

Kip and the Shrink



A play in 6 scenes

To be read or produced

By

Tom Gnagey

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NOTE:

This is a ‘twofer’.

If the reader prefers to read a novel rather than a play, it will be found, in full, in the back half of this book, after the play.

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The Characters

Doctor Thomas (Doc) A male therapist, fiftyish or sixtyish.

Kip A fourteen-year-old boy (the patient)

Setting

After the cover picture. The minimalist office of Dr. Thomas

Two comfortable chairs set at conversation angles separated by a lamp on an end table set back so as to not block the line of sight. A working door to the right of the right chair (audience right). A square box of Kleenex sits on the table in front of the lamp.

The conversation area is contained on a large area rug. The area is illuminated as three independently lit area – Docs chair to the left, Kips chair to the right, and the door. The intersection of the lighting illuminates the whole conversation area.

Background is black (dark). Each of the three electrical circuits is on a separate dimmer.

SCENE ONE

Lights gradually come up together.

A very tentative knock is heard from the door. Doc looks up toward the door (to help direct the audience to its source) and sets his glasses and a book he was reading on lamp table to his left.)

DOC: Come in.

(A sullen Kip enters from the slowly opening door from stage left. Wearing jeans and a hoodie, hood up. Kip closes the door. Doc stands and offers his hand as Kip approaches. They shake - Kip fumbles as if not used to the activity. Doc motions toward the other chair. Kip sits and looks around in an obvious attempt at avoiding eye contact. Doc sits.)

DOC: (Doc speaks during handshake)

I'm Dr. Thomas but then you knew that. Many of my young friends call me Doc.

KIP: You're not my friend so what shall call

you?

DOC: Dr. Thomas, then, I suppose.

KIP: (Kip nods)

DOC: Why have you come to see me?

KIP: My parents forced me to come.

DOC: They have that kind of power over you, do they?

KIP: (a quick and then gone glance at Doc.)

You bet they do! (Offered with some emotion and disbelief at the dumb question.)

DOC: What reason did they give you for coming?

KIP: They think I'm nuts, I guess.

DOC: Is that the reason they gave you?

KIP: (shrug. silence. More looking around)

DOC: You don't answer questions?

KIP: (Sounding exasperated)

They never offered me a sensible reason. What am I supposed to think, being forced to see a shrink?

DOC: Ah! The old answer a question with a question ploy. Very good, I suppose if you feel like you need to avoid the issue.

KIP: What issue?

DOC: That was my first question to you.

KIP: Me being nuts you mean.

DOC: That was not the reason your parents

gave me.

KIP: What reason did they give you?

DOC: I asked you first.

KIP: (the slightest hint of a smile builds as he peeks up at Doc for just a moment and pushes back his hood)

Mom says I am impossible to live with – incorrigible I believe was her exact word.

DOC: Well, I suppose if someone were really impossible to live with that just might be reason for them to come and see me. Are you impossible to live with?

KIP: Can't say. Never had to try and live with me so the question is moot.

DOC: Moot? You know the word moot?

KIP: Just used it, didn't I?

(Continues speaking as if reading from the dictionary.)

Unanswerable because the circumstances can't make sense of it.

DOC: (Nods. Just a very short moment of silence)

You know what I've learned about you so far?

KIP: (perks up and looks Dock in the face – himself looking puzzled.)

Nothing, would be my studied impression.

DOC: I've learned you are a bright young man – from the high class vocabulary you use. I've

learned you are uncomfortable when put on the spot – from your body language and reluctance to say any more than absolutely necessary. I've learned that admitting you may have a problem is very uncomfortable if not impossible for you. I suspect you believe the quickest way out of this uncomfortable situation is not to converse – not to enter into the conversation. And, I've learned you really like girls.

KIP: (Kip looks clearly surprised, brow furrowed)

How do you know that last thing?

DOC: I noticed a light growth of hair on your upper lip and you are a fourteen-year-old male.

KIP: (smiles and nods while maintaining his eye search Doc's face)

I do like girls. You got one thing right, at least.

DOC: (Doc speaks as if pretending disappointment.)

Only one?

KIP: (shrugs)

DOC: It seems to me that you know what is concerning your parents and I suspect they have told you.

KIP: (sighs)

They hate me, is that better. Aren't all screwed up kids that way because their parents hate them – I read that.

DOC: So you have looked into the matter,

have you? Must seem rather important, then.

KIP: Of course it's important.

(emotion increases)

Being hated is a pretty big deal, in case you never noticed.

DOC: What do they do to show you they hate you?

KIP: How long a list do you want?

DOC: Something between one and infinity.

KIP: (Smiles more fully than had been evidenced up to that point.)

They have all these rules.

DOC: (Puts his hand alongside his head as if amazed.)

Rules? In a family? Really? I am astonished!

..

(another short smile)

Rules such as . . . ?

KIP: Being on time for meals. Getting up when my alarm goes off. Taking a shower every day. Making my bed. Not beating on my little brother, Randy. Covering up with a towel when I go down the hall from the bathroom to my room – well, our room. I share it with Pest.

DOC: Pest, meaning Randy.

KIP: Yeah. A ten-year-old pest. Always into my stuff. Always tattling on me. Always under foot. Always pestering me to play catch with him. He's just

ALWAYS there. I never have any privacy or any peace.

DOC: Is it your problems with Randy that seem to be bothering your parents the most?

KIP: (shrug)

Yeah. Some at least. Maybe not. Probably my poor grades and getting detentions at school, more.

DOC: Tell me about your grades.

KIP: What's to tell?"

DOC: How does a bright boy like you come to get poor grades?

KIP: I get them because that's what my teachers give me.

(Holds his hands up as if to say 'how dumb can you be?')

DOC: I think you understand that's not what I meant.

KIP: The stuffs not interesting so I don't study it.

DOC: What would you prefer to be studying at school?

KIP: Girls. (another quick checking out the old guy's reaction sort of top of the eyes peek)

DOC: I figure you make certain that you get in your share of that subject, regardless.

KIP: (another broad smile. Unzips his hoody a few inches. Kip relaxes visibly in his chair. He looks around)

I thought I was supposed to lay on a couch or something and pour my guts out to you – tell you all about my sex life. That’s how it’s done on TV.

DOC: Is that how you would like for us to proceed?

KIP: (shrug)

I Have that choice?

DOC: You can have some choices within my reasonable guidelines – but then it seems you are basically opposed to most guidelines.

KIP: (silence for a long moment)

So, how do we proceed? I want to get this over with. What kind of a grade do I need to get in order to pass?

DOC: (smiles)

P. S.

KIP: (frowns and cocks his head)

P. S.? I don’t get it.

DOC: Problem Solved.

KIP: (smiles)

What problem?

DOC: I think we have gone full circle back to where we started.

KIP: (Looks Doc over all quite deliberately. Delivers a single, exaggerated nod.)

You seem to be as skillful as Dad led me to believe you were.

DOC: This has been a test?

KIP: (smile and shrug)

P.P.

DOC: P. P. ?

KIP: You get a Provisional Pass.

(emphasizes the 'P' in both words)

DOC: (nods his head and smiles)

KIP: Can we talk about girls and sex sometime?

DOC: Can't think of a fourteen-year-old boy whose come here where those things didn't come up.

KIP: I guess we need to get started then.

DOC: I thought we already had started.

KIP: Oh. Sneaky. I like that in a person. Keeps a guy on his toes.

DOC: Actually, Kip, I do have two rules here – as much as I hear you dislike rules.

KIP: Parents been narking on me, have they?

DOC: I thought you were the one who told me that.

(a moment of silence)

KIP: (shrug)

So, what are they – the two rules?

DOC: We strive to be honest with each other and we talk about solutions instead placing blame.

(Doc indicates each rule with one finger and then two.)

KIP: (clearly thinks about the statement.)

I'll give it a try. Both things are really foreign to me. At home, all we do is lie to each other and blame other people for our mistakes.

DOC: Mistakes?

KIP: Maybe, shortcomings would be a better word. I'd like to call it misbehavior but my parents will never admit to misbehaving themselves.

DOC: You're saying you'll give my rules a try, then?

KIP: Like that?

DOC: Like that? I don't understand.

KIP: That's you being honest, huh?

DOC: For one thing. For another I need clarification.

KIP: I'll give them a try, like you said – like that. Not guaranteeing anything.

DOC: Tell me about your friends.

KIP: Don't have any. Had one, Jerry. He doesn't come around anymore. Can we talk about something else and come back to friends”

DOC: Okay then. Tell me what your parent's call you?

KIP: Huh?

DOC: How do they address you?

KIP: Mom calls me Kip but she spells it K-y-p-p. She's got a real snooty, better than everybody else, side to her. I hate that. Dad either calls me 'you, there' or 'hey, bad ass'. Randy calls me Kippy, if that's of any importance.

DOC: It seemed to be important to you, didn't it?

KIP: Yeah. He's the only one who really means the real me when he addresses me, you know?"

DOC: Not sure I do, but I'd like to understand. Tell me more.

KIP: Kippy is like he's relating to me kid to kid, friend to friend, honest like. I'm not sure how to describe it. Kippy doesn't indicate anything but who and what I really am. Bad Ass doesn't do that. K-y-p-p doesn't either. Bad Ass tells me I'm no good. K-y-p-p tells me I need to be some high-class dude that reflects good on my mother – 'well' on my mother, I guess it should have been.

DOC: Is Kip your real name or a nick name?

KIP: It's what I've always been called. Birth certificate says Howard Benjamin Watson. I'd like either of those better – Howie or Ben or Benny.

(He nods convincingly)

DOC: Have you mentioned those feelings to your parents?

KIP: (answer with great emotion and flailing arms)

You kidding? They'd blow the roof off the house. Me challenging one of their decisions. No way, man, er, Doc!

DOC: Sorry you don't have an opinion about that, Howard Benjamin Watson.

KIP: (They exchange broad smiles and nods.)

Movement in chair indicating some discomfort.)

I must admit I was a little surprised about how that came out.

DOC: Came out?

KIP: With such – what – emotion and all this.

(he replays his arm movements from just before)

DOC: So, what will be comfortable to have me call you?

KIP: Kip, I guess.

DOC: After all that – what – emotion and all this (he poorly mimics Kips arm motions) you want me to call you Kip?

KIP: (shrug)

It's what I'm used to. I guess you could call me, Sexy Rexy, if you'd prefer – it's what Sally calls me.

DOC: She your special friend – and no I won't be calling you Sexy Rexy, nor will I ask you about its origin.

KIP: I know her, that's all. She's a tease – most girls are, I've noticed. They like to set guys midsection on fire and then drop them on the spot. She'd never even let me get to the batter's box let alone first base – you know about bases?"

DOC: I know.

KIP: Sometime we will need to talk about bases but I sense now is not that time.

DOC: Why do you think that?

KIP: It's not a problem that has anything to do with why I'm here and I only want to talk about why I'm here so I can stop coming.

DOC: An honest answer. I like that.

KIP: I sort of thought you would.

(Smile. He licks his little finger – right hand - and makes a pretend hash mark high in the air then points to his chest.)

DOC: Are you ready to say or speculate about why you're here so we can get on with it, then?

KIP: I'm here because I choose to make everybody's life miserable at home.

DOC: You choose to?

KIP: Sure. Revenge, pure and simple. They do bad stuff to me and I do bad stuff back at them.

DOC: And how is that working?

KIP: Great, if its purpose is really to keep them all riled up, angry and out of their gourds. Bad if its purpose is to get on like a good family should get on.

DOC: You've given it a good deal of thought.

KIP: Every day of my life.

(He deliberately looks directly into Doc's face, leaning a bit forward in the chair.)

I cry into my pillow about it every night. I get up in the morning all ready to do things right and then – whammo – some little thing sets me off and there we go again.

DOC: Little thing?

KIP: Like this morning, Mom fixed Randy's toast but by the time I sat down she told me I had to make my own. I blew up.

DOC: Blew up?

KIP: Picked up the toaster and threw it across the room, dumped over the OJ pitcher on the table and kicked over the waist paper basket.

DOC: I suppose that would qualify as blowing up.

KIP: That's not the worst part. I slapped Randy up side his head and made him cry.

DOC: You weren't trying to make him cry?

KIP: Of course I was trying to make him cry. Why else would I hit a helpless little kid?

DOC: So you succeeded. Why does that make it the worst part, then?

KIP: I hate that.

DOC: That?

KIP: You twisting things all up like that.

DOC: Or, you hate to have your own illogic pointed out to you?

KIP: (Sits back. Lower lip begins to quiver. Begins to sob ever so slightly)

Don't you think I know that? I'm not dumb, remember. I hate this.

DOC: Hate what?

KIP: You just never give up, do you?

DOC: No. That is one thing I will promise you.

I will never give up until things get better for you.

KIP: (Kip looks up at Doc, and begins sobbing openly. Doc hands Kleenex box from table to him.)

SCENE FADES TO BLACK (all lights at once).

SCENE TWO

[All lights come up. Doc again in his chair. Other chair empty. Knock on door – less tentative than in scene one. Hoodie replaced by drab sweat shirt, pushed up on forearms. Doc looks at his watch.]

DOC: Come in, Kip – that’s K-I-P, Kip.

(Kip opens the door a foot or so and peeks around the open edge as if to scope out the area. Appearance is up one notch from first scene. Hair is less disheveled though not thoroughly combed.)

(Doc motions across the area with his arm)

Pretty much the same as last week. No gremlins or boogy man last time I checked.

KIP: (Kip enters offering a quick smile. Closes door. He approaches Doc with his own hand out. Doc stands to accept it. It was a better shake that time. They separate and move back and sit in their regular seats.)

KIP: How was that?

DOC: That what? I'm sorry I don't understand.

KIP: The shake. I've been practicing. No adult ever asked to shake my hand before you did last week. I figured I did a pretty lousy job. I've made Randy practice with me during the week.

DOC: It was a first class shake, Kip. I hope there wasn't bloodshed.

KIP: Bloodshed? Now I don't understand.

DOC: In the course of your making Randy practice with you.

KIP: (A nod and a broad smile, held for a long moment.)

No transfusion needed, anyway. So let's get going. Daylight's burning.

DOC: (Nods indicating he got the message.)

Anything on your mind, today?

KIP: That's one of those really dumb questions that adults ask. I had hoped better from you, Doc.

DOC: More, please.

(Doc gestures to encourage it – twirls his finger.)

KIP: I am alive. I am awake. Of course, I have something on my mind. I can't avoid having something on my mind when I'm alive and awake.

DOC: My intention wasn't to put you down by how I worded that.

KIP: It just twists my shorts. When adults say

dumb things, nothing happens. When I say dumb things everybody's on my case immediately.

DOC: I can see how that seems unfair. Can we get past that or have I irreparably damaged our relationship forever?

KIP: (quick smile)

Sorry. I go off on dumb things like that. Gets me in hot water all the time. The unfairness thing I think.

DOC: Let me change directions just a bit. How does Randy react when your parents get onto you about things?

KIP: He gets really scared, I can tell.

DOC: You two ever talk about it, later.

KIP: Sometimes. I always apologize to him.

DOC: Why to Randy?

KIP: For making him scared like that.

DOC: Do you apologize to your parents as well.

KIP: Hell no, I mean, heck no. It's always their fault in the first place. Not for me to apologize.

DOC: Tell me more about Randy.

KIP: I thought I was here to talk about me.

DOC: It occurs to me that Randy is very important in your life. Maybe we can both learn some things about you by learning what you think about him.

KIP: (shrugs, nods as if it makes sense, and

sits back in his chair.)

He's a good kid. Never gets into trouble with anybody but me. I'm always on his case. He makes good grades – we're both pretty smart. He has lots of friends. He'll talk about girls with me but I can tell he's not interested in them as females. You understand the difference?

DOC: I do. Go on.

KIP: I can remember how it was. I kissed a girl for the first time when I was ten. Hard to imagine why it seemed so disgusting back then. Her life age was eleven but I think her hormone age was about twenty. She got all handsy and I turned around and ran all the way home.

(He stops and looks at doc's face)

You understand, handsy?"

DOC: I imagine I do, yes.

KIP: He's a good artist, likes to read, tattles on me a lot.

DOC: About?

KIP: Stuff.

DOC: Shall I stop and put that answer in my notes – stuff?

KIP: (smiles)

Mostly, I guess when I hurt him or ignore him.

DOC: In his shoes would you not do the same thing – tattle?

KIP: I hate that, but I guess I just have to go along with it order to pass, huh?

DOC: More.

KIP: You keep making me think about things in ways I'd rather not think about them.

DOC: Then yes, you need to go along with it in order to pass.

(Doc leans way forward and puts an invisible hash mark with his little finger in the approximate area Kip used during the previous session. Kip frowns. Doc sits back.)

I figured if you were keeping score I didn't want you to miss that one. Pretty important, I think.

KIP: (Smiles and nods, leans back and pretends to survey his scoreboard.)

Looks like two for me.

(He turns his head and body as if to look into the air above Doc)

Don't see any at all on your score board.

