

Gerston broke in, “Madam Prime Minister, thank you again for honoring these amazing people; I certainly agree that they were highly deserving of the great honor you bestowed on them. Now that they’ve helped both of our countries so significantly, perhaps we can find something else to turn their unique talents to? Perhaps something simple like world peace?”

Grayson laughed. “We’ll need to get together to discuss that, Mr President. And find another country for them to which they can export their rebellion.”

The End