

CHAPTER 1

ARRIVAL

My family. They eventually got to know me. Know me better than I did. I didn't know who I was. I'm sure of it now. Back then, I didn't want to know—you know, the stuff that's stuffed in your heart and head that drives you nuts sometimes. Three things. That's all I knew: the old man wasn't my father, the bastard kicked me out of the house, and I'm no queer...sure as hell hope not.

So I stole his beat-up USMC sea-bag. Big deal. Mom didn't give a hoot of that, or much of anything but horses. I didn't hate the ranch. Just Arizona and my so-called friends. The ones who got me into this mess. But cool ones too, like Bruce and Jack. But mostly yahoos and country music freaks with fake Gunsmoke's Chester twangs, thick as bricks baked in the desert sun. I dreamed of so much better. The old man hated me for it. No balls. Me or him.

I went down to the wash where I burned the wrestling magazines. They came from The Devil himself, like me, like so I was told, like about what I'd do to myself out behind the horse barn where I stored 'em. I kicked the soggy ashes into the monsoon runoff, then killed off the booze, and pitched the empty bottle half way to Mars. Glass shattered bell-like against the rocks.

I was finally ready to kiss the desert's ass farewell.

That was yesterday. Literally. Now my trunk, his sea-bag, a two-suiter and a backpack were on the curb. My worldly possessions in a place as different and far away as I could get.

I slammed the door and the taxi took off like a scared rabbit across the empty parking lot and down the narrow forest road toward the distant village. Alone on the macadam in the warm humid August morning, the intimidating English Collegiate Gothic dormitory, old Taylor Hall itself, glared down at me in bright sunlight, its dull gray surface camouflaged by gobs of ivy clinging to the venerable weather-worn stone, ready and waiting for another class of fresh males who'd lay siege next week to their new home.

The driver bled me of \$22.75. Only \$177.38 left. Mostly from life guarding. When I cough up another \$2620.00, my tuition will be paid. Yeah, sure! It must be in my other jeans. The scent of my gross fuckedupedness filled the air.

My guts hurt from a ton of doubts I wish I could shit. Me huddling with fancy blue-bloods, thinking great thoughts, holding a cup of tea, pretending I had a lousy buck in my pocket. Yeah, sure! Maybe the stupid money is under that rock over there along with my food, books, and clothes.

Don't think about it. I'm a phony Robinson Crusoe washed up on the strange all-male island of Ridgeston College. A place to tame or be tamed and where, when I fail, my ass will graduate to Vietnam. Or I'll dodge the draft and go to Canada. I could get used to Canada. Another good reason to be damned scared shitless.

The oak backdoor of Taylor Hall stared back at me. I gave it a yank. Then a push and a rattle. I peered in the leaded glass window and pronounced the building dead. But I was numb blind to the plaque in front of my nose: "Ring Bell After Hours".

Did mid-morning qualify? I asked myself, and timidly pressed the button.

The rasping buzzer would have waked the dead. *Nada*. My pile of luggage at the curb. I'd camp with it tonight. I leaned on the buzzer again. I'd nothing to lose.

"I hear you!" shouted a hoarse male voice. A moment later the door clanged open and bolts of lightning shot through me. A statuesque block of marble chiseled beautifully into a twenty-something man, dark stubble, strong jaw, short tousled hair, muscular arms and pecs crammed into a tee that fell to the top of his sturdy thighs, taunted my curiosity of what lay underneath.

"And you are?"

His gleaming gunmetal blue eyes, slitted like a dozing cat, drilled me deep somewhere behind my solar plexus, in my heart or balls or both. The effort not to look, not to stare, while yearning to discover if he were completely naked, sapped my vocal cords.

“S...sorry. Sorry to bother you. I'm here to check in.” I said with an uncharacteristically squeaky voice.

“Name?”

“Tom Hamilton, sir,” I said, gathering my wits.

“I've been expecting you. Come.”

His long artistic fingers ruffled his dark hair, his other hand extended horizontally holding the thick plank door open as if it were a feather.

“My bags too?”

“Unless you want to sleep outside,” the creature said with a silky voice.

His raised eyebrow confirmed my stupidity. I was damaged goods even to a total stranger and pathetic enough for him to linger in the doorway and watch as I nervously trotted back and forth to create a jumble of luggage in the foyer.

“This back door is always locked. Those are the main doors.” He pointed to the far side of the cherry paneled foyer high enough for basketball and big enough to stable a team of horses and with double doors to the quad you could drive a wagon through. I could hardly wait to see the rest of the dorm.

“For now, I lock the doors at 2200, that's 10 o'clock. Miss that and you'll sleep outside 'til I open at 0500. I'll announce changes and dorm rules at 1900 next Wednesday when orientation starts. Understood?”

“Yes,” I answered quickly.

“I'm Mike Kelly. The guy who runs this place—and your life. You may call me ‘sir.’”

“Yes sir, Mr. Kelly.”

I was off to an impertinent start as usual.

Alpha-dog extended his right hand. I hesitated. His thin smile seemed like permission to touch. His firm grip jellied my guts. A handshake too short that lasted too long.

“Follow me, please,” Mr. Kelly said, pulling his hand from mine.