DOC: Perhaps I haven't earned any yet.

KIP: (acts upset)

Oh, I didn't mean that. You're doing just fine.

DOC: Sometimes it's hard to tell.

KIP: I know what you mean. I missed that last one, myself, you know.

DOC: Let's get back to

KIP: (Kip jumps in and finishes doc's sentence.)

Randy. I know. Nice, smart, helpful, loving, kind, the sort everybody loves to death.

DOC: You jealous of any of that?

KIP: Jealous? Of course, not. I could be all that if I wanted to be.

DOC: So, you're saying you don't want to be.

KIP: (Smiles broadly)

It would seem that way, wouldn't it?

(silence)

It's easier to be a pain in the ass, you know.

(silence)

Hardly takes any smarts at all to be a bad ass.

(silence)

That's all dad thinks I'm capable of – being a bad ass.

(silence)

DOC: So?

KIP: So, I figure when I'm acting like a bad ass I'm just acting the way he expects me to act. He should be happy about that, shouldn't he?

DOC: You tell me. If you were your dad how would you feel about you as a son?

KIP: There you go again. I still hate it when you do that.

DOC: Make you think things through from a different perspective, you mean?

KIP: Yeah. I really have no idea how to answer that and I'm being honest. I'd think when I was being like he says I am, he'd like it, but he yells at me about it. He never says how else he wants me to be. He hates mom's K-y-p-p thing so I'm sure it's

not that way at least.

DOC: When did things really start getting bad between you and your parents?

KIP: Depends on what you mean by bad, I guess.

DOC: However you define it.

KIP: I know mom was unhappy when she found out she was pregnant with me – I overheard her talking to one of her friends one day. I seem to have ruined her perfect body. It's like she blames me for her getting pregnant. Unless the books I've read have been very wrong, I'm not the one responsible for that.

DOC: That is somehow related to when things started going bad between you and your parents?

KIP: I thought you shrinks were supposed to be able to read between the lines.

DOC: Oh, I can. Just wondering if you can.

KIP: Okay, so I believe they hated me even before I was born.

DOC: Ouch!

KIP: Definitely, OUCH!

DOC: But they went ahead and had Randy.

KIP: Oh, no. Randy is adopted. Mom would never risk going through that again – the pain – the disfigurement. Oh, no!!!

DOC: When did that happen – the adoption?

KIP: When he was (long silence) eight.

DOC: (Docs forehead furrows but he doesn't pursue it.)

So, he is a relatively recent addition to your family. How did you feel about the adoption, Kip?

KIP: (smiles)

Now that sounds more like the shrinks I've read about.

(He mimics docs voice and intonation)

"How did you feel about the adoption, Kip?"

DOC: (smiles and nods)

Well?

KIP: I thought it was a great idea. I'd have somebody to look up to me – somebody I could teach stuff to – somebody to blame when I did something wrong.

(Smiles)

DOC: Has it worked out that way?

KIP: I assume that's somehow for my benefit and not yours since you already know it's been a disaster.

DOC: Let me hear the benefit, then.

(Doc smiles and waits)

KIP: Once he got there I soon found out I didn't like to share my life with him. He can't learn to give me my space – my time alone. Mom and dad won't listen to me about it. I tell Randy but he just shrugs his shoulders and keeps on. I need my own room back.

DOC: In just a word or two what's the worst thing about having Randy around?

KIP: He's mom and dad's pet. He can't do anything wrong as far as they're concerned. He's everything I'm not, you could say. And, yes, I know that was more than a word or two.

DOC: (Shrugs indicating no big deal)

In just a word or two what's the best thing about having Randy around?

KIP: Everybody likes him and I get to claim him as my brother. That sort of makes me look good, like I get some credit for how he is. And, I can beat the shi . . . (shrugs) tar out of him when I get mad at me.

DOC: Mad at you?

KIP: No, I meant when I get mad at him.

(Nods in an over-exaggerated manner)

Him.

DOC: Let me be sure I have this right; Randy's a great kid and you enjoy beating him up.

KIP: (Looks at doc in silence, a motionless glare)

DOC: Shall I say it or will you?

KIP: OH, I'll say it. I hate it when you do that?

(short silence)

Can't we talk about something else for a while? The Randy center in my brain is hurting.

DOC: Sure. Like what?

KIP: Like ... your love life.

(Impish smirk)

DOC: This is me ignoring that. I repeat. Like what?

KIP: Why my teachers all hate me.

DOC: What do you do to make them like you?

KIP: You mean to hate me (delivered as matter of fact correction)

DOC: No, I mean to like you.

KIP: But I just told you they HATE me.

DOC: And I asked what you do to make them like you.

KIP: Ah. One of those turn the tables on the unsuspecting kid, things, again.

DOC: (shrugs and raises his hands as if signaling to go ahead - say more.)

KIP: Nothing.

DOC: And you wonder why they hate you? Come now. You've been smarter than that since you were five.

KIP: Love is supposed to be unconditional. I've read a lot about it. I'm supposed to be loved just because I am a person.

DOC: Well, I certainly agree with that. Let me ask you this.

KIP: (rolls his eyes)

Here we go again!

DOC: Do you love Randy?

KIP: Randy? Yeah.

(Kip begins to squirm a bit)

DOC: Do you like everything he does?"

KIP: You know I don't.

(silence. Slowly Kip nods as if to himself. He sits up a bit straighter.)

You can add a mark up there, doc.

(he points to doc's imaginary score board.)

DOC:

(nods as if appreciatively, and adds the mark)

KIP: Love and like are two different things, huh?

DOC: Are they?

KIP: Yeah. They are. Never thought of it that way. Here's what you've done to my thinking. I love Randy but I hate what he does sometimes – well, often – maybe most of the time. My teachers hate what I do but some of them may even love me sort of, kind of, in some way, maybe, I guess.

DOC: Yes. Sort of, kind of, in some way, maybe, I guess.

(They exchange a smile)

KIP: Can I ask you something?

DOC: You can always ask me anything so long as you give me the right not to answer if that becomes my choice.

KIP: (nods thoughtfully and speaks in a monotone)

Do you love me?

DOC: Absolutely and without any doubt.

KIP: Do you like me?

DOC: I really do like the Kip I am growing to know here in my office. Quite honestly, I couldn't really like the Kip I hear about at home and at school.

[THE LIGHTS BEGIN A VERY SLOW DIMMING PROCESS]

(Kip sighs an audible sigh, stands and moves toward doc. Doc stands. Kip puts out his arms and doc accepts his hug and head to his chest just as the stage goes to black.)

SCENE THREE

(A knock, strong and steady. Kip's hair combed. Dressed in a nice looking, form-fitting, sports-logo T-shirt)

DOC: (Doc glances briefly at his watch)

Yes. Come in Kip.

KIP: (door opens and he enters with no tentativeness. They shake and take their seats)

DOC: Good to see you. I believe you are a bit early.

KIP: I can leave if I need to.

DOC: No. I didn't mean that. Glad you're here, Kip.

KIP: And by that you mean the Kip you've grown to know here in this room – that's the one you're glad to see.

DOC: It's the only Kip I have personally experienced.

KIP: (nods as if accepting the premise.)

Only got four detentions this week.

DOC: Four as compared to . . . ?

KIP: I usually average about ten, I guess.

DOC: How do you evaluate that?

KIP: Don't understand – evaluate?

DOC: Better, worse, what?

KIP: Better. I thought you'd get that.

DOC: I'm glad you evaluate the change as better.

KIP: Oh, I see. If I really wanted to keep things in a turmoil at school, fewer detentions would indicate my efforts had been less than stellar.

DOC: You have a wonderful way with words – do you realize that?

KIP: No. Not sure what you mean

DOC: Your vocabulary, your word choice, the simplicity of the way you get to the point.

KIP: Those are good?

DOC: (Shrugs)

I was stating a fact – you have a wonderful way with words. It implied no moral evaluation – good or bad.

KIP: You're wrong. It was a compliment and compliments are good. I don't get it.

DOC: What's seen as a compliment to one is not necessarily seen that way to another.

KIP: Like is the few detentions thing good or bad? I see. Thinking the word thing was a

compliment was my interpretation and not really contained in what you said.

DOC: Right. But I must say I'm pleased you could take it as a compliment.

KIP: Why?

DOC: It tells me you aren't truly committed to being the bad ass as you contend you are.

KIP: Because a bad ass wouldn't want to get compliments, you mean.

DOC: (nods without much commitment implied)

Not positive ones, at least.

KIP: So where does that leave us?

DOC: You tell me.

KIP: (manages a grin and sits back thoughtfully. Next statement delivered like a question, tone raising at end.)

That I'm acting like a bad ass but that's not really how I want to be?"

DOC: If that's true how might you want to be acting?

KIP: Answer seems clear to me to me, how about you?"

DOC: Pretty clear to me.

KIP: I want to be acting like a kid who gets compliments and let me ask your next question. What kind of a kid gets compliments? It would be a kid who behaved the way other people wanted him to behave. But that takes us right back to where I

already told you I was.

DOC: And where is that?"

KIP: Dad never says how he wants me to be, just that I am a bad ass.

DOC: Ever ask him?

KIP: You don't understand. Dad and I don't do things like that.

DOC: Like what.

KIP: Talk, let alone talk about stuff like this.

DOC: When was the last time you tried?

KIP: Like never, I guess. I don't have clue one how to go about it.

DOC: You say you and Randy talk about things. How do you go about that?

KIP: I know what he'll talk about.

DOC: You're saying you know his mind?

KIP: Sort of, I guess. And I'm older so I sort of get to call the shots on things like that.

DOC: Think about this. Would it make any real difference to you if your father said he wanted you to become a kid who behaved himself at school, did his school work, and got as good a grades as you're capable of?

KIP: It would make more of a difference if he said he knew I was capable of behaving at school, doing my school work and getting good grades.

DOC: Give yourself another point or whatever you're keeping track of up there.

(He points and smiles)

KIP: (shrugs but doesn't move to add a score)

DOC: So, what is the difference between what I said and what you said?

KIP: When he refers to me as a bad ass he's really saying he doesn't believe in me – that I can ever be anything else. It's like he's just given up on me. If he'd say he believed I could be different like that, it would mean he had confidence in me – like he could actually see something worthwhile inside me.

DOC: It is your father, not me, with whom you should be having this conversation, you know.

KIP: Never happen.

DOC: That's disheartening.

KIP: (Nods. Lower lip quivers but just briefly.)

DOC: So, you going to just go through life letting him believe what he believes about you?

KIP: What do you mean?

DOC: Letting him force you into being a bad ass when you really want to be something else.

KIP: When I first started coming here I hated when you did that.

DOC: That?

KIP: Turned my head upside down like that.

DOC: Does that imply your feelings are changing?

KIP: (Grin)

Yes and no.

(Grin extends)

DOC: I love yes and no answers. They suggest you are seeing at least two sides of an issue.

KIP: (Nods thoughtfully)

It's like a circle - what's the term? Vicious circle, I think.

DOC: I'll need more.

KIP: Doc, you always need more.

(They exchange smiles. Kip continues.)

He thinks I'm a bad ass, so I act like a bad ass to prove he's right, but being the way I think he wants me to be doesn't get me anywhere.

DOC and KIP together: Anywhere?

(They chuckle out loud)

KIP: What I'm looking for is his love – maybe his like, now, I'm not sure.

DOC: His approval, perhaps.

KIP: You have a wonderful way with words – do you realize that, Doc?

(More nods and mutual grins)

DOC: Let's get back to that later. Who in your life truly approves of you?

KIP: (Without hesitation)

Randy.

DOC: But I thought you did terrible things to Randy.

KIP: It doesn't matter. He still approves of me.

It's like he's the only one in the world – at home at least – who loves me – that unconditional kind of love we talked about last time.

DOC: Seems like you take advantage of that.

KIP: How?

DOC: You tell me you do terrible things to him even though you seem to need to have him love you – unconditionally as you put it. Seems like you are trying to put some terrible conditions on it.

KIP: Hadn't thought about that. Maybe it's like a test.

DOC: Test?

KIP: Yeah. To see if he'll love me no matter what.

DOC: When will you consider the test over?

KIP: Probably never, the way it's going, is that where you're heading me?

DOC: (Points to himself)

Me? Heading you somewhere? What are you implying?

KIP: No implying. I'm outright stating it. You do it all the time. I guess that's what my parents are really paying you all that money to do.

DOC: If the fact I'm doing this for pay bothers you, we can deal with that later. Right now, I think it would behoove us to get back to that Randy Test.

KIP: Thank you.

DOC: I'm not sure I understand.

KIP: For using the word behoove. I bet you don't use that with most kids my age who come here. It means you give me credit for being smart and knowing stuff – stuff probably not being the best word I could have used right there to illustrate what I meant. But the Randy Test. Here's what I think you're trying to get me to understand. I'm forcing Randy to keep proving his love for me even though I never do the same for him. In fact, I really can't because of the awful, unloving stuff I do to him to make him prove it. I'm not being fair. If I want his unconditional love, then I should give him unconditional love. I've never really done that, I guess.

DOC: You have done lots of good work today. How do you feel?

KIP: (thinks for a moment)

Awful, in the true sense of the word. Awe means wonder, respect, amazement, surprise – and I'm certainly full of all those things right now. I'm also really angry for some reason.

DOC: Is the anger directed at anything, anybody?

KIP: Mostly at you – for stirring up my head that way, I imagine. I've felt it after every session but I'm trying to live with it.

DOC: Only mostly at me?

KIP: At Kip, too, I think.

DOC: At Kip?

KIP: No, I meant Randy.

DOC: Why Randy?

KIP: Because he's so perfect and my parents never see his faults.

DOC: Do I detect a hint of jealousy?

KIP: Wouldn't that be normal?

DOC: Tell me more.

KIP: (Kip gives doc a look of disgust)

I've been around for fourteen years and he just came last year and they're all about him, not me. I'm their real kid, for god's sake. He's just some damn accident they picked up in a kid warehouse because he was so cute.

DOC: Those feelings must really hurt.

KIP: (Response is emotional)

Darn right! I hate him and I hate my parents for loving him and I hate me for hating and loving him.

DOC: Wow!

KIP: (Sits back and relaxes a bit as if embarrassed by his outburst.)

Wow? I give you the most important thing I've ever given you and all you have is, Wow?

DOC: (playfully tentatively)

Double Wow?

KIP: (Snorts, smiles, chuckles, nods)

DOC: What I truly hope is that you gave that not to me but to yourself.

KIP: (nodded, as if acknowledging the truth in doc's statement)

DOC: It must be so hard to hate and love the same person.

KIP: People.

DOC: People?

KIP: Randy, Mom, Dad.

DOC: Randy, Mom, Dad and who else?

KIP: (looks puzzled)

That's it. Can't say I love my teachers. Don't have any friends since Jerry gave up on me. You don't count, I've decided, because you're just temporary.

DOC: Try it again, you both love and hate, Randy, Mom, Dad and ...

KIP: If I say it I won't have anything left. You'll have destroyed everything.

DOC: OR, maybe you will rescue the most important one of all.

KIP: (Looks up. Sighs. Tears begin. A moment more of silence. Then in a monotone...)

I both love and hate Randy ... Mom ... Dad and Me.

(The stage goes gradually dark except for the spot on KIP as he closes his eyes and sobs, physically. Then quickly to black.)

SCENE FOUR

(No knock. Door opens. Kip enters and sits, slouching, no offer to shake. Looks around but not at DOC. Upon Kip's entrance, Doc begins to stand and then, seeing Kip's position, retakes his seat before becoming upright. Kip's hair is combed. Button down the front shirt hanging out.)

DOC: (looks at his watch)

Fifteen minutes late. I was concerned about you.

KIP: (looks up, puzzled and disturbed look)

You were supposed to be mad.

DOC: Sorry to disappoint you. This was a planned ploy, you're saying

KIP: Who but doc would say 'planned ploy'?

DOC: You once thanked me for using such things in my conversation with you.

KIP: (shrugs, looks around, uncomfortable)

DOC: Something seems different today.

KIP: I hate being here.

DOC: And why would that be worse today than on all the other days you hated being here?

KIP: You're ruining my life.

DOC: That's not my intention – not in the long run at least.

KIP: (Shoots a hateful glance at doc)

I been confused all week – who I like. Who I hate. I don't even have any idea why I love anybody or why I hate anybody anymore.

DOC: That seems to imply that you used to know.

KIP: (Delivered with some emotion and finger pointing)

See, that's the problem right there.

DOC: (shrugs)

KIP: (Emotion continues)

It didn't used to matter to me why I loved or why I hated. I just felt like I felt and that was okay. But you've meddled with that and now I'm all messed up.

DOC: You certainly do sound angry.

KIP: (answer with some disgust)

There goes old doc sounding like old doc.

DOC: And you'd prefer I sounded like ?

KIP: (shrug, just the hint of a sheepish grin.)

Let's get to work. I still want to get this over

with.

