

Boy to Man

1972

In a house still new enough to have boxes stacked on the walls, Travis ignored the shouting coming from the kitchen and stayed out of site on the porches.

Bedtime had been hours ago.

No one noticed.

All attention was on the new member, the member who didn't want to be here.

Sitting in the lawn chair the owners left behind, Travis leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, staring at the picture in his fingers.

The kid in the photo smile, a sincere smile you saw all the way into the eyes. It didn't matter that the photo was wallet sized and things were small. The look on that kid's face, there wasn't anything small about it.

In front of him, stacked shortest to tallest was four more of the same family mix. All the kids looked alike and the way Evan had his hands on two of their shoulders, there was possessiveness, protectiveness.

Evan loved his family.

And they took that from him, when they made him like them. It was only to save him, he would have died if Travis and Stuart hadn't it, but shit it hurt like hell to know they had caused this. They had taken a sweet kid and made them like them.

There were two punch marks in the hallway of this new house, where Evan's had made a minutes relief from his frustration.

There were so many broken plates a new set might be in order,

The kid was destruction on wheels as his new strength gave him an advantage he hadn't had before. His agony drove him.

Travis heard the door open behind him. Stuart stepped up and held the scotch in front of Travis's face. Travis reach and took it but didn't drink.

"We're down another lamp," Stuart said. "Quinn cleaned it up."

"It's only been a couple weeks."

"And a new city. And a new house. And so fucking new I don't think we're going to pull it off."

Travis leaned back and looked up.

"Are you seriously suggesting offing a seventeen year old kid?"

"Do you have any suggestions?" Stuart asked.

"You want to do it? Get rid of him for good?"

"No, but we have to realize we may have been wrong. It might have better walk away from the situation. The kid is in agony and I don't how to pull that back."

Travis looked to the side. "What do you want to do? Stake from behind? Maybe have Quinn slit his throat? Or just through him outside at the right minute and watch

him burn.”

Stuart sat down and silence followed.

“You I don’t want that. But unless you have any ideas where we going?”

“I have no idea what to do,” Travis said. “Figured we would just keep going and he’ll wake up one day and realize we’re his only chance.”

“He’s too young,” Stuart whispered. “He shouldn’t have been taken. How can take down someone so young?”

“There are laws for us for a reason. I can’t fathom ignoring them to kill a kid.”

More noise came from the kitchen. Shouts and stuff hitting the walls. Travis let out a heavy breath. This was getting exhausting, but Stuart up got first and Travis followed.

“It’s not fucking fair,” Evan screamed at Travis as he walked in the room.

Travis stood cool and calm while Jason stood up from his chair and Quinn stayed seated. Ian came in as Travis drew a deep breath.

“...reality and you have to stop fighting back. We’re trying to help.”

“This is help? You turn me into this creature and you say you helped? It hurts,” he said, holding his gut. “I want things and I don’t know what they are but their bad. You’re bad.”

“We can help you with that,” Quinn said, pushing the glass on the toward the kid.

“Your other option was dead.,” Quinn said “If that bastard you’re talking about hadn’t taken the chance on you would be dead right now. Drink this and you will feel better. It’s a start.”

“I don’t give a fuck what he did,” Evan snapped back. “I want him to undo it. I want to go home.”

Jason walked across the kitchen to the fridge. “You looked like nice kid when we brought you in. Didn’t expect you to turn into an ungrateful bastard.”

Evan screamed and charged the dining room table. Quinn snapped back out of his chair, his hands up in surrender. Everyone close jumped away a step.

Evan grabbed a high-backed chair and swung it high, nailing the covered plate glass window dead center.

The sounds of breaking glass exploded in the room, though the curtains, before they came down, controlled the spray of shards. The covering ripped, it fell and the entire kitchen was flooded in sunlight.

Jason and Quinn acted together without a word. They each grabbed Evan by a shoulder flipping him off his feet, slamming him on his back into the tiled floor. Travis felt the burn of the sun and knew they had seconds.

Evan’s crying and struggling didn’t stop the situation.

“Out,” Travis yelled.

Stuart first through the door, Travis stayed back and watched Quinn and Jason, still holding the shoulders, dragging the kid out into the dining room behind the protection of the wooden door.

Jason let go first, uttering a fuck under his breath. Quinn held on a minute longer but eventually stood up, too. They stared at each other with fury on their face.

"Every single one of us lost something and hated everything," Quinn snapped. "You get over or you don't. You don't get over you at least bury it and don't let it out to hurt the people trying to help you."

He turned around and walked to the living room and the stairs. Bedrooms were on the second floor.

"There's no people here," Evan screamed. "Everyone is a monster and you turned me into one, too."

"You can call us whatever you want," Jason said. "We still didn't leave your ass in there to fry when we so sick of your shit we're ready to stake you ourselves."

He headed toward the living room, too.