DOC: So your goal is to get this over with rather than to solve your problem.

KIP: Damn right! I've done just fine living with my problem up til now.

DOC: Does that represent merely confusion on your part or was it an intentional out and out lie?

KIP: How about merely an intentional lie?

DOC: I can accept that. Can you?

KIP: (Kip ignores Doc's question.)

Randy spent the night at a friend's, last night.

DOC: And that is important for me to know, why?

KIP: I thought you were interested in everything about me.

DOC: Let me rephrase it. Why would that be the first important thing you choose to bring up today?

KIP: It was the first time we hadn't spent the night together since he arrived.

DOC: You were lonely?

KIP: No. It was great having my room all to myself again. No pest underfoot. No constant chatter. I could sneak a smoke or dance naked or do anything I wanted to and he wouldn't be there to tattle on me.

DOC: Let me change that from a question to a statement: You were lonely.

KIP: Maybe. A little, I guess. It was more something else.

DOC: (gives him the, 'tell me more' look and gesture.)

KIP: You're going to make me say it, aren't you?

DOC: Do you think I make you say things you don't want to?

KIP: Of course you do. I imagine in college you took a course in how to make kids spill their guts to you when they don't want to.

DOC: Oh, yes – Gut Spilling 101. Now I remember.

(Doc smiles)

KIP: You're not being serious.

DOC: Just trying to lighten the mood. You usually seem to appreciate that. You are more upset than usual today. You ready to talk about why?

KIP: Ok.... I got really scared without him there. I know that's dumb. It's not like the pest could have protected me or anything.

DOC: So you're bothered for two reasons.

KIP: (mimics doc's tell me more hand motion)

DOC: First, I hear you saying you're bothered because you were scared without him there. Second I hear you saying you are concerned because you don't understand why you were scared.

KIP: (Nods thoughtfully)

I guess both of those, right. Good job.

DOC: (nods with a brief smile)

So?

KIP: So, what?

DOC: Yes. So, what? At this point you usually take the bit in your teeth and run with it.

KIP: I didn't realize that. Well, I don't like being scared so if Randy being there keeps me from being scared I suppose he serves some good purpose. But, you're right. I really don't know what specifically I was scared about. I guess you can say I'm scared because I was scared.

DOC: (Signals for Kip to add another hash mark. He does.)

KIP: (Repeats the signal for Doc.)

You, too. If I get one it was because of whatever voodoo you do from over there.

DOC: (adds a mark to his score board and nods deliberately)

Did you do things to try and keep from being scared?

KIP: I went to sleep.

DOC: How did that work?

KIP: Had a terrible dream. I suppose you want me to tell it to you. I understand shrinks get a big kick out of listening to their patients' night time terrors.

DOC: Night time terror? Doesn't sound very pleasant.

KIP: Doh!!!! (Gestures in exasperation)

DOC: (Shrugs and raises his eyebrows)

KIP: Sorry. I'm mad as hell and really scared and have no idea what to do about any of it.

DOC: How about starting with the dream.

KIP: (moves to the front of his chair as if it the level of importance had suddenly moved up a notch)

I was a little boy sitting at a table. A man gave me a piece of candy – wrapped in cellophane. He put it on the table in front of me. It had legs and first it ran away from me across the table. Then it came back to me. Then it started hitting me – it really hurt. Then it unwrapped itself and jumped into my mouth. It was the best tasting candy I'd ever had. Then it turned sour and awful tasting and I had to spit it out. It ran away and never came back.

DOC: Any ideas if it means anything?

KIP: I thought all dreams meant something.

DOC: Some are overflowing with meaning and some are just collections of garbage left over from the day before.

KIP: (nods, thoughtfully)

I thought it was your job to tell me what it meant.

DOC: How about we make it a cooperative venture?

KIP: (shrugs and nods)

Where do we start?

DOC: How is candy supposed to taste?

KIP: Good. Sweet. Pleasant, I guess. That

what you mean?

DOC: (nods)

Assuming that your mind was in charge of what went on in your dream, what could the running away and returning mean?

KIP: Ambivalence? Like I wasn't sure if I wanted or didn't want the candy?

DOC: (nods)

What was your reaction to the candy?

KIP: At first I liked it and then I didn't. More ambivalence, I'd guess. What's the candy?

DOC: I suppose that's the important question, isn't it? It tasted good and then it tasted bad. What else?

KIP: It hurt me – ah... something I wanted, hurt me – wasn't good for me. That getting closer?

DOC: Perhaps.

KIP: Perhaps isn't really very reassuring, doc.

DOC: (smiles) What have we been talking about that your mind might consider both sweet – good – sour – bad?

KIP: Love and hate?

DOC: Can you say that without the question mark?

KIP: (smiles.)

Love and hate. I suppose if I punctuated that with a period it would represent just a statement. If I used an exclamation mark it might mean an

important revelation.

DOC: So? Period or exclamation mark?

KIP: (Looks off thoughtfully, then begins nodding.)

Seems like a *period* doing its damndest to turn into an *exclamation mark*. I think that's good, right?

(Kip grins and lowers his tone to mimic doc's voice)

I think that's good, period.

DOC: (Claps playfully)

KIP: So the hate and love are good and bad, helpful and hurtful – and that's another period.

DOC: In the dream, what was the source of love and hate?

KIP: The candy

DOC: What happened to the candy in the end?

KIP: It ran away forever.

DOC: And that made you feel . . . ?

KIP: Really terrified. I woke up in a sweat. My heart was pounding and I was breathing hard.

DOC: And one more thing, I imagine.

KIP: (looks down at his lap)

And I was crying. I remember being glad Randy wasn't there to see that."

DOC: So it matters to you how Randy thinks about you?

KIP: Seems so, doesn't it? There's one more

thing. I've been really uneasy about the whole Randy thing today.

DOC: Randy thing?

KIP: I know. It's a strange way to think about it, him, I mean.

DOC: Did you see him today?

KIP: He came home just before I had to leave for here. Mom stayed with him and dad brought me.

DOC: How was it to see him?

KIP: I didn't like how it was.

DOC: (cocks his head and furrows his brow)

KIP: It was like he wasn't important to me anymore. I don't understand that. I was scared without him last night but when he came back I could have cared less.

DOC: May I change the topic?

KIP: It's your dime as they say – well, I guess it really isn't since my parents are paying through the nose for all this, but go ahead.

DOC: Tell me about the ride here, today.

KIP: Not much to tell. Dad asked about school. I told him I'd made A's on two tests. He nodded and smiled. I wanted to talk with him about the Randy thing but he'll never talk with me about Randy. Something about that seems hard for him. Can't figure why. I just don't . . . well, you get the idea.

DOC: What about all that should surprise me?

KIP: (Kip nods deliberately)

That we were talking – Dad and me. Seems to have begun to change – things between us. Can't explain it.

DOC: How do you feel about that?

KIP: (a quick smile at doc, then in an exaggerated delivery he says)

Well, doc, in terms of how I feel about it, pretty good, I guess.

DOC: (a smile acknowledging the horseplay)

KIP: I'll just save you the time of asking your next question. He hasn't called me bad ass in a couple of weeks. I imagine that's due to your meddling, but I really don't want to know. Rather just leave it as it is for whatever reason.

DOC: Detentions?

KIP: None for several weeks.

DOC: That due to more of my meddling or can you take credit for it?

KIP: Both – that's sort of like one of those yes and no answers you said you liked.

DOC: Do I get any more than that?

KIP: 'No' to your meddling at school but 'yes' to your meddling inside my head.

DOC: Does that mean my meddling has been good or not so good?

KIP: Oh, strictly good in that way. I mean it is really uncomfortable to have to change my picture of myself and I guess if I was honest I'd have to admit sometimes I still get mad about that. It's like all this

right here (points back and forth between Doc and him) is both good and bad.

DOC: Sweet and sour, hurtful and pleasant, you mean?

KIP: You saying you were the candy?

DOC: I'm saying some dreams mean several things. I think there may still be other meanings lurking down there inside your mind.

KIP: I'm not sure how you do it.

DOC: Do what?

KIP: I came here with the intention of making a mess of things today. I wasn't going to cooperate – talk, answer questions, react, and you messed it all up and here I've not only talked I've spilled my very private guts to you.

DOC: It seems like you've done all the doing – not me.

KIP: You know what I mean.

DOC: Yes, I know. One thing before we finish for the day. How are you going to relate to Randy when you get home?

KIP: Oh, yeah. Hadn't considered that. I have no idea, if you want the truth, and I do believe that was one of the two rules you set up for us. Any suggestions, he asks knowing full well old doc will find a way to throw it right back in my face.

DOC: (Rears back as if to throw something at him.)

Right cheek or left?

(Smiles)

KIP: I think right between the eyes usually works best.

(Smile is returned)

DOC: Let me ask you this: How do you hope Randy will react to you?

KIP: Truthfully, I'd like him to leave me alone.

DOC: Is there some way you can be where he isn't so you don't have to interact?

KIP: I could do my studying down on the dining room table, I guess. This probably sounds terrible but I just hate to think of having to deal with him. He always follows me into the bathroom when I take my shower at night. He perches on the stool and yaps at me the whole time. I just want him to leave – to leave me alone, I mean.

DOC: This will seem strange.

KIP: I've become very used to strange since I've started sitting in this chair.

(Smiles but perks up as if suddenly very interested)

DOC: You, of course, know about what's called modern art or abstract art.

KIP: (nods)

DOC: Close your eyes and in your mind, take a snapshot of Randy and pretend it's such a painting. What does that picture mean to you – unravel its abstract qualities.

KIP: Tough. I usually like tough but I don't like

this one. I hate all this emphasis on Randy, anyway. Seems like he's been more important to you than I have.

(Silence)

Well, he's wearing a white T with black lettering – black and white – bad and good. He's smiling but I can't tell if that's because he's happy about me or happy that he just got me into trouble. I guess I would name it that ever popular, Ambivalence in the Abstract. There is one thing odd about the picture. It like fades in and out. I have a hard time keeping it there and I'd really rather not try.

(opens his eyes.)

That what you wanted?

DOC: Whatever you saw was what I wanted.

(Doc looks at his watch)

We can follow up on that next time.

KIP: (Stands to leave. Looks toward door and then back at Doc.)

I really need to know how you think I'm doing. Not too good, I hope.

DOC: I don't understand that. You've been so determined to pass and get out of here.

KIP: I still hate it but I'm scared out of my gourd when I think about not being able to come back.

DOC: If ambivalence were just a saleable commodity, you could be a millionaire, you know that, young man?

KIP: (Smiles, faintly, shrugs)

That didn't answer my question.

DOC: You are doing very well. I'm proud of how hard you are working at this. By the time I think you are ready to not come back, you will understand that you are ready not to come back.

KIP: Guarantee?

DOC: Guarantee!

(They hold each other's gaze for a few seconds. Kip offers a quick, faint, smile and nods slowly. He turns to leave and the stage goes black before he really is able to take a full step.)

SCENE FIVE:

(LIGHTS COME UP. Doc sitting with book, wearing glasses. Door opens a foot. KIP reaches around and knocks on the inside of it - then peeks into the room. His hair is messed up and he is wearing a tight, stained, T shirt.)

KIP: I'm early. Okay if I come in?

DOC: Sure.

(Looks at his watch, puts book down, removes glasses.)

My, you are early. What's up?

KIP: (sits immediately, forward on the chair, hands on knees, as he leans forward)

Bad stuff is what's up, doc. Very... bad... stuff.

(He shakes his head looking very sad - distraught)

DOC: I'm listening.

KIP: I tried to kill Randy last night.

DOC: I'd agree that's bad stuff. More!

KIP: Randy sleeps on the bottom bunk. I couldn't sleep. I was really angry inside and felt like I was going to boil over.

DOC: Angry about . . .

KIP: How I hated Randy. How he is just like I want to be but I can't be like him. Everybody likes him. He likes everybody. He never gets into trouble. He gets good grades. His teachers think he's something special. His art teacher says he has a gift. Mom and dad really love him – they tell him that every time he leaves the house – “Love you Randy,” “Be careful Randy, Wouldn't want anything to happen to you, Randy.” Dad even kisses him on the forehead sometimes. He never even touches me let alone kisses me.

DOC: Would you let him touch you if he tried?

KIP: (gives doc a look with no response.)

DOC: They never tell you they love you?

KIP: Tell me or mean it? Two different things.

DOC: How do you know they don't mean it?

KIP: They aren't dumb. How could they love me? I'm a class-A loser – a bad ass like dad says. I'm always in trouble. I get awful grades. Everybody hates me. I hate everybody. All I can think about is making life terrible for everybody.

DOC: I thought you indicated things seemed better between you and your dad and things were looking up at school – detentions, grades. Did I hear

you wrong?

KIP: None of that counts. It's not how I really am.

(Sits back and slumps, extends legs a bit)

DOC: So tell me about what you did to Randy last night.

KIP: (Sits back up. Takes a big breath.)

I was laying up there still wide awake at one in the morning. I started breathing hard and my heart was pounding. I felt hot and my head ached like it was going to explode. I jumped down onto the floor, grabbed my pillow. I straddled Randy on his bunk – he was on his back – and I forced my pillow over Randy's face. He was under a sheet and a blanket and with me on top he couldn't free himself no matter how he struggled. I heard him screaming into the pillow and it made me feel SOOOO good inside. You know what I said to him. I said, "Good-bye, bad ass, burn in hell."

DOC: And . . . ?

KIP: Something came over me and I pulled off the pillow. He just laid there quiet, like he slept through the whole thing. He was breathing, and the damndest thing of all – he didn't wake up. It was like nothing had happened.

DOC: I thought you heard him screaming.

KIP: Did I say that? I don't know. It's all like a dream.

DOC: Could it have been a dream?

KIP: (sits forward and looks doc in his face.)

It was NO dream. When I got back in my bunk my pillow was all wet with his slobber.

DOC: And what did you do then?

KIP: I went right to sleep. A minute at the most.

DOC: Okay. Let me recap, here. You experienced a fit of the worst sort of anxiety attack filled with raging hate for Randy, you tried to suffocate him, you found you hadn't succeeded, you got back in bed and went right to sleep. Does that make even the faintest amount of sense to you?

KIP: (Shrugs and sit back, puzzled look. Shakes head as if thinking it through.)

I guess not, really. You think it really was a dream?

DOC: How would you feel it hadn't been a dream?

KIP: Like you ought to handcuff me to my chair and not let me ever leave.

DOC: Frightened that you might you try it again?

KIP: (nods – a quivering lower lip and perhaps a few tears)

DOC: How would you feel if it had been a dream?

KIP: Like there was terrible stuff inside me that I got to keep locked up in there or else.

DOC: Or else . . . ?

KIP: Or else I might really kill it.

DOC: Kill it?

KIP: Him. I said him. Kill him.

DOC: Either way – real or dream – what are you going to do about it?

KIP: My plan was to come early and ask you what I should do about it.

DOC: Let's try it this way. You say you hate Randy because he's so great in every possible way. You say you are simply awful in every possible way. According to those descriptions who, if anybody, deserves to be hated here?

(Doc motions like a scales of justice, as if weighing the options)

KIP: Like I've been telling you, Randy. He's making my life miserable.

DOC: That first time we were together you said things were bad at home because you worked overtime to make and keep it that way. Do you remember?

KIP: Yeah. It's true. I do.

DOC: And you do that why?

KIP: Because everybody hates me.

DOC: (doc lets a moment pass)

Tell me, who would be included in that everybody you speak of.

KIP: Huh?

DOC: I assume you're referring to dad, mom, Randy, other kids, teachers, . . . who else rounds out your meaning when you say everybody?

KIP: That's it. There isn't anybody else.

DOC: Nobody else in your family?

KIP: No?

DOC: This may seem like an odd question then but how does KIP fit into all of this?

KIP: Kip? Me? . . . Ah! . . . Hmm. You're saying I tend to leave myself out.

DOC: (shrugs)

KIP: So what you're leading up to is how do I feel about myself?

DOC: Is it?

KIP: That's doc being doc. Of course, it is. You're saying that if everybody hates me and I'm part of everybody then I must hate myself as well. If I don't, then I'm not part of everybody and of course that can't make any sense.

DOC: (nods)

I even think I followed that.

KIP: (very quick and very faint smile)

If I hated myself as much as I hate Randy, then why didn't I try to kill myself instead of Randy? Since I didn't, that has to prove I hate him more.

DOC: How often have you considered possibly taking your own life?

KIP: Kill this? (opens his arms as if to show off his wonderful self)

Never! I'm all I have. NO chance I'd ever do that.

DOC: Do you remember telling me you liked –

even loved – Randy?

KIP: (Shrugs and looks away)

DOC: You did. I'm wondering if you actually do love him as well as hate him or if you're telling me a story.

KIP: (Flashes an angry look)

I promised to do your two rules and my word is good!

DOC: Okay, so what does that leave us, then?

KIP: I love Randy and I hate Randy, you mean.

DOC: And what about KIP?

KIP: What about me?

DOC: The love and hate thing.

KIP: (sad face, slumped shoulders, tears)

Like I said, all I got is me, doc. I have to love me, don't I?

DOC: Okay. I'll grant you that. And I must say you seem to be clinging to that as tenaciously as any young man I've ever known.

KIP: (gives doc a long look as if he is deep in thought)

But I do seem to be capable of loving and hating the same people – dad, mom, Randy. You're really asking if I am also both loving and hating myself.

DOC: That is just what I'm doing.

KIP: What if . . . I loved myself but didn't like myself? You said things like that could be, right?

DOC: (nods)

Think about that in relation to Randy.

KIP: You mean that I love him but I don't like him?

DOC: OR . . . (with his hand twirling leads Kip to continue thinking.)

KIP: Or? I don't get it.

(a look of sudden amazement comes to Kip's face – cocks his head.)

Oh. Or, maybe the other way around, you're thinking?

DOC: And that would be . . . ?

KIP: I like him but I don't love him. Wow! Not sure what to do with that. ... You think?

DOC: A possibility that deserves consideration.

KIP: But it's not that way with mom and dad. I know I love them, I just really don't like them.

DOC: Don't like them why, again?

KIP: Because they hate me. Oh. You're suggesting they do love me, not hate me, but they don't like me – my . . . stuff.

DOC: Could that be?

KIP: I sincerely doubt that you ever ask a question you don't already know the answer to. So, I'll go with yes, it could be???

DOC: If I may, let me get back to the first question I asked you that first day.

KIP: I know what it was. I hated it because it

made me think, and that made me think that this whole thing was going to be about thinking about stuff I didn't want to think about.

(Raises his arms and leans forward as if to ask if Doc had been able to untangle his meaning.

DOC: (nods)

As amazing as it may seem, I do believe I understood that.

KIP: (nods, soberly, thoughtfully.)

Anyway, you asked me why my parents had forced me to come and see you.

DOC: Now that you've had nearly six weeks to ponder that, you have any new thoughts.

KIP: Probably not because they hate me, like I said, but because they love me.

DOC: They love you and they want . . .

KIP: (Puzzled look slowly clears up)

Because they want me to get my stuff fixed.

DOC: I think you're finally ready to define what you mean with you say, 'your stuff'.

KIP: (nods thoughtfully)

Well, on the outside, at least, my inexcusable behavior.

DOC: Inexcusable, is it? You've just spent six weeks defending it as a necessary and key to who you believe you are – who you must be.

KIP: You interrupted me. You don't usually do that. Like you say you let me take the bit in my teeth

and run with things.

DOC: You'll pardon me?

KIP: (Manages a very slight smile)

That's my outside stuff that they hate. Then there has to be my inside stuff that they are also bothered by.

DOC: Do I dare interrupt and ask that you get more specific about the inside stuff?

KIP: (nods thoughtfully as each item below is stated)

My anger. ... My hatred.... My unhappiness..... My tendency to keep things riled up. ... My disrespect to . . . well, to everybody.

(Cocks his head)

You know, I never thought of myself as unhappy until this very minute. . . . I really am unhappy.

DOC: I know you are and we can handle that. I am intrigued, however, that in those lists of outside and inside stuff, you didn't mention 'Randy' as something your parents might be concerned about.

KIP: (looks up, puzzled, shakes his head, stands up, circles his chair looking off into the darkness, then sits back down)

Randy. Randy. Randy. I'm beginning to see that Randy is very complicated.

DOC: Do we need to move him to a place of safety tonight?

KIP: I'll leave that up to you and my parents.

DOC: Have you told your parents about last night?

KIP: No. Since it was all a dream, probably no reason to, huh?

DOC: We'll see.

KIP: Here's a question for you, doc. What if after all this, I end up deciding I hate myself and commit suicide. Could you live with that – helping me understand that and me not being able to see any way out but slitting my wrists or putting a 45 slug through my brain?

DOC: You are bringing up a most unlikely – impossible, probably – scenario. You have one of the strongest survival instincts I've ever witnessed.

KIP: That's good, then, right?

DOC: That is generally good. I believe it plays a very interesting and central role in your situation. We'll deal with that specifically in one of our next sessions. I think you've worked hard enough for one day. Again, Kip, I am really proud of you.

KIP: You really mean that, don't you? I was thinking about that a couple of weeks ago. It seemed like that rubbed off, somehow.

DOC: I'm not sure I understand.

KIP: When I let myself believe you really were proud of me, it was like some of that came my way and I sort of played with the feeling that week – the feeling of how it would be to actually be proud of myself.

DOC: Did you come to a conclusion?

KIP: I concluded that the whole idea scared the hell out of me. So foreign, you know. So contrary to everything I believed about me. Well, more confusing than contrary, I guess. I was proud in a kind of a way that I was such an expert at making people mad and keeping them upset. Knowing all the buttons to press you could say. Probably not what you mean when you use the term, huh?

DOC: I assume that's rhetorical?

KIP: Rhetorical. A question that answers itself from its mere statement. Ya. I suppose we can assume that was rhetorical.

(Kip mounts the only real grin of the scene)

(LIGHTS DIM BUT QUICKLY OFF.)

SCENE SIX

(Kip enters without knocking, hair combed, 'dressed up' compared to other times in a sport coat, shirt open at the collar. He offers his hand for a shake and they sit)

DOC: You really look great today, young man.

KIP: Thanks. Dressed up to fit the way I feel.

DOC: You feel great?

KIP: Great. Fantastic. Awesome. Whole, I guess is the best word.

DOC: Whole – w-h-o-l-e?

KIP: That's it. All together as a single, indivisible unit.

DOC: Do I get to hear about it?

KIP: You know you do. I've been thinking about how I would begin, today. Here's the thing. During the past year or two I have been nuts –

certifiable as it is said. Batty, bonkers, loony, crazy, cracked – I suppose you get what I'm trying to say.

DOC: Hard to miss, I'd say.

KIP: (A brief smile though generally all business)

Last night I stopped being nuts. I still have some problems but I'm no longer nuts.

DOC: Something spectacular must have occurred.

KIP: (nods)

I finally really, once and for all, killed Randy.

DOC: And that is awesome and all those other things?

KIP: The most awesome moment of my entire life. Whatever happens to me from here on, I'll always have that remarkable moment to remember – relish would describe it better.

DOC: (cocks his head to listen, clearly fascinated rather than disturbed.)

KIP: (Kip's mood is obviously up beat – joyous – fully inappropriately so if he just killed Randy.)

Here's the deal. I had another one of those anxiety attacks – that's what you called it. My head was throbbing so badly I thought my eyes were going to pop out. I was sweating. I was shaking. I could hardly catch my breath. I've been terrible angry before – you know that – but never anything approaching that. I was crying and could hardly see. I jumped down to the floor with my pillow, again. I repeated what I had done before – straddled Randy

as he lay there on his back and pushed the pillow against his face. That time he didn't struggle. He didn't scream into the pillow. I used every ounce of strength I could find and must have left the pillow there for two or three minutes. I knew I was getting rid of him forever and I can't explain the feeling – the mixture of the worst kind of hate a human being has ever had and the most wonderful feeling of relief and joy that I can imagine.

(He pauses and looks into doc's face for a long moment, nodding)

When I was sure he was dead, I removed the pillow and you know what, doc? Well, I'm sure you do know but it surprised the hell out of me, I can tell you, that. Randy wasn't there. No face, no head, no body, no Randy. That's when I realized it all. It like filled my whole being all of a sudden. All parts of it came together at once. It spun my head. Randy had never been there. He was just in my mind. I had made him up. I think my mind couldn't handle the mixed feelings I was having about myself so it created this Randy character and filled him with all that. I'm going to need your help to get it all sorted out.

(He sits back, clearly drained.)

DOC: Wow!

KIP: I really expected something more memorable, more insightful from the great doctor than, 'Wow!'

DOC: An exceedingly amazing and essential psychological breakthrough that will most certainly change your life and the lives of your family members

forever.

KIP: And

(Does the twirling finger thing that doc has done so often)

DOC: (at first looks puzzled then his face clears)

And I am truly proud of you from the tips of my toes to the hair on my head.

KIP: Yes! That.

(Pulls air with his arm and clinched fist.)

KIP: So, put it all together for me. That's what we're paying you the big bucks for - me and my parents.

DOC: It seems like you pretty well have it. According to your parents, about fifteen-months ago, you created what they described to me as an imaginary friend – apparently you had several as a young child. They assumed it would go away but recently this Randy person became an all-consuming obsession for you. You'd throw terrible fits when your mother wouldn't set a place at the table for him and things like that. It was when they first contacted me. You, of course, had no idea Randy was imaginary. He needed to be real because he was where you had deposited all the conflicting feelings you had about yourself – to be loved, to be hated, to be enjoyed, to be a pest, to do well in school and to do poorly in school, to make your parents proud and to make them ashamed and humiliated. Your mind knew you couldn't be all those things so it created a safer place to store those feelings – beliefs really. In a way you

recreated your parents, as well, changing them in your mind into bad guys to fit how you believed they should react to a terrible son.

KIP: I think I mostly understand all that since last night. But why have I been so convinced that I am this terrible kid or said better, maybe, that I needed to be that terrible kid?

DOC: I think it is time you answered that question for yourself. You will need to be very brave and trust me completely.

KIP: I trust you. I've been trusting my mind to you for months and there's not much more precious to a person than his mind. I'll do my best to be brave but I don't understand.

DOC: There is something you need to remember – something that was so painful that your mind erased it from your memory. We need to get that back for you so you can deal with it in a helpful way.

KIP: I'm baffled. Seems my old mind has been working overtime. It better put in for combat pay after all this gets over.

(He looks terrified for a moment)

All this will get over, won't it, doc.

DOC: My firmest belief is, yes. It all comes down to how brave you can be right now.

KIP: If it'll put all this behind me I've suddenly become the bravest fourteen-year-old you've ever run across.

DOC: You know something about hypnosis,

I'm sure.

KIP: (nods)

Actually, quite a bit. I've read up on it.

DOC: Are you comfortable with the procedure?

KIP: With you in the driver's seat I will be completely comfortable. I need to relax and close my eyes, right.

DOC: That's right.

KIP: Now?

DOC: Sooner the better I'd say. How about you?

KIP: (Says nothing but immediately works himself into a comfortable position and closes his eye fiddling a bit until he finds a comfortable spot for his arms and hands.

Eventually he nods.)

DOC: For the next few minutes you are only going to pay attention to my voice and the words and images I use and suggest. ...

(Light dims a bit on doc but remains steady on KIP)

Imagine a large, bluebird on the lawn in front of you. It rises into the air and flies lazily toward the distant horizon directly in away from you. As its form gets smaller and smaller you will relax your body more and more, only concerned with the image and more and focused on my voice. I want you to remember the creek where you used to swim with your friends. It was always a good time there with

lots of joking and laughing and fun in and out of the water. When you can see that scene, nod.

(Kip nods and smiles a bit as if it is a happy memory.)

Now, you need to focus in on just one time – one occasion. It was about a year and a half ago. You and one of your friends were there together. The rule your parents had all agreed to was never fewer than three of you there together at once, but you and he decided it would be okay just that one time. When you can see that scene, nod.

(Kip shakes his head and furrows his brow as if not wanting to see it)

Come now, Kip. You agreed to be brave. It is very important that you go on with this memory.

(Kip nods, reluctantly – his face and arms tense as he makes fists)

Relax again. Feel the warm sun of that day and hear the cool water lapping up against the shore. It has always been a good place – a place for good times.

(Kip visibly relaxes again)

So, you are seeing you and your friend there that day.

(Kip nods)

Tell me what you see.

KIP: (Speech is labored, deliberate)

Jerry went into the water and he wanted me to go right in with him. I said I wanted to get the fire

started first. There was a breeze and I knew we'd be chilly when we got out. I went and gathered some sticks and got them lit in the fire circle we'd made with some good-sized rocks. It probably took me five minutes.

(Kip begins sobbing. His story is delivered, through occasional sobs, as if in the present, with intense emotion.)

When I turn back to go into the water, Jerry is gone. I call out for him, thinking he got out and was teasing me. (Kip becomes more and more physically agitated.) Then I begin screaming. I wade out into the water and feel around. I crisscross the entire shallow area as fast as I can. Then I begin diving to search the deeper part. Every time I come up for air I scream out for help. Nobody ever comes. I am so tired but I don't dare stop. About twenty minutes later, I suppose, I find him on the bottom, downstream a way. It is a terrible struggle to pull him out. Even before I get to shore I see he's not breathing. I lay him out on the grass and begin CPR. I must have done that until I was completely exhausted because sometime later I woke up. I was draped over his chest. He was dead and it was my fault. I shouldn't have agreed to break the rule and swim with him. I should have looked out in the deep part first. I should have been better at CPR. I must have done something wrong. I killed him, plain and simple.

(He sobs on heavily for some moments. Tears would be nice!)

DOC: Now, Kip, you will return here to our safe

place – just you and me. You will be fully awake. You must bring the memory back with you. Do you understand?

KIP: (grimaces but nods)

DOC: You are back here, now. Open your eyes when you are ready.

(a few moments pass before his eyes flutter open. The light on doc comes back up)

KIP: Wow – if I can borrow your psychological term.

(a faint smile as he scoots up from his former relaxed position)

DOC: Quite a trip you just took, young man.

KIP: Not one I want to ever repeat. You okay?

DOC: (smiles)

I am fine. You?

KIP: I assume I should be better than ever. Doesn't feel like that, though.

DOC: It will, I guarantee that.

KIP: (nods and wipes at his eyes with the back of his hand. Doc offers the tissues from the lamp stand. Kip takes the whole box acknowledging the gesture with a nod and uses one)

KIP: So, do I put all this together, or do you?

DOC: We've made a pretty good team the past. Let's try it together. First, what kind of guy was Jerry?

KIP: The biggest trouble maker in the school.

Everybody hated Jerry – but me. I felt sorry for him, I guess. He had terrible parents – awful family life. I'm sure I was his only friend. Sometimes I'd do stuff he suggested that I knew I shouldn't just to try and make him feel good.

DOC: And once he was gone your mind decided to do what?

KIP: To like take his place maybe as the baddest thing in school???

DOC: Was that like you?

KIP: Being a bad kid? No, sir. I was always a really good kid. People liked me. I made good grades. I excelled in art – Oh, my, god. Randy!

DOC: (Nods and waits for more)

KIP: Help me with this, doc.

DOC: While you were going about preserving the image of Jerry you stored yourself in . . .

KIP: In Randy. . . . I can see how it all took place, you know. But, that Randy kid seemed so real. I mean I beat on him. I felt his body with my fist. I threw stuff at him, balls, books. They bounced off and he cried tears.

DOC: So who did you hate through all of this?

KIP: I see you saved the tough questions for me.

DOC: (smiles and raises his eye brows.)

KIP: Well, I hated the new KIP – really the old Jerry that seemed to invade me. Since I couldn't tolerate hating me, I created and hated Randy –

problem was, Randy was really me so it didn't solve the problem. What a mess, Doc

DOC: Yes. Mess is certainly the psychological term.

(Brief smiles)

Here's the thing – as a young friend of mine might begin, you needed to discover the mess before you could begin cleaning it up.

KIP: (sighs and nods, He removes several tissues from the box and puts them into his shirt pocket.)

I have the idea I'm going to be needing these.

(He manages a faint, forced, smile.)

So, I guess now the real work begins, huh?

DOC: Fortunately, you're up to it, Kip.

KIP: Thanks to you, doc. You saved my life, you know.

DOC: And here I thought it was *you* who had done that.

(They stand quickly - Kip first - move toward each other and embrace, Kips head on doc's chest his face toward the audience.)

KIP: I Love you doc.

DOC: I love you Kip.

(The lights slowly dim to black.)

You may now applaud!

(MORE)

SUGGESTED 'BOWS APPEARANCE' AT THE END OF PERFORMANCE.

The two actors stand side by side on dark stage.

Lights come up dim.

Spot on Doc from waist up comes up full. He is holding a sign in front of his chest that reads: "I am _____ and I played the role of Doc.

He bows (applause) Spot stays up.

Spot comes up full on Kip from waist up. He is holding a sign that reads: "I am _____ and I played Kip.

He bows. (applause) Spot stays up for as long as applause lasts.

THEN: a small disheveled boy crawls out between the two. A new spot on him there on the floor. He smiles broadly (like an imp) waves with one hand and holds a sign with the other that says: "*I'm Randy – The Real Star.*"

[Randy should be significantly shorter than Kip.]

(Applause - hold lights for applause to almost run its course)

Randy then stands, makes a stick-out his-tongue, 'wobbly fingers beside his ears face up at Kip. Kip flails his arms above his head and chases Randy off the stage and out the door. Doc turns to the audience and shrugs, then walks after them. Set goes dark. Curtain.