"Are you two okay?" Travis asked.

"Little singed," Jason said. "We'll live." He looked over at Evan on the floor. "But I think your new pet project probably ran its course. Might be time to find a new placement for him."

Stuart sat silently at the end of the bed, watching at the kid in the dark. His breaths were labored, his forehead damp with the pain of what he fought. He was so young and so lost and so afraid. It wasn't fury driving the behavior. It was fear. So he lashed out at all of them had done. Craving could drive a man – a vampire – to kill the first person they came across. To beat that back took astronomical strength of will. Stuart didn't know if it was the kid that stopped the kill, or the fact that four bodies weren't going to let him near a door.

The only way to clear the path for Evan was to get him on the program. The rest of them were doing what they couldn't, but that didn't guarantee success. Other had tried and failed. The four here were the success stories. They had to get him clear of it, but now, so soon, the instinct to hunt and kill, they had to play with his body and his mind.

They would do anything for this kid.

But give him blood.

That was something they would never do.

"I woke up alone," Stuart said soft with his Scotland lining the edge. "There was no one there to tell me what happened or why I felt the things I felt."

"I don't care."

"Yes you do. You care too much that's why it hurts so bad. I still carry the loss of my family, but it's more shades of pale grey than the bright red it used to be. You'll get there. It's just going to take time."

"I want to go home. I want my mom."

"You can leave here and join a den. Become like the ones who did this. We can even help you find one if that's what you want. It's not easy but you talk to the right people and will find a direction. But you can't go home., I'm sorry. It's not for them and it would kill you."

"The people who did this to me, are they dead?"

"Would it make it easier on you if I lied and said yes?"

"You didn't kill them for this?"

"We didn't have the chance or we would have. You were down and we had to choose. Helping you was our main concern and them alive or dead didn't even matter."

"Feels like it matters now," the kid said.

"Evan, you can be pissed, you just have to pull it in some. We want to help you. But you have to let us."

Travis heard Jason come down the stairs before he saw him come in the door. Sitting at the table, a cup of coffee in front of him, Travis felt the defeat move to every nerve ending causing physical pain. His mind told he had taken down the same before, but for some reason, this kid, it just hurt like hell.

"I don't think your project is working out right."

"I know what you think. I don't need to hear it."

"That's not what I mean. He used the phone in the den, wrote down the info then left without it. But he's smart and should know better. If he was thinking clear he would have covered his tracks. He's not taking *Ace in a Hole* and he's not getting blood that I know of, so he might be firing from inside."

"What info?" Travis asked looking up.

"Greyhound. He called and got their schedule for buses to Seattle."

Travis looked at his watch and did the math.

"Bus station is five miles at least. Even if he gets there in time for the departure, sun will be up when he's in route. His he isn't doing good. "

Travis looked at him. "You want us to help."

"I wouldn't wish pain on anyone. We need to get him tied him down and funnel down his throat till he drinks."

"Shit," Travis said, letting out a deep sigh.

"He's not upstairs. I checked."

Travis looked at him as Quinn came into the room.

"You let him go, we're free of it and he makes his own choice. He probably won't though. Not unless he grabs someone and teaches them some new manners."

Quinn poured a cup. "Or you go get him and we keep trying. We do have a funnel in the kitchen."

Jason smiled and laughed a little. "Bastard did have potential, even if he was a pain in the ass."

Quinn drank his coffee hot and black. Moving to the cupboard, he pulled out a sports bottle and filled from the glass pitcher in the refrigerator.

"It's your call, boss man," Quinn said, twisting the top on tight. "You made the decision to do this. You make the one to end or not. And unfortunately, you don't get a few days to think about it. That bus is leaving."

Travis took three more sips of the coffee before he stood up, he swiped the bottle off the counter, went for his keys and moved out the back door.

He saw him on the road, a mile from the bus station, but he didn't stop. The kid looked miserable in the rain so Travis just kept on driving. He parked and got to the Seattle departure gate well before Evan made it.

Travis waited at the gate in a black fake leather chair and stretched out his long legs. He saw Evan buy the ticket with money he to have stolen from one of them then turn to head toward Travis.

Travis saw the kid see him, stopped mid-step to stare before looking at the ground. Travis looked at the window in front of him, seeing the bus that would take him away.

People moved around even at this late hour, most looking like they wanted to be anywhere but here. Rain hit the windows in silver spots and Travis just in his chair.

Evan came over to sink down next to him.

"You going to make me go back?"

"No. It's your choice. We showed you as best we can what we have to offer. If you don't want it then you get to go. A lot of what you are going, though, that's going to get worse. The pain, the craving, the fury. It doesn't stop until we make it stop."

"How do I stop it?"

"Three ways. You wait for sunrise and take walk. Or, you can wait in the shadows until someone comes too close. Feed on blood and all of this goes away in a heartbeat."