**Kip and the Shrink –
THE SHORT NOVEL**

A young teen struggles to shed his monsters

Tom Gnagey

Family of Man Press

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CHAPTER ONE

Kip was a nice looking, early teen boy with blond hair and blue eyes. He often wore a pleasant smile or an impish grin. None of that was evident in the tightly drawn blue hoodie and angst prompted scowl presented as he knocked tentatively at the door of the doctor's private office. He entered with more than a little reluctance, closed the door behind him and stood there the picture of discomfort and uncertainty.

Dr. Thomas removed his reading glasses and laid a folder, new in appearance, on the lamp table that sat between his chair and the matching one a few feet away. The room was small, comfortable, and subdued in appearance with bookcases along two walls, one window draped in blue beside bright white sheer curtains, and an oval braded rug in shades of blue, gray and tan connecting the furnished area into a unit of sorts. The chairs continued the color scheme and sat at angles conducive to conversation.

Kip slipped his flattened hands into the front pockets of his jeans.

“Hello, Kip,” Doc began, smiling, standing, and taking a step in the boy’s direction. “I’m Dr. Thomas, but then you knew that. Many of my young friends call me Doc.”

He offered his hand for a shake.

Kip moved into the room and fumbled through a shake – clearly neither well-practiced nor sincere. Doc motioned toward the other chair. Kip sat and looked around in an obvious attempt at avoiding eye contact. Doc retook his chair.

“You’re not my friend so what shall I call you.”

“Dr. Thomas, then, I suppose.”

Kip nodded, offering a quickly gone face to face.

“Why have you come to see me?”

“My parents forced me to come.”

“They have that kind of power over you, do they?”

Kip offered another quick and gone glance.

“You bet they do!”

It was offered with some emotion and obvious disbelief at the dumb question.

“What reason did they give you for coming?”

“They think I’m nuts, I guess.”

“Is that the reason they gave you?”

Kip offered a shrug and maintained his silence. He filled the time by looking around some more – the book shelves, the ceiling fixture, which remained off, the lamp on the table, which remained on. He even felt the fabric on his chair.

“You don’t answer questions?”

Kip offered a sigh meaning it to suggest his exasperation with everything about the undertaking.

“They never offered me a sensible reason.

What am I supposed to think, being forced to see a shrink?”

“Ah! The old answer a question with a question ploy. Very good, I suppose, if you feel like you need to avoid the issue.”

“What issue?”

“That was my first question to you.”

“Me being nuts, you mean?”

“That was not the reason your parents gave me.”

“What reason did they give you?”

“I asked you first.”

The slightest hint of a smile built on Kip’s face as he peeked up at Doc for just a moment. He untied and pushed back his hood, shaking his head as if to reset his hair. It did – long, blond, could have used two minutes with a comb.

“Mom says I am impossible to live with – incorrigible I believe was her exact word.”

“Well, I suppose if someone were really impossible to live with that just might be reason for them to come and see me. Are you impossible to live with?”

“Can’t say. Never had to try and live with me so the question is moot.”

“Moot? You know the word moot?”

“Just used the word, didn’t I?”

He offered the definition as if reading from a dictionary.

“Unanswerable because the circumstances can’t make sense of it or have changed so it is inappropriate.”

Doc nodded extending a moment of silence.

“You know what I’ve learned about you so far?”

Kip perked up and looked Doc in the face, presenting a puzzled look as he offered his best guess.

“Nothing, would be my studied impression.”

“I’ve learned you are a bright young man – from the high-class vocabulary you use. I’ve learned you are uncomfortable when put on the spot – from your body language and reluctance to say any more than is absolutely necessary. I’ve learned that admitting you may have a problem is very uncomfortable if not impossible for you. I suspect you believe the quickest way out of this uncomfortable situation is not to converse – not to enter into the conversation. And, I’ve learned you really like girls.”

Kip directed his full attention the Doc’s face, clearly surprised – perhaps bothered even.

“How do you know that last thing?”

“I noticed a light growth of hair on your upper lip and you are a fourteen-year-old male.”

All quite automatically, Kip raised his fingers to his lip and smiled, nodding and maintaining his visual search of Doc’s face.

“I do like girls. You got one thing right, at lease.”

“Only one?”

Kip shrugged and looked back at his lap.

“It seems to me that you know what is concerning your parents and I suspect they have told you.”

Kip sighed.

“They hate me, is that better? Aren’t all screwed up kids that way because their parents hate them – I read that?”

“I see. So you have looked into the matter,

have you? Must seem rather important then.”

“Of course, it’s important.”

Kip was becoming more uneasy by the moment. He continued.

“Being hated is a pretty big deal in case you’ve never noticed.”

Up to that point the ‘girl comment’ had been the only moderately cordial response from the boy.

“What do they do to show you they hate you?”

“How long a list do you want?”

“Something between one and infinity.”

Kip offered his first genuine full face smile.

“They have all these rules.”

Doc put his hands alongside his face as if amazed.

“Rules? In a family? Really? I am astonished!”

Kip offered another quick smile – clearly one he not had intended. Doc continued.

“Rules such as . . .?”

“Being on time for meals. Getting up when my alarm goes off. Taking a shower every day. Making my bed. Not beating on my little brother, Randy. Covering up with a towel when I go down the hall from the bathroom to my room – well, our room. I share it with Pest.”

“Pest, meaning Randy.”

“Yeah. A ten-year-old pest. Always into my stuff. Always tattling on me. Always under foot. Always pestering me to play catch with him. He’s just always there. I never have any privacy or any peace.”

Is it your problems with Randy that seem to be bothering your parents the most?”

Kip shrugged and immediately muddied the waters.

“Some at least. Maybe not. Probably my poor grades and getting detentions at school, more.”

“Tell me about your grades.”

“What’s to tell?”

“Like, how does a bright boy like you come to get poor grades?”

“I get them because that’s what my teachers give me.”

Kit held his hands up as if to say, ‘How dumb can you be, old man?’ ”

“I think you understood that was not what I meant.”

“The stuff’s not interesting so I don’t study it.”

“What would you prefer studying at school?”

“Girls.”

Kip managed a quick, top of the eyes sort of peek to get a feel for the old guy’s reaction.

“I figure you make certain that you get in your share of that subject, regardless.”

Kip offered a face to face smile, unzipped the front of his hoodie and sat back, relaxing. He looked around the room some more.

“I thought I was supposed to lay on a couch or something and pour my guts out to you – tell you all about my sex life. That’s how it’s down on TV.”

“Is that how you would like for us to proceed?”

Kip shrugged.

“I have that choice?”

“You can have some choices within my reasonable guidelines – but then it seems you are basically opposed to most guidelines.”

Kip remained silent for a long moment before

responding.

“So, how do we proceed? I want to get this over with. What kind of a grade do I need to get in order to pass out of here?”

Doc smiled.

“P. S.”

Kip frowned and cocked his head.

“P. S. I don’t get it.”

“Problem Solved.”

Kip offered a weak smile and nod.

“What problem would that be?”

“I think we have gone full circle back to where we started.”

Kip took a moment to look Doc over all quite deliberately, then delivered a single, exaggerated nod.

“You seem to be as skillful as Dad led me to believe you were.”

“This has been a test?”

Kip smiled and shrugged.

“P. P.”

“P. P.” Doc asked launching his own smile.

“You get a Provisional Pass.”

He emphasized the ‘P’ sound in each word.

“Can we talk about girls and sex sometime?”

“I can’t think of a fourteen-year-old boy who has come here where those things didn’t come up.”

Kip sat completely back in the chair, really for the first time. He pushed his sleeves up.

“I guess we need to get started, then.”

“I thought we already had started.”

“Oh. Sneaky. I like that in a person. Keeps a guy on his toes.”

“Actually, Kip, I do have two rules – as much as

I hear you dislike them.”

“Parents been narking on me, have they.”

“I thought that term died a natural death forty years ago.”

Kip offered a broad smile.

“I was trying to use terms I felt you might know.”

“Then, I appreciate the effort. It suggests you understand the need for us to communicate accurately.”

“So, what are they – the two rules?”

“We strive to be honest with each other and we talk about solutions instead of placing blame.”

Kip grew silent and gave them some serious thought.

“I’ll give it a try. Both things are really foreign to me. At home, all we do is lie to each other and blame other people for our . . . what, mistakes?”

“Mistakes?”

“Maybe shortcomings would be a better word. I’d like to call it misbehavior, but my parents will never admit to misbehaving themselves.”

“You’re saying you’ll give my rules a try, then?”

“Like that?”

“Like that? I don’t understand.”

“That’s you being honest, huh – admitting you don’t understand?”

“For one thing, I suppose, yes. For another I need clarification if we are to communicate meaningfully.”

“I’ll give them a try, like you said – like that. No guaranteeing anything – that’s me being honest.”

“Seems like a reasonable beginning. Tell me about your friends.”

“Don’t have any. Had one, Jerry. He doesn’t

come around anymore. Can we talk about something else and come back to friends?"

"Okay, then. Tell me what your parent's call you?"

"Huh?"

"How do they address you?"

"Mom calls me Kip, but she spells it K-y-p-p. She's got a real snooty, better than everybody else, attitude about her. I hate that. Dad either calls me 'You There' or 'Hey, bad ass'. Randy calls me Kippy, if that's of any importance."

"It seemed to be important to you, didn't it?"

"Yeah. He's the only one who really means the real me when he addresses me, you know."

"Not sure I do, but I'd like to understand. Will you tell me more?"

"Kippy is like he's relating to me kid to kid, friend to friend, honest like. I'm not sure how else to describe it. Kippy doesn't indicate anything but who and what I really am. Bad Ass doesn't do that; K-y-p-p doesn't either. Bad Ass tells me I'm no good. K-y-p-p tells me I need to be some high-class dude that reflects good on my mother – 'well' on my mother, I guess it should have been."

"Is Kip your real name or a nick name?"

"It's what I've always been called. Birth certificate says Howard Benjamin Watson. I'd like either of those better – Howie or Ben or Benny."

His tone was most convincing - sincere.

"Have you mentioned those feelings to your parents?"

Kip became animated, flailing his arms in the air.

"You kidding?" They'd blow the roof off the

house. Me, challenging one of their decisions. No way, man . . . er, Doctor Thomas, Doc!”

“It’s a shame you don’t have an opinion about that, Howard Benjamin Watson.”

They exchange smiles – warm smiles, although Kip moved uncomfortably in his chair. He spoke.

“I must admit I was a little surprised about how that came out.”

“Came out?”

“With such – what – emotion and this, I guess.”

He demonstrated the arm movement which Doc interpreted was the, this.”

“So, what will be comfortable to have me call you?”

“Kip, I guess.”

“After all that – what – emotion and all this,” Doc said, imitating Kips arm movements in an exaggerated manner, “you still want me to call you Kip.

Kip shrugged. It seemed to be his go-to response up to that point.

“It’s what I’m used to. I guess you could call me, Sexy Rexy, if you’d prefer – it’s what Sally calls me.”

“So, there’s a Sally. She your special friend – and, no, I won’t be calling you Sexy Rexy, nor will I ask you about its origin.”

“I know her, that’s all. She’s a tease – most girls are, I’ve noticed. They seem to get some perverted kick out of setting a guy’s midsection on fire and then drop them on the spot. She’d never even let me get to the batter’s box let alone first base – you know about bases?”

“I know.”

“Sometimes we will need to talk about bases, but I sense not is not that time.”

“Why do you think that?”

“It’s not a problem that has anything to do with why I’m here and I only want to talk about why I’m here so I can stop coming.”

“An honest answer. I like that.”

“I sort of thought you would.”

Kip licked his little finger on his right hand and made a pretend hash mark high in the air, then pointed to his chest.

“I assume that means one for you.”

Doc moved on not waiting for a confirmation.

“Are you ready to say or speculate any more about why you’re here, so we can get on with it, then – so you can stop coming.”

“I am here because I choose to make everybody’s life miserable at home.”

“You choose to?”

“Sure. Revenge, pure and simple. They do bad stuff to me and I do bad stuff back to them.”

“And how is that working?”

“Great, if its purpose is really to keep them all riled up, angry and out of their gourds. Not great if its purpose is to get on like a good family should get on.”

“You’ve given it a good deal of thought.”

“Every day of my life.”

He leaned forward and lowered his voice as if becoming confidential.”

“I cry into my pillow about it every night. I get up in the morning all ready to do things right and then – whammo – some little thing sets me off and there we go again.”

It had clearly been another test of some kind –

admitting to the tears. Doc tried to remain on topic.

“Little thing?”

“Like this morning, Mom fixed Randy’s toast, but by the time I sat down at the table she told me I had to make my own. I blew up.”

“Blew up?”

“Picked up the toaster and threw it across the room, dumped over the OJ pitcher on the table and kicked over the waist paper basket. And that was my restrained reaction – I really wanted to through the toaster at mom.”

“I suppose that would qualify as blowing up.”

“That’s not the worst part. I slapped Randy up side his head and made him cry.”

“You weren’t trying to make him cry?”

“Of course, I was trying to make him cry. Why else would I hit a helpless little kid?”

“So, you succeeded. Why does that make it the worst part, then?”

“I hate that.”

“That?”

“You twisting it all up like that.”

“Or, you hate to have our own illogic pointed out to you?”

Kip sat back. His shoulders slumped. His lower lip began to quiver and he began sobbing ever so quietly.”

“Don’t you think I know that?” he said. “I’m not dumb, remember. I hate this.”

“Hate what?”

“You just never give up, do you?”

“No. That is one thing I will promise you. I will never give up – never stop – until things get better for you.”

Kip looked up at Doc, sobbing openly. Doc handed him a box of tissues.

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CHAPTER TWO

It was the same time of day, a week later. There was a knock on Doc's door, less tentative than it had been the first time. Doc looked at his watch.

"Come in Kip – that's K-I-P, Kip."

He pushed the door open about a foot and peeked around the edge as if scoping out the room. Kip's hoodie had been replaced by a less bulky, drab orange, sweat shirt, the sleeves pushed up on his forearms. His long blond hair, though not really combed, had at least not been messed by removing a hood. Doc played along, also looking about the room.

"Pretty much the same as last week, wouldn't you say? No gremlins and no boogieman last time I checked and I've left the cuffs and leg irons in the closet."

Doc stood and offered his hand. They shook, then separated and moved back to the chairs they had occupied during the first visit.

"How was that?" Kip asked.

"That what? I'm sorry I don't understand."

"The shake. I've been practicing. No adult ever

asked to shake my hand before you did last week. I figured I did a pretty lousy job. I've made Randy practice with me during the week. So, how was it?"

"It was a first class shake, Kip. I hope there wasn't bloodshed."

"Bloodshed? Now I don't understand."

"In the course of you making Randy practice with you."

It garnered a smile.

"No transfusion needed, anyway. So, let's get going. Daylight's burning."

Doc nodded, indicating he received the fully unexpected message.

"Anything on your mind, today?"

"That's one of those really dumb questions that adults ask. I had hoped better from you, Doc."

"More, please," Doc said twirling his hand to encourage him to amplify his comment."

"Well, I am alive. I am awake. Of course, I have something on my mind. I can't avoid having something on my mind when I'm alive and awake."

"My intention was not to put you down by how I worded that."

"It just twists my shorts. When adults say dumb things, nothing happens. When I say dumb things everybody's on my case immediately."

"I can see how that seems unfair. Can we get past that or have I irreparably damages our relationship forever?"

Kip offered a quick, sheepish, grin.

"Sorry. I go off on dumb things like that. Gets me in hot water all the time. The unfairness thing, I think."

"Let me change directions just a bit. How does

Randy react when your parents get onto you about things?”

“He gets really scared, I can tell.”

“You two ever talk about it later?”

“Sometimes. I always apologize to him.”

“Why to Randy?”

“For making him scared like that.”

“Do you apologize to your parents as well?”

“Hell no, I mean, heck no. It’s always their fault in the first place. Not for me to apologize.”

“Tell me more about Randy.”

“I thought I was here to talk about me.”

“It occurs to me that Randy is very important in your life. Maybe we can both learn some things about you by learning what you think about him.”

Kip nodded as if it made sense and sat back in his chair.

“He’s a good kid. Never gets into trouble with anybody, but me. I’m always on his case. He makes good grades – we’re both pretty smart. He has lots of friends. He’ll talk about girls with me, but I can tell he’s not interested in them – as females. You understand the difference?”

“I do. A good difference to note, by the way. Go on.”

“I can remember how it was. I kissed a girl for the time when I was ten. Hard to imagine why it seemed so disgusting back then. Her life age was eleven, but I think her hormone age was about twenty. She got all handsy and I turned around and ran all the way home.”

He paused and looked into Doc’s face.

“You understand, handsy?”

“I imagine I do, yes.”

Kip continued.

“He’s a good artist, likes to read, tattles on me a lot.”

“About?”

“Stuff.”

“Shall I stop and put that answer in my notes – stuff?”

Kip smiled.

“Mostly, I guess when I hurt him or ignore him.”

“In his shoes, would you not do the same thing – tattle?”

“I hate that, but I guess I just have to go along with it in order to pass, huh?”

“More, please.”

“You keep making me think about things in ways I’d rather not think about them.”

“Then, yes, you need to go along with it in order to pass.”

Doc leaned way forward and, licking his little finger, put an invisible hash mark in the approximate location Kip used during the previous session. Kip frowned. Doc sat back.

“I figured if you were keeping score. I didn’t want you to miss that one. Pretty important I think.”

“Suddenly understanding, Kip looked up as if surveying his scoreboard.”

“Looks like two for me.”

He turned his head to look into the area above Doc’s head. He pointed.

“Don’t see any at all on your score board.”

“Perhaps I haven’t earned any yet.”

Kip looked upset.

“I didn’t mean that. You’re doing just fine.”

“Sometimes it’s hard to tell.”

“I know what you mean. I missed that last one, myself, you know.”

He offered a quick smile. Doc began to speak.

“Let’s go back to . . .

Kip jumped in and finished Doc’s sentence.

“. . . Randy. I know. Nice, smart, helpful, loving, kind, the sort everybody loves to death.”

“Your tone makes me wonder if you are jealous of any of those things.”

“Jealous! Of course, not. I could be all that if I wanted to be.”

“So, you’re saying you don’t want to be.”

Kip offered a broad smile.

“It would seem that way, wouldn’t it.”

There was silence for some time. Doc let it run its course.

“It’s easier to be a pain in the ass, you know.”

There was more silence.

“Hardly takes any smarts at all to be a bad ass.”

Again, there was a short period of silence.

“That’s all dad thinks I’m capable of – being a bad ass.”

That time Doc broke the quiet time with one of those questions Kip hated.

“So?”

“So, I figure when I’m acting like a bad ass I’m just acting the way he expects me to act. He should be happy about that, shouldn’t he?”

“You tell me. If you were your father how would you feel about you as a son?”

“There you go again. I still hate it when you do that.”

“When I force you to think about things from a different perspective, you mean?”

“Yeah. I really have no idea how to answer that and I’m being honest. I’d think when I was being like he says I am, he’d like it, but he yells at me about it. He never says how else he wants me to be. He hates mom’s K-y-p-p thing so I’m sure it’s not that way at least.”

“When did things really start getting bad between you and your parents?”

“Depends on what you mean by bad, I guess.”

“However you define it.”

“I know mom was unhappy when she found out she was pregnant with me – I overheard her talking to one of her friends one day. I seem to have ruined her perfect body. It’s like she blames me for her getting pregnant. Unless the books I’ve read have been very wrong, I’m not the one responsible for that.”

“That is somehow related to when things started going bad between you and your parents – the moment she got pregnant?”

“I thought you shrinks were supposed to be able to read between the lines.”

“Oh, I can. Just wondering if you can.”

“Okay. So I believe they hated me even before I was born.”

“Ouch,” Doc said.

“Definitely, OUCH!”

“But they went ahead and had Randy.”

“Oh, no. Randy is adopted. Mom would never risk going through that again – the pain – the disfigurement. Oh, no!”

“When did that happen – the adoption?”

“When he was . . . (he offered a long silence as if thinking) eight.”

Doc had lots of wonders about what was going on during Kip's downtime there, but didn't pursue it.

"So, he is a relatively recent addition to your family. How did you feel about the adoption?"

"Now that sounds more like the shrinks I've read about."

Kip mimicked Doc's voice and intonation.

"How did you feel about the adoption, Kip?"

Doc smiled and nodded.

"Well?"

"I thought it was a great idea. I'd have somebody to look up to me – somebody I could teach stuff to – somebody to blame when I did something wrong."

He smiled as if to recognize the inappropriateness of the last portion of that.

"Has it worked out that way?"

"I assume that's somehow for my benefit and not yours since you already know it's been a disaster."

"I am interested in hearing just what benefit for me that might be."

Doc waits and smiles.

"Once he got there I soon found out I didn't like to share my life with him. He can't learn to give me my space – my time alone – my privacy. Mom and dad won't listen to me about it. I tell Randy, but he just shrugs his shoulders and keeps on. I need my own room back."

"In just a word or two, what's the worst thing about having Randy around?"

"He's mom and dad's pet. He can't do anything wrong as far as they're concerned. He's everything I'm not, you could say. And, yes, I know that was

more than a word or two.”

Doc shrugged indicating it had been no big deal – the extra words.

“In just a word or two what’s the best thing about having Randy around?”

“Everybody likes him and I get to claim him as my brother. That sort of makes me look good, like I get some credit for how good he is. And, I can beat the shi . . . tar out of him when I get mad at me.”

“When you get mad at you?”

“No, I meant when I get mad at him.”

Kip exaggerated a series of nods as if to add credence to the correction.

“Let me be sure I have this right; Randy’s a great kid and you enjoy beating him up.”

Kips looked at Doc in silence, presenting a motionless glare.

“Shall I say it or will you, Kip?”

“Oh, I’ll say it. I hate it when you do that?”

It was followed by a brief period of quiet.

“Can’t we talk about something else for a while? The Randy Center in my brain is hurting.”

“Sure. Like what?”

“Like . . . your love life.”

It had been offered through an impish smirk.

“Watch now,” Doc said. “This is me ignoring that. I repeat, like what?”

“Why my teachers all hate me.”

“What do you do to make them like you?”

“You mean to hate me.”

It was strictly confrontational in tone.

“No. I mean what do you set out to do to make them like you?”

“But I just told you they HATE me.”

“And I asked what you do to make them LIKE you.”

“Ah. One of those turn the tables on the unsuspecting kid, things, again.”

Doc shrugged and offered one hand to indicate for him to continue.

“Nothing.”

“And you wonder why they hate you? Come now. You’ve been smarter than that since you were five.”

“Love is supposed to be unconditional. I’ve read a lot about it. I’m supposed to be loved just because I am a person.”

“Well, I certainly agree with that. Let me ask you this.

Kip rolled his eyes.

“Here we go again.”

Doc ignored that ‘often witnessed’ expression of angst from his teenage patients.

“Do you love Randy?”

“Randy? Yeah.”

The boy squirmed a bit.

“Do you like everything he does?”

“You know I don’t.”

Again, Doc allows the ensuing silence. Presently, Kip offered a few bumpity, back and forth nods. He sat up a bit straighter.

“You can add another mark up there, Doc.”

He pointed to Doc’s imaginary scoreboard. Doc went along with a feeble gesture waiting to hear what had just happened inside the boy’s head.

“Love and like are two different things, huh?”

“Are they?”

“Yeah. They are. Never thought of it that way.

Here's what you've done to my thinking. I love Randy, but I hate what he does sometimes – well, often – okay, most of the time. My teachers hate what I do, but some of them may even love me sort of, kind of, in some way, maybe, I guess.”

“Yes. Sort of, kind of, in some way, maybe, I guess.”

They exchange silent smiles.

“Can I ask you something?”

“You can always ask me anything, so long as you grant me the right not to answer if that becomes my choice.”

Kip nodded, thoughtfully. He began speaking in a monotone.

“Do you love me?”

“Absolutely and without any doubt.”

“Do you like me?”

Doc knew, of course it was the question to follow.

“I really do like the Kip I am growing to know here in my office. Quite honestly, I couldn't really like the Kip you are describing at home and at school.”

Tears begin to flow down Kips cheeks. He sighed, stood and walked to Doc. Doc stands and accepts the boy as he holds out his arms and melts into the man's body. They hold each other for a long time. Some days the best therapy involves no words whatsoever.

CHAPTER THREE

The knock on his door was strong and steady. Doc took note of the time as Kip entered, hair combed and wearing a nice looking, form-fitting light blue T-shirt. Kip crossed the room and extended his hand while Doc got to his feet.

“Good to see you, Kip. I believe you are a bit early.”

“I can leave if I need to.”

“No. I didn’t mean that. Glad you’re here.”

“And by that you mean you’re glad the Kip you’ve grown to know here in this room – that’s the one you’re glad to see.”

“It’s the only Kip I have personally experienced.”

The boy nodded as if accepting the premise. He paused while Doc sat then he took his seat.

“I only got four detentions this week.”

“Four as compared to . . .?”

I usually average about ten, I guess.”

“How do you evaluate that?”

“I don’t understand – evaluate?”

“Better, worse, what?”

“Better. I thought you’d get that.”

“I’m glad you evaluate the change as better.”

“Oh, I see. If I really wanted to keep things in a turmoil at school, fewer detentions would indicated my efforts had been less than stellar.”

“You have a wonderful way with words – do you realize that?”

“No. Not sure what you mean.”

“Your vocabulary, your word choice, the simplicity of the way you get to the point.”

“Those are good?”

Doc shrugged.

“I was stating a fact – you have a wonderful way with words. It implied no moral evaluation – good or bad.”

“You’re wrong. It was a compliment and compliments are good. I don’t get it.”

“What’s seen as a compliment to one is not necessarily seen that way by another.”

“Like, is the few detentions thing good or bad? I see. Thinking it was a compliment was my interpretation and not really contained in what you said.”

“Right. But I must say, I’m pleased you could take it as a compliment.”

“Why?”

“It tells me you aren’t truly committed to being the bad ass as you contend you are.”

“Because a bad ass wouldn’t want to get compliments, you mean.”

“Not unless they commended his attempts at badassory.”

Kip smiled.

“So, where does that leave us?” Kip asked.

“I’d like for you to tell me.”

Kip sat back, managing a grin. His next statement was delivered like a question, his tone rising at the end.

“That I’m acting like a bad ass, but that’s not really how I want to be?”

“If that’s true, how might you want to be acting?”

“Answer seems clear to me. How about you?”

“Pretty clear to me.”

“I want to be acting like a kid who gets compliments and let me just go ahead and ask your next question for you. What kind of a kid gets compliments? It would be a kid who behaved the way other people wanted him to behave. But that takes us right back to where I already told you I was.”

“And where is that?”

“Dad never says how he wants me to be, just that I’m a bad ass.”

“Ever ask him?”

“You don’t understand. Dad and I don’t do things like that.”

“Like what?”

“Talk, let alone talk about stuff like this.”

“When was the last time you tried?”

“Like never, I guess. I don’t have clue one how to go about it.”

“You say you and Randy talk about things. How do you go about that?”

“I know what he’ll talk about.”

“You’re saying you know his mind?”

“Sort of, I guess. And I’m older so I sort of get to call the shots on things like that.”

“Think about this, Kip. Would it make any real difference to you if your father said he wanted you to become a kid who behaved himself at school, did his school work, and got the best grades you’re capable of getting?”

“It would make more of a difference if he said he knew I was capable of behaving at school, doing my school work and getting good grades.”

“Give yourself another point or whatever you’re keeping track of up there.”

Doc pointed and smiled. Kip shrugged, but made no move to add a score. Doc continued.

“So, what is the difference between what I said and what you said?”

“When dad refers to me as a bad ass he’s really saying he doesn’t believe in me – that I can ever be anything else. It’s like he’s just given up on me. If he’d say he believed I could be different like that, it would mean he had confidence in my – like he could actually see something worthwhile inside me.”

“It is your father, not me, with whom you should be having this conversation, you know.”

“Never happen.”

“That’s truly disheartening.”

Kip’s lower lip quivered. It could barely be detected.

“So, you going to just go through life letting him believe what he believes about you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Letting him force you into being a bad ass when you really want to be something else.”

“When I first started coming here I hated when you did that.”

“That”

“Turned my head upside down like that.”

“Does that imply your feelings are changing?”

Kip offered a grin.

“Yes and no.”

He extended his grin.

‘I love yes and no answers,’ Doc said. “They suggest you are seeing at least two sides of an issue.”

Kip nodded thoughtfully.

“It’s like a circle – what’s the term – vicious circle, I think.”

“I’ll need more if I’m to understand.”

“Doc, you always need more.”

They exchanged smiles – not the kind that accompany humor, but the kind that reflect respect.

“Dad thinks I’m a bad ass, so I act like a bad ass to prove he’s right, but being the way I think he wants me to be doesn’t get me anywhere.”

As one voice they said, “Anywhere?”

That was worth the other kind of smiles and chuckles. Kip wanted to continue his thoughts.

“What I’m looking for is his love – maybe even just his like for now. I’m not sure.”

“His approval, perhaps.”

“You have a wonderful way with words – do you realize that, Doc?”

There were more nods and smiles.

“Let’s get back to that later. Who in your life truly approves of you?”

With no hesitation, whatsoever, Kip offered his answer.

“Randy.”

“But I thought you did terrible things to Randy.”

“That doesn’t matter. He still approves of me.”

It's like he's the only one in the world – at home at least – who loves me – that unconditional kind of love we talked about last time.”

“Seems like you take advantage of that.”

“How?”

“You tell me you do terrible things to him even though you seem to need to have him love you – unconditionally as you put it. Seems like you are trying to force some terrible conditions on it.”

“Hadn't thought about that. Maybe it's like a test.”

“Test?”

“Yeah. To see if he'll love me no matter what.”

“When will you consider the test over?”

“Probably never, the way it's going, is that where you're heading me?”

Doc points to himself in mock seriousness.

“Me. Heading you somewhere? What are you implying?”

“No implying. I'm outright stating it. You do it all the time. I guess that's really what my parents are paying you all that money to do.”

“If the fact I'm doing this for pay bothers you, we can deal with that later. Right now, I think it would behoove us to get back to that Randy Test.”

“Thank you.”

“I'm not sure I understand.”

“For using the word behoove. I bet you don't use that with most kids my age who come here. It means you give me credit for being smart and knowing stuff – stuff probably not being the best word I could have used right there to illustrate what I meant. But the Randy Test. Here's what I think you're trying to get me to understand. I'm forcing

Randy to keep proving his love for me even though I never do the same for him. In fact, I really can't because of the awful, unloving stuff I do to him to make him prove it. I'm not being fair. If I want his unconditional love, then I should give him unconditional love. I've never really done that, I guess."

"You have done lots of good work today, Kip. How do you feel?"

Kip gave the question a good deal of thought.

"Awful, in the true sense of the word. Awe means wonder, respect, amazement, surprise – and I'm certainly full of all those things right now. I'm also really angry for some reason."

"Is the anger directed at anything, anybody?"

"Mostly at you – for stirring up my head that way, I imagine. I've felt it after every session, but I'm trying to live with it."

"Only mostly at me?"

"At Kip, too, I think."

"At Kip?"

"No, I meant, Randy."

"Why Randy?"

"Because he's so prefect and my parents never see his faults."

"Do I detect a hint of jealousy?"

"Wouldn't that be normal?"

"Tell me more."

It was by any definition a look of disgust that Kip flashed across at Doc.

"I've been around for fourteen years and he just come last year and they're all about him, not me. I'm their real kid, for god's sake. He's just some damn accident they picked up in a kid warehouse because

he was so cute.”

“Those feelings must really hurt.”

Kip’s response was over the top.

“Darn right! I hate him and I hate my parents for loving him and I hate me for hating and loving him.”

Doc’s response was short and to the point.

“Wow!”

Kip sat back and relaxed clearly embarrassed by his outburst.

“Wow? I give you the most important thing I’ve ever given you and all you have is, wow?”

Doc became playful, his next offering tentative.

“Double WOW?”

Kip snorted and smiled. He shrugged. Doc became serious.

“What I truly hope is that you gave that not to me, but to yourself.”

Kip raised his eyebrows once and nodded twice. Doc continued.

“It must be so difficult to hate and love the same person.”

“People,” Kip added as if offering a correction.

“People?”

“Randy, mom, dad.”

“Randy, mom, dad and who else?”

Kip flashed a genuinely puzzled loo at Doc but tried a response.

“That’s it! Can’t say I love my teachers. Don’t have any friends since Jerry gave up on me. You don’t count, I’ve decided, because you’re just temporary in my life.”

“Try it again, you both love and hate Randy, mom, dad, and . . .”

“If I say it I won’t have anything left. You’ll have destroyed everything.”

“OR, maybe you will rescue the most important one of all.”

“As Kip looked up, tears began streaming down his face. He sobbed, chest heaving sobs. He remained silent for several moments, then began speaking in a low monotone.

“I both love and hate Randy . . . Mom . . . Dad and Me.”

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CHAPTER FOUR

The door to Doc's office opened. There had been no knock. Kip entered and took his seat, slouching, no offer to shake. It all took place before Doc could stand to welcome him. Kip was wearing a button down the front shirt, hanging out, and his hair was combed – 'date ready'.

Doc looked at this watch.

"Fifteen minutes late. I was concerned about you."

Kip looked up, puzzled and disturbed.

"You were supposed to be mad."

"Sorry to disappoint you. This was a planned ploy, you're saying?"

"Who but Doc would say 'planned ploy'?"

"You once thanked me for using such things in my conversation with you."

Kip shrugged, uncomfortable, looking around the room as a diversion.

"Something seems different today."

"I hate being here."

"And why would that be worse today than on all the other days you hated being here?"

“You’re ruining my life.”

“That is certainly not my intention – not in the long run at least.”

Kip shot a hateful glance at Doc.