"What's my last choice?"

"You follow us. It's hard, but we know what we are doing and fix it with just a little time. It doesn't take much to start the process and feel better pretty quick. If you listen. And trust."

"You want me to trust the man who did this to me?"

"The only thing we did wrong was make a choice and that choice resulted in you still breathing."

"It's not fucking fair," Evan said, his voice deep with emotion.

"No, it's not. And I'm not going to bullshit you with how it happened to us and how bad we had because we did. Some in worse ways, if you can imagine that. It fucking sucks. You're right."

Evan looked at him. "I don't want to do this. I don't want to hurt anyone."

"Evan, you get on that bus now, they find a pile of ashes in the back before you are halfway there. The trip is too long and you can't hide from the sun."

"I don't care. I would have tried to see them. I would have tried to get home."

"Who's going to know when your dead?"

Evan leaned forward and put his head in his hands. "My head hurts. It never stops. I see things and here things."

"I know."

"They needed me. They needed a big brother. My mom is crying right now. My dad, he's probably in the garage rearranging his tools like a zombie."

"A hundred years ago I fell off the map for them. I never saw any of them again. I never visited the land or checked to see if they left me. I moved on. A became something bad. And then I became something good. My parents and brothers, they were victims, too. We have to accept that. We hate it. And we move forward."

"Thanksgiving is in three weeks. I've been carving the turkey for four years. I want to carve the fucking turkey and eat mom's cranberry sauce and have pumpkin pie."

"We'll have a turkey. You can carve it and I'll take a shot at cranberry sauce and you can be as unthankful as you want. But you do it with us from now on. That's just the way it is, Evan."

"Why?"

"Because we're your family now and we will fuck-up and make your life miserable at times. But we will never give up on you and help you in any way we can. Maybe we don't need a big brother. Maybe we need a little."

"Cut Stuart's hair," Evan said trying to make joke with eyes sad.

Travis smiled. "I am afraid there are some things in this universe even we can't provide."

"I want to go home. I want to go to school. I don't want to do this."

Travis put his arm up, pulling Evan into a half embrace. "In ten years that feeling might had edged a little. Probably not much. In twenty-five you'll be one of the lucky ones who still remembers being human and can still appreciate your loss. At some point it won't hurt so much and you'll only remember the warm glow of what you had."

"Can't I just have it back?"

"No. I'm sorry. And you can't go back, you can't see them. You can't have anything to do with them every again. You won't even be able to visit your own grave."

"I have a grave?"

Travis nodded slow. "With the blood and the jacket the police closed your case. You're not missing anymore. You're presumed dead. Jason found the report when he called the police in Seattle."

Evan looked down, then back up.

"Your parents had a place picked out for you and buried a coffin. " Travis shrugged. "Usually it's a lot of your shit in it. Like they needed something to hold and remember with. The tombstone will be up in a few months. Jason will track that down a photo of that, if you want.

Evan looked at the ground. "There was this girl," he said. "He looked up at Travis. "Donna." He looked back down. "She liked to go to the games. She would cheer us on and smile." He looked back up. "I liked her but I was too afraid to say anything. I was working up the nerve to ask her to prom."

"Prom is five months away,"

Evan smiled a little and cocked his head at Travis. "It takes me a long time to work up the nerve. I can't see her again, can I?"

"My girlfriends name was Jeannie. I liked her. A lot. I don't know if it would have gone much further but I was having a hell of a good time finding out. She's dead now. We never had our chance."

"Doesn't that piss you off?"

"Used to. Hated the person responsible for taking that from me. Then it just dawns on you one day. We got dealt a shitty hand and we stand back and think about that all the time, or we adapt and realize that even the bastard that did it, maybe he can be a friend."

"You did this to me didn't you? You're the one that actually did it."

"Yes, technically I did. The circumstance, though. Would you rather not be having this conversation at all and be in that grave because that's where you were heading when we walked up."

"So I thank you?"

Travis shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe somewhere in the middle. We're not monsters and we have room. Everyone likes you and wants this to work. You should really consider coming home for breakfast. We still have a lot of *Ace in the Hole* and you should try it. Suns going to be up in a couple hours. We want to be inside the house before it shows."

Evan turned to face forward and Travis let him have his silence.

The minutes ticked by. People moved back and forth.

The Seattle bus pulled out of its birth and they watched it pull away and disappear out of sight.

"Will I ever feel normal again?"

"No," Travis said. "You'll feel but it's not such a bad different once we get everything under control. You might actually realize you like and we can all take you a movie sometime."

"Monster?"

"We can do horror."

"And we get popcorn and Milk Duds."

Travis laughed. "You've been talking to Stuart. That's his favorite order."

Evan turned his face toward him and that was almost a smile.

Travis stood up and put his hands in his pockets. "Come on," he said, nodding his head toward the parking lot. "Let's go home."