“I been confused all week – who I like. Who I hate. I don’t even have any idea why I love anybody or why I hate anybody anymore.”

“That seems to imply that you used to.”

Kip responded with a good deal of emotion and finger pointing.

“See, that’s the problem right there.”

Doc shrugged. Kip continued. His emotion continued.

“It didn’t used to matter to me why I loved or why I hated. I just felt like I felt and that was okay. But you’ve meddled with that and now I’m all messed up.”

“You certainly do sound angry.”

Kip’s answer swims in disgust.

“There goes old Doc sounding like old Doc.”

“And you’d prefer I sounded like . . . ?

Kip shrugged, the hint of a sheepish grin evident. He spoke.

“Let’s get to work. I still want to get this over with.”

“So, your goal is to get this over with rather than to solve your problem.”

“Damn right! I’ve done just fine living with my problem up ‘til now.”

“Does that represent merely confusion on your part or was it an intentional out and out lie?”

“How about merely an intentional lie?”

“I can accept that. Can you?”

Kip ignored the question.

“Randy spent the night at a friend’s last night.”

“And that is important for me to know, why?”

“I thought you were interested in everything about me.”

“Let me rephrase it. Why would that be the first important thing you choose to bring up, today?”

“It was the first time we hadn’t spent the night together since he arrived.”

“You were lonely?”

“No. It was great having my room all to myself again. No pest underfoot. No constant chatter. I could sneak a smoke or dance naked or do anything I wanted to and he wouldn’t be there to tattle on me.”

“Let me change that from a question into a statement. You were lonely.”

“Maybe. A little. I guess. It was something else.”

Doc offered the ‘tell me more’ look.

“You’re going to make me say it, aren’t you?”

“Do you think I make you say things you don’t want to?”

“Of course, you do. I imagine in college you took a course in how to make kids spill their guts to you when they don’t want to.”

“Oh yes. Gut Spilling 101. Now I remember.”

Doc smiled.

“You’re not being serious.”

“Just trying to lighten the mood. You usually seem to appreciate that. You are more upset than usual today. You ready to talk about why that is?”

“Okay. I got really scared without him there. I know that’s dumb. It’s not like the pest could have protected me or anything.”

“So, you’re bothered for two reasons.”

Kip mimicked Doc's 'tell me more' hand motion.

"First, I hear you saying you're bothered because you were scared without him there. Second, I hear you saying you are concerned because you don't understand why you were scared."

Kip nodded thoughtfully.

"I guess both of those, right. Good job."

Doc offered a weak smile and as he responded.

"So?"

"So, what?"

"Yes. So, what? At this point you usually take the bit in your teeth and run with it."

"I didn't realize that. Well, I don't like being scared so if Randy being there keeps me from being scared, I suppose he serves some good purpose. But, you're right. I really don't know what specifically I was scared about. I guess you can say I'm scared because I was scared."

Doc signaled for Kip to add another hash mark. That time he did. He also leaned over and made a motion like he was giving Doc one as well.

"You get one, too. If I get one it was because of whatever voodoo you do from over there."

Doc nodded, acknowledging the credit.

"Did you do things to try and keep from being scared?"

"I went to sleep."

"How did that work?"

"Had a terrible dream. I suppose you want me to tell it to you. I understand shrinks get a big kick out of listening to their patients' night time terrors."

"Night time terror? Doesn't sound very pleasant."

"Doh!"

Kip threw his hands up signaling exasperation.

Doc shrugged and raised his eyebrows as if saying, 'Whenever you are ready'."

"Sorry. I'm mad as hell and really scared and have no idea what to do about any of it."

"How about starting with the dream?"

Kip nodded. He scooted to the front of his chair as if the level of importance suddenly moved up a notch.

"I was a little boy sitting at a table. A man gave me a piece of candy – wrapped in cellophane. He put it on the table in front of me. It had legs and first it ran away from me across the table. Then it came back to me. Then it started hitting me – it really hurt. Then it unwrapped itself and jumped into my mouth. It was the best tasting candy I'd ever had. Then it turned sour and awful tasting and I had to spit it out. It ran away and never came back."

"Any ideas if it means anything?"

"I thought all dreams meant something?"

"Some are overflowing with meaning and some are just collections of garbage left over from the day before."

Kip nodded thoughtfully.

"I thought it was your job to tell me what it meant."

"How about we make it a cooperative venture?"

Kip shrugged and nodded.

"So, where do we begin this cooperative venture?"

"How is candy supposed to taste?"

"Good. Sweet. Pleasant, I guess. That what you mean?"

Doc nodded.

“Assuming that your mind was in charge of what went on in your dream, what could the running away and returning mean?”

“Ambivalence? Like I wasn’t sure if I wanted or didn’t want the candy?”

Doc nodded.

“What was your reaction to the candy?”

“At first I liked it and then I didn’t. More ambivalence, I guess. What’s the candy?”

“I suppose that’s the important question, isn’t it? It tasted good and then it tasted bad. What else?”

“It hurt me – ah . . . something I wanted, hurt me – wasn’t good for me. That getting closer?”

“Perhaps.”

“Perhaps, really isn’t very reassuring, Doc.”

Doc smiled as he spoke.

“What have we been talking about that your mind might consider both sweet – good – and sour – bad?”

“Love and hate?”

“Can you say that without a question?”

Kip offered a smile. He responded.

Love and hate. I suppose if I punctuated that with a period it would represent just a statement. If I used an exclamation mark it might mean an important revelation.”

“So? Period or exclamation mark?”

Kip looked off toward nowhere in particular and began nodding.

“Seems like right now, at least, it’s a *period* doing its damndest to turn into an *exclamation mark*. I think that’s good, right?”

Kip offered a grin and lowered his tone to mimic Doc’s voice.

“I think that’s good. Period.”

Doc clapped playfully. Kip continued.

“So, the hate and love are good and bad, helpful and hurtful – and that’s another period.”

“In the dream, what was the source of the love and hate?”

“The candy.”

“What happened to the candy in the end?”

“It ran away forever.”

“And that made you feel . . . ?”

“Really terrified. I woke up in a sweat. My heart was pounding and I was breathing hard.”

“And one more thing, I imagine.”

“And, I was crying. I remember being glad Randy wasn’t there to see that.”

“So, it matters to you how Randy thinks about you?”

“Seems so, doesn’t it? There’s one more thing. I’ve been really uneasy about the whole Randy thing today.”

“Randy thing?”

“I know. It’s a strange way to think about it, him, I mean.”

“Did you see him today?”

“He came home just before I had to leave for here. Mom stayed with him and dad brought me.”

“How was it to see him?”

“I didn’t like how it was.”

Doc cocked his head and furrowed his brow.

“It was like he wasn’t important to me anymore. I don’t understand that. I was scared without him last night, but when he come back I could have cared less.”

“May I change the topic?”

“It’s your dime as they say – well, I guess it really isn’t yours since my parents are paying through the nose of all this, but go ahead.”

“Tell me about the ride here, today.”

“Not much to tell. Dad asked about school. I told him I’d made A’s on two tests. He nodded and smiled. I wanted to talk with him about the Randy thing, but he’ll never talk with me about Randy. Something about that seems hard for him. Can’t figure why I just don’t force the . . . well, you get the idea.”

“What about all that should surprise me?”

Kip nods deliberately again.

“That we were talking – Dad and me. Seems to have begun to change – things between us. Can’t explain it.”

“How do you feel about that?”

Kip offered a quick smile, then, using an exaggerated, humorous delivery responds.

“Well, Doc, in terms of how I feel about it, pretty good, I guess.”

Doc smiled acknowledging the horseplay. Kip went on.

“I’ll just save you the time of asking your next question, Doc. He hasn’t called me bad ass in a couple of weeks. I imagine that’s do to your meddling, but I really don’t want to know. Rather just leave it as it is for whatever reason.”

“Detentions?”

“None for several weeks.”

“Is that due to more of my meddling or can you take credit for it?”

“Both – that’s sort of like one of those yes and no answers you said you liked.”

“Do I get any more than that?”

“No, to your meddling at school, but yes to your meddling inside my head.”

“Does that mean my meddling has been good or not so good?”

“Oh, strictly good in that way. I mean it is really uncomfortable to have to change my picture of myself and I guess if I was – were – honest, I’d have to admit sometimes I still get mad about that. It’s like all this right here (he pointed back and forth between the two of them) is both good and bad.”

“Sweet and sour, hurtful and pleasant, you mean?”

“You saying you were the candy?”

“I’m saying some dreams mean several things. I think there may still be other meanings lurking down there inside your mind.”

“I’m not sure how you do it.”

“Do what?”

“I came here with the intention of making a mess of things today. I wasn’t going to cooperate – talk, answer questions, react, and you meddled it all up and here I’ve not only talked, I’ve spilled my very private guts to you.”

“It seems like you’ve done all the doing – not me.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Yes, I know. One thing before we finish for the day. How are you going to relate to Randy when you get home?”

“Oh, yeah. Hadn’t considered that. I have no idea, if you want the truth, and I do believe that was one of the two rules you set up for us. Any suggestions, the boy asks, knowing full well old Doc

will find a way to throw it right back in my face.”

Doc reared back as if making ready to throw something at him.

“Right cheek or left?”

Kip smiled.

“I think right between the eyes usually works best.”

“Let me pose the question in a slightly different way: How do you hope Randy will react to you?”

“Truthfully, I’d like him to leave me alone.”

“Is there some way you can be where he isn’t so you don’t have to interact with him?”

“I could do my homework down on the dining room table, I guess. This probably sounds terrible, but I just hate to think of having to deal with him. He always follows me into the bathroom when I take my shower at night. He perches on the stool and yaps at me the whole time. I just want him to leave – to leave me alone, I mean.”

“This will seem strange, Kip.”

“I’ve become very used to strange since I’ve started sitting in this chair.”

He smiled and perked up as if suddenly very interested.

“You, of course, know about what’s called modern art or abstract art.”

Kip nodded and cocked his head.

“Close your eyes and in your mind, take a snapshot of Randy and pretend it’s such a painting. What does that picture mean to you – unravel its abstract qualities.

“I usually like tough, but I don’t like this one. I hate all this emphasis on Randy, anyway. Seems like he’s been more important to you than I have.”

A few moments of silenced passed.

“Well, he’s wearing a white T with black lettering – black and white – bad and good. He’s smiling, but I can’t tell if that’s because he’s happy about me or happy that he just got me into trouble. I guess I would name it that ever popular, Ambivalence in the Abstract. There is one thing odd about the picture. It like fades in and out. I have a hard time keeping it there in focus and I’d really rather not try.”

He opened his eyes.

“That what you wanted?”

“Whatever you saw was what I wanted.”

Doc looked at his watch.

“We can follow up on that next time.”

Kip stood to leave, looking at the door and then back at Doc.

“I really need to know how you think I’m doing. Not too good, I hope.”

“I don’t understand that. You’ve been so determined to pass and get out of here.”

“I still hate it, but I’m scared out of my gourd when I think about not being able to come back.”

“Kip, if ambivalence were just a saleable commodity, you could be a millionaire, you know that?”

Kip smiled faintly, shrugged and spoke.

“That didn’t answer my question.”

“You are doing very well. I’m proud of how hard you are working at this, apparently even in your sleep. By the time I think you are ready to not come back, you will understand that you are ready not to come back.”

“Guarantee?”

“Guarantee!”

They hold each other's gaze for a few seconds. Kip offers a quick, faint, smile and nods slowly. He turned and left the room.

CHAPTER FIVE

Doc was sitting alone in his office reading a book. The door opened a foot or so. Kip reached around the corner and knocked on the inside of it – then peeks into the room. His hair is uncombed and he is wearing a tight, stained, T shirt.

“I’m way early. Okay if I come in?”

“Sure.”

Doc laid he book on the table, removed his glasses and looked at his watch.

“My, you are early. What’s up?”

Kip immediately took a seat, sitting forward on the chair, hands on knees, and leaned forward turned in Doc’s direction.

“Bad stuff is what’s up, doc. Very . . . bad . . . stuff.”

He shook his head, anxious, nervous, and distraught.

“I’m listening.”

“I tried to kill Randy last night.”

“I’d agree. Bad stuff. More!”

“Randy sleeps on the bottom bunk. I couldn’t sleep. I was really angry inside and felt like I was

going to boil over.”

“Angry about . . .?”

“How I hated Randy. How he is just like I want to be, but I can’t be like him. Everybody likes him. He likes everybody. He never gets into trouble. He gets good grades. His teachers think he’s something special – like a gift from God. His art teacher says he has a gift. Mom and dad really love him – they tell him that every time he leaves the house – ‘Love you, Randy,’ ‘Be careful, Randy,’ ‘Wouldn’t want anything to happen to you, Randy.’” Dad even kisses him on the forehead sometimes. He never even touches me let alone kisses me.”

“Would you let him touch you if he tried?”

Kip stared into Doc’s face with no response.

“They never tell you they love you?”

“Tell me or mean it?” Kip said. “Two different things.”

“How do you know they don’t mean it?”

“They aren’t dumb. How could they love me? I’m a class-A loser – a bad ass like dad says. I’m always in trouble. I get awful grades. Everybody hates me. I hate everybody. All I can think about is making life terrible for everybody.”

“I thought you indicated things seemed better between you your dad and that things were looking up at school – detentions, grades. Did I hear you wrong?”

“None of that counts. It’s not how I really am. Like it’s all an act.”

Kip sat back and slumped, extending his legs and crossing them.

“So, tell me about what you did to Randy last night.”

He rearranged himself into a more upright sitting position and took a big breath.

“I was laying up there still wide awake at one in the morning. I started breathing hard and my heart was pounding. I felt hot and my head ached like it was going to explode. I was filled with fright – anxiety maybe. I jumped down onto the floor and grabbed my pillow. I straddled Randy on his bunk – he was on his back – and I forced my pillow over his face. He was under a sheet and a blanket and with me on top he couldn’t free himself no matter how he struggled. I heard him screaming into the pillow and it made me feel SOOOO good inside. You know what I said to him. I said, “Good-bye, bad ass, burn in hell.”

“And . . . ?”

“Something came over me and I pulled off the pillow. He just laid there quiet, like he slept through the whole thing. He was breathing and the damndest thing of all, he was still asleep. It was like nothing had happened.”

“I thought you heard him screaming.”

“Did I say that?” I don’t know. It’s all like a dream where everything’s all fuzzied up.”

“Could it have been a dream?”

Kip moved forward in his chair and looked into Doc’s face.

“It was NO dream. When I got back in my bunk my pillow was all wet with his slobber.”

“And what did you do then?”

“I went right to sleep. A minute at the most. Like I just had to get out of there.”

“Okay. Let me recap, here. You experienced a fit of the worst sort of anxiety attack filled with raging hate for Randy, you tried to suffocate him, you found

you hadn't succeeded, you got back in bed and went right to sleep. Does that make even the faintest amount of sense to you?"

Kip shrugged and sat back wearing a puzzled look. He shook his head as if trying to shake things back into the right order.

"I guess not, really. You think it really was a dream? It sure seemed real."

"How would you feel if it hadn't been a dream?"

"Like you ought to handcuff me to my chair and not let me ever leave."

"Frightened that you might try it again?"

Kip nodded, his lower lip quivered and a few tears appeared.

"How would you feel if it had been a dream?"

"Like there was terrible stuff inside me that I got to keep locked up in there forever or else."

"Or else . . ."

"Or else I might really kill it."

"Kill IT?"

"Him. I said him. Kill him."

"Either way – real or dream – what are you going to do about it?"

"My plan was to come early and ask you what I should do about it."

"Let's try it this way. You say you hate Randy because he's so great in every possible way. You say you are simply awful in every possible way. According to those descriptions who, if anybody, deserves to be hated here?"

Doc motioned with his hands as if weighing the options.

"Like I've been telling you, Randy. He's making my life miserable."

“That first time we were together you said things were bad at home because you worked overtime to make and keep it that way. Do you remember?”

“Yeah. It’s true. I do.”

“And you do that, why?”

“Because everybody hates me.”

Doc allowed a few moments pass in silence.

“Tell me, who would be included in that everybody you speak of?”

“Huh?”

“I assume you’re referring to dad, mom, Randy, other kids, teachers. Who else rounds out your meaning when you say everybody?”

“That’s it. There isn’t anybody else.”

“Nobody else in the family?”

“No?”

“This may seem like an odd question then, but how does Kip fit into all of this? I think we touched on it before.”

“Kip? Me? . . . Ah! . . . Hmm. You’re saying I tend to leave myself out.”

Doc shrugged.

“So, what you’re leading up to is how do I feel about myself?”

“Is that what I’m leading up to?”

“Now, that’s Doc being Doc! Of course, it is. You’re saying that if everybody hates me and I’m part of everybody then I must hate myself as well. If I don’t, then I’m not part of everybody and of course that can’t make any sense.”

Doc nodded.

“I even think I followed that, Kip.”

Kip offered a quick, faint smile.

“If I hated myself as much as I hate Randy, then why didn’t I try to kill myself instead of Randy? Since I didn’t, that has to prove I hate him more.”

“How often have you considered possibly taking your own life?”

“Kill this?”

He opened his arms as if to show off his magnificent self.

“Never! I’m all I have. NO chance I’d ever do that.”

“Do you remember telling me you liked – even loved – Randy?”

Kip shrugged and looked away.

“You did. I’m wondering if you actually do love him as well as hate him or if you’re telling me a story.”

Kip flashed an angry look at Doc.

“I promised to do your two rules and my word is good.”

“My thought, too. So, what does that leave us, then?”

“I love Randy and I hate Randy, you mean. I think we’ve covered that ground.”

“And what about Kip?”

“What about me?”

“The love and hate thing.”

Kip slumped forward putting his face in his hands, and cried.

“Like I said, all I got is me, Doc. I have to love me, don’t I?”

“Okay. I’ll grant you that. And I must say you seem to be clinging to that as tenaciously as any young man I’ve ever known.”

Kip turned his head and gave Doc a long look,

clearly deep in thought. He sat back and spoke.

“But I do seem to be capable of loving and hating the same people – dad, mom, Randy. You’re really asking me if I am also both loving and hating myself. As if I need to revisit anything I said about it before.”

“That is just what I’m doing.”

“What if . . . I loved myself, but didn’t like myself? You said things like that could be, right?”

Doc nodded.

“Now, think about that in relation to Randy.”

“You mean that I love him but don’t like him?”

“Or . . .”

“Or? I don’t get it.”

Kips face suddenly clears.

“Or, maybe the other way around, your thinking?”

“And that would be . . .?”

“I like him, but I don’t love him. Wow! Not sure what to do with that. . . . You think?”

“A possibility that deserves consideration.”

“But it’s not that way with mom and dad. I know I love them, I just really don’t like them.”

“Don’t like them, why?”

“Because they hate me. Oh. You’re suggesting they do love me, not hate me, but they don’t like me – my . . . stuff.”

“Could that be?”

“I sincerely doubt that you ever ask a question you don’t already know the answer to. So, I’ll go with yes, it could be and I suppose that’s a question.”

“If I may, let me get back to the first question I asked you that first day.”

“I know what it was. I hated it because it made

me think, and that made me think that this whole thing was going to be about thinking about stuff I didn't want to think about."

Kip raised his hands as if asking whether or not Doc had been able to untangle his meaning.

Doc nodded.

"As amazing as it may seem, I do believe I followed every word of that."

Kip nodded as if Doc's response had been important to him.

"Anyway, you asked me why my parents had forced me to come and see you."

"Now that you've had all these weeks to ponder that, do you have any new thoughts?"

"Probably not because they hate me, like I said, but because they love me."

"They love you and they want . . ."

Kip offered a puzzled look, which gradually cleared.

"Because they want me to get my stuff fixed."

"I think you're finally ready to define what you mean when you say, 'your stuff'."

Kip nodded thoughtfully for some time.

"Well, on the outside, at least, my inexcusable behavior."

"Inexcusable, is it? You've just spent two months defending it as a necessary and key element in who you believe you are – who you must be."

"You interrupted me. You don't usually do that. Like you say, you let me take the bit in my teeth and run with things."

"I hope you will pardon me."

Kip managed a very slight smile and continued.

"That's my outside stuff that they hate. Then

there has to be my inside stuff that they are also bothered by.”

“Do I dare interrupt and ask that you get more specific about the inside stuff?”

Kip nodded thoughtfully as he presented each element of what he meant.

“My anger . . . My hatred . . . My unhappiness . . . My tendency to keep things riled up . . . My disrespect to . . . well, to everybody.”

He cocked his head and looked at Doc.

“You know, I never thought of myself as unhappy until this very minute . . . I really am unhappy.”

“I know you are and we can handle that. I am intrigued, however, that in those lists of outside and inside stuff, you didn’t mention Randy as something your parents might be concerned about.”

Kipped look up as if startled, puzzled. He shook his head and stood up, took a turn around the room and then sat back down.

“Randy, Randy, Randy. I’m beginning to see that Randy is very complicated.”

“Do we need to move him to a place of safety tonight?” Doc asked.

“I’ll leave that up to you and my parents.”

“Have you told your parents about last night?”

‘No. Since it was probably all a dream, I guess there’s no reason to, huh?’

“We’ll see.”

“Here’s a question for you, Doc. What if after all this, I end up deciding I hate myself and commit suicide. Could you live with that – helping me understand that and me not being able to see any way out but slitting my wrists or putting a 45 slug

through my brain?”

“You are bringing up a most unlikely – impossible, probably – scenario. You have one of the strongest survival instincts I’ve ever witnessed.”

“That’s good, then, right?”

“That is generally good. I believe it plays a very interesting and central role in your situation. We’ll deal with that specifically in one of our next sessions. I think you’ve worked hard enough for one day. Again, Kip, I am really proud of you.”

“You really mean that, don’t you? I was thinking about that a couple of weeks, ago. It seemed like that rubbed off, somehow.”

“I’m not sure I understand.”

“When I let myself believe you really were proud of me, it was like some of that come my way and I sort of played with the feeling that week – the feeling of how it would be to actually be proud of myself.”

“Did you come to a conclusion?”

“I concluded that the whole idea scared the hell out of me. So foreign, you know. So contrary to everything I believed about me. Well, more confusing than contrary, I guess. I was proud in a kind of a way that I was such an expert at making people mad and keeping them upset. Knowing all the buttons to press you could say. Probably not what you mean when you use the term, huh?”

“I assume that’s rhetorical,” Doc said.

“Rhetorical. A question that answers itself from its mere statement. Yeah. I suppose we can assume that was rhetorical. I’ll be on time next week.”

CHAPTER SIX

Kip entered the office without knocking. His hair was combed. He was dressed up in sport coat, shirt open at the collar, slacks. He walked with purpose to Doc and offered his hand.

“You really look sharp today, young man.”

“Thanks. Dressed up to fit the way I feel.”

“It appears you feel great.”

“Great. Fantastic. Awesome. Whole, I guess is the best word.”

“The whole/hole spelled w-h-o-l-e?”

“That’s it. All together as a single, individual unit.”

“Do I get to hear about it?”

“You know you do. I’ve been thinking about how I would begin, today. Here’s the thing. During the past year or two I have been nuts – certifiable as it is said. Batty, bonkers, loony, crazy, cracked – I suppose you get what I’m trying to say.”

“Hard to miss, I’d say.”

They shared a brief smile. Kip continued.

“Last night I stopped being nuts. I still have some problems, but I’m no longer nuts.”

“Something spectacular must have occurred.”

Kip nodded as he replied.

“I finally really, once and for all, killed Randy.”

“And that is awesome and all those other things?”

“The most awesome moment of my entire life. Whatever happens to me from here on, I’ll always have that remarkable moment to remember – relish would describe it better.”

Doc cocked his head to listen, clearly fascinated rather than disturbed. He saw that Kip’s mood was obviously up beat – joyous – fully inappropriately so, if he just killed Randy.

“Here’s the deal. I had another one of those anxiety attacks – that’s what you called it. My head was throbbing so badly I thought my eyes were going to pop out. I was sweating. I was shaking. I could hardly catch my breath. I’ve been terribly angry before – you know that – but never anything approaching that. I was crying and could hardly see. I jumped down to the floor with my pillow, again. I repeated what I had done before – straddled Randy as he lay there on his back and pushed the pillow against his face. That time he didn’t struggle. He didn’t scream into the pillow. I used every ounce of strength I could find and must have left the pillow there for two or three minutes. I knew I was getting rid of him forever and I can’t explain the feeling – the mixture of the worst kind of hate a human being has ever had and the most wonderful feeling of relief and joy that I can imagine.”

He paused and looked into doc’s face for a long moment, nodding purposefully.

“When I was sure there could not be even an

ounce of life left in him, I removed the pillow and you know what, doc? Well, I'm sure you do know, but it surprised the hell out of me, I can tell you, that. Randy wasn't there. No face, no head, no body, no Randy. That's when I realized it all. It like filled my whole being in just a split second. All parts of it came together at once. It spun my head. Randy had never been there. He was just in my mind. I had made him up. I think my mind couldn't handle the mixed feelings I was having about myself so it created this Randy character and filled him with all that. I'm going to need your help to get it all sorted out."

He sat back clearly drained but clear eyed.

"Wow!"

"I really expected something more memorable, more insightful from the great doctor than, "Wow!"

"Then how about this. An exceedingly amazing and essential psychological breakthrough that will most certainly change your life and the lives of your family members forever."

"And . . ."

Kip did Doc's twirling finger, 'give me more' motion.

Doc looked puzzled. Then his face cleared.

"And, I am truly proud of you from the tips of my toes to the hair on my head."

"Yes! That!"

Kip pulled air with both arms and clinched fists. He continued.

"So, help me put it all together. That's what we're paying you the big bucks for –me and my parents."

"It seems like you pretty well have it. According to your parents, about fifteen months ago you created

what they described to me as an imaginary friend – apparently you had several as a young child. They assumed it would go away, but recently this Randy person became an all-consuming obsession for you. You'd throw terrible fits when your mother wouldn't set a place at the table for him and things like that. It was at that point they first contacted me. You, of course, had no idea Randy was imaginary. He needed to be real because he was where you had deposited all the conflicting feelings you had about yourself – to be loved, to be hated, to be enjoyed, to be a pest, to do well in school and to do poorly in school, to make your parents proud and to make them ashamed and humiliated. Your mind knew you couldn't be all those things so it created a safer place to store those feelings – beliefs really. In a way you recreated your parents, as well, changing them in your mind into bad guys to fit how you believed they should react to a terrible son. I am quite certain your father never once called you a 'bad ass.'

"I think I mostly understand all that since last night. But why have I been so convinced that I am this terrible kid or said better, maybe, that I needed to be that terrible kid? I know I didn't when I was younger. I loved the hell out me."

"I think it is time you answered that question for yourself. You will need to be very brave and trust me completely."

"I trust you. I've been trusting you with my mind for months and there's not much more precious to a person than his mind. I'll do my best to be brave, but I don't understand."

"There is something you need to remember – something that was so painful that your mind erased

it from your memory. We need to get that back for you so you can deal with it in a helpful way.”

“I’m baffled. Seems my old mind has been working overtime. It better put in for combat pay after all this gets over.”

He looked Doc in that face.

“Suddenly I’m terrified. All this will get over, won’t it, Doc?”

“My firmest belief is, yes. It all comes down to how brave you can be right now.”

“If it’ll put all this behind me, I’ve suddenly become the bravest fourteen-year-old you have ever run across.”

“You know something about hypnosis, I’m sure.”

Kip nodded and showed the least indication of a frown. He chose to answer.

“Actually, quite a bit. I’ve read up on it.”

“Are you comfortable with the procedure?”

“With you in the driver’s seat I will be completely comfortable. I need to relax and close my eyes, right?”

“That’s right.”

“Now?”

“Sooner the better I’d say. How about you?”

Kip said nothing, but immediately worked himself into a comfortable position and closed his eyes, fiddling a bit until he found comfortable spots for his arms and hands. Presently, he nodded.

“For the next few minutes you are only going to pay attention to my voice and the words and images I use and suggest.

“Imagine a large, bluebird on the lawn in front of you. It rises into the air and flies lazily toward the

distant horizon directly away from you. As its form gets smaller and smaller you will relax your body more and more, only concerned with the image as you become more and more focused on my voice. I want you to remember the creek where you used to swim with your friends. It was always a good time there with lots of joking and laughing and fun in and out of the water. When you can see that scene, nod.”

Kip nodded and offered an easy smile, as if it were a happy memory.

“Now, you need to focus in on just one time – one occasion. It was about a year and a half ago. You and one of your friends were there together. The rule that all of your friends’ parents had agreed to that summer was that there would never be fewer than three of you there at once, but you and he decided it would be okay just that one time. When you can see that scene, nod.”

Kip shook his head and furrowed his brow as if not wanting to see it.

“Come now, Kip. You agreed to be brave. It is very important that you go on with this memory.”

Kip’s brow remained furrowed, but he nodded. His face and arms tensed and he formed fists.

“Relax again – forehead . . . cheeks . . . shoulders . . . arms and hands . . . chest – very good. Feel the warm sun of that day and hear the cool water lapping against the shore. It has always been a good place – a place for good times.”

Kip visibly relaxed according to Doc’s suggestions.

“So, you are seeing you and your friend there that day, right?”

Kip nodded and squirmed for just a moment.

“Tell me what you see.”

Kip’s speech became labored and deliberate.

“Jerry went into the water and he wanted me to go right in with him. I said I wanted to get the fire started first. There was a breeze and I knew we’d be chilly when we got out. I went and gathered some sticks and got them lit in the rock, fire circle we’d made the summer before. It probably took me five minutes.”

Kip began crying. His story was delivered as if in the present, with intense emotion.

“When I turn back to go into the water, Jerry is gone. I call out for him, thinking he got out and was teasing me. (He became more and more physically agitated.) Then I begin screaming. I waded out into the water and feel around. I crisscross the entire shallow area as fast as I can. Then I begin diving to search the deeper part. Every time I come up for air I scream out for help. Nobody ever comes. I am so tired, but I don’t dare stop. About twenty minutes later, I suppose, I find him on the bottom, downstream a way. It is a terrible struggle to pull him out. Even before I get to shore I see he’s not breathing. I lay him out on the grass and begin CPR. I must have done that until I was completely exhausted because sometime later I woke up. I was draped over his chest. He was dead and I know it was my fault. I shouldn’t have agreed to break the rule and swim with him. I should have looked out in the deep part first. I should have been better at CPR. I must have done something wrong. I killed him, plain and simple.”

He lowered his head into his hand and sobbed on heavily for some moments.

“Now Kip, in a moment I will ask you to return here to our safe place – just you and me. You will be fully awake. You must bring the memory back with you. Do you understand?”

Kip sat up and grimaced. He nodded. His lips quivered.

“You are back here with me, now, Kip. Open your eyes when you are ready.”

A few moments pass before his eyes fluttered open. He sat quietly for some time, then spoke.

“Wow – if I can borrow your psychological term.”

He offered a faint smile as he scooted up straighter from his relaxed position.

“Quite a trip you just took, young man.”

“Not one I ever want to have to repeat. You okay?”

Doc smiles.

“I am fine. You?”

“I assume I should be better than ever. Doesn’t feel like that, though.”

“It will, I guarantee that.”

Kip nodded and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. Doc offered the tissue box which the boy accepted with a nod.

“So, do I put all this together, or do you?” Kip asked at last, his face more or less dry.

“We’ve made a pretty good team in the past. Let’s try it together. First, what kind of guy was Jerry?”

“The biggest trouble maker in the school. Everybody hated Jerry – but me. I felt sorry for him, I guess. He had terrible parents – awful family life. I’m sure I was his only friend. Sometimes I’d do stuff he

suggested that I knew I shouldn't just to try and make him feel good."

"And once he was gone your mind decided to do what?"

"To like take his place maybe as the baddest thing in school?"

"Was that like you?"

"Being a bad kid? No, sir. Like I have told you, I was always a really good kid. People liked me. I made good grades. I excelled in art – Oh, my, god. Randy!"

Doc nodded and just waited for it to get straight in Kips head.

"Help me with this, Doc."

"While you were going about preserving the image of Jerry, after his death, you stored yourself in . . ."

"In Randy. I can see how it all took place, you know. But, that Randy kid seemed so real. I mean I beat on him. I felt his body with my fists. I threw stuff at him, balls, books. They bounced off and he cried tears."

"So, who did you hate through all of this?"

"I see you saved the tough questions for me in this cooperative effort."

Doc offered a smile and raised eyebrows.

"Well, I hated the new Kip – really the old Jerry that seemed to invade me. Since I couldn't tolerate hating me, I created and hated Randy – problem was, Randy was really me so it didn't solve the problem. What a mess, Doc."

"Yes, Mess is certainly the psychological term."

Smile met smile.

"Here's the thing – as a young friend of mine

might begin, you needed to discover the mess before you could begin cleaning it up.”

Kip sighed and offered a weak nod. He removed several tissues from the box and put them in his shirt pocket.

“I have the idea I’m going to be needing these.”

He managed a faint, forced smile and continued.

“So, I guess now the real work begins, huh? Rebuilding my self-concept, establishing a new reputation, taking a new look at my personal goals, resetting my relationship with my parents and teachers and other kids. ”

“Fortunately, you’re up to it, Kip.”

“Thanks to you, Doc. You saved my life, you know.”

“And here I thought it was *you* who had done that.”

Kip stood first and moved toward Doc. Doc stood to meet him. It was an easy embrace, Kip’s head resting against Doc’s chest and Doc’s strong arms gentled around the boy’s back.

“I love you, Doc.”

“I love you, Kip.”

“Next week, same time?”

“I will be looking forward to it.”

THE END (well, you understand.)