We glided past a stone staircase that lead to the upper floors and under an ornate pewter chandelier hanging in the center of the foyer. The rich walnut paneling flowed into an elegantly furnished lounge with a huge manor house fireplace, a grand piano, leather sofas and chairs, walls dripping with oil paintings, shelves of books and...

“This way.” Mr. Kelly motioned me to the left. “I'll tour you later.”

...a few steps further and I was at his eight-paneled apartment door, transfixed by the brass plaque engraved “Dormitory Master”. He whisked me into his simple neat living room where beyond was a kitchen tucked mostly out of sight around a corner, and through an open doorway nearby on my left was a crumpled queen bed right out in plain view... there... his bedroom... his sheets... his dented pillow where I had awakened him. I tore my gaze away to an office area near my right elbow, a creamy leather sofa faced me...

“Please sit down...”

...with a glass and cherry coffee table to trip over and make myself look like an ass.

“...at the chair by the desk.”

I planted my butt and glanced out the leaded Gothic windows to the bright green campus beyond, but for only a second. The best view was in the room.

His biceps bulged, triceps stretched, shoulders flexed sensuously as he rummaged in the file cabinet. The bottom edge of his tee seductively rose to unveil a round iron butt that drew my eyes like magnets and aligned my brain to a single thought: strip him naked!

I ripped my gaze away to the nearby walls speckled with diplomas and citations.

“Don't mind those, they're just pieces of paper.”

His back was to me, his head still buried in the file drawer.

He turned. I saw, for a fleeting moment, a barely visible line, a scar perhaps, wandering beneath his fine dark thigh hair that disappeared too quickly under the desk as he sat down with a manila file that bore my name.

“You're not assigned a roommate.”

And I wondered if he had one with a bed that big and why I didn't, and feared it meant I could be banished from Ridgeston that much easier.

Manicured fingers flipped through the curiously pregnant folder.

“I've assigned you to a single room. Top floor, north end. Number 301. Please sign here for the key.” He pushed a paper across the desk.

“Yes, Mr. Kelly, sir.”

He stood, his torso twisting across the desk in front of me... and closer yet as he reached toward a small brown metal cabinet on the nearby wall. Dare I lean forward? I could. I could let my lips touch the bulge that pushed at the bottom of his tee. My eyes squeezed shut to garrote the animal stirring inside me. My fingers fumbled in my jeans.

He raised his arms full length to stretch, and pointed his face to heaven and unveiled the thin tight white newly fashionable nylon underwear, a bountiful snowball straining to confine his seductively veiled man-flesh imprisoned by the cloth fringed by coal-dark pubic hair—where I paused long and hard to meditate.

He bayed a yawn. A thick smooth penis glans hinted of an uncut cock that nudged the elastic on his groin and sought escape just as a puff of hair had done in a delicate Happy Trail that narrowed at the navel and faded into a soft line undulating through his six ripped abs—where lay another scar. Like Jesus Christ's.

I felt his stare. And ripped mine away.

“I...I can't find my pen.” Embarrassed as hell. I was losing control.

Mr. Kelly tugged his tee, stepped quickly to the other side of the desk and impatiently flipped me one.

“I understand your uncle attended Ridgeston,” Mr. Kelly said flatly, his deep blue eyes drilling holes in my mind, reading my very thoughts.

“Yes sir, he did,” I said with an anxious voice.

“He stayed here in Taylor Hall,” Mr. Kelly said laconically, “This was my dorm too, and, ironically, still is. Our footprints are on the floors of this hall, if you know what I mean. Ridgeston College and the boys Academy have a long, rich tradition. Solid. Steadfast.”

His words worked magic on himself. He leaned over the desk and shared sonorously, “Learn well, so you can chart your life with confidence. Here you'll find the cream of young men, our future leaders. The best there is. There's a lot to live up to. Keep that in mind as you loiter here.”

“Yes sir, I will.”

“For better or worse, this is our dorm.”

His legs, his hips, his chest and face paced slowly back and forth, his whole six-foot plus—I have to know exactly every bit of his dimensions somehow, someway—body, a pendulum that mesmerized me.

“Rules are to be obeyed. You'll get the manual at our dorm meeting at 1900 hours next Wednesday.”

His pecs flexed as he rubbed his hands together. Then he suddenly relaxed. “Meanwhile, there's a list of nearby eateries on the bulletin board downstairs in the Social Room, aka “Wreck Room”, along with everything else you need to know.”

“I...I'm sorry. I forgot today's date.”

“It's Wednesday twenty-eight August, Nineteen-Hundred-Sixty-Eight, Mr. Hamilton.”

After I scrawled as best I could, he lifted the pen from my trembling fingers and boldly signed “Michael Kelly” next to mine and handed me the key. Our fingers touched. My guts tingled yet again. My cock applauded.

“Good luck, Mr. Thomas Hamilton,” he said quietly, his words hissing through his lips like steam from a dying tea kettle. “You're on your own 'til next week. Don't mess with me and I won't mess with you. Understood?”

“Yes. Yes sir,” I said, wondering if I would even see next week.

His face softened, his deep blue-steel eyes warmed for the first time. “I understand you had some problems at home.”

Gut-jabbing words for sure. Was it a good guess by this alien, a world away from the ranch? What did he know? That I had fuck-all for money in my pocket? That I scrounged the airline ticket? That I was a sitting duck to get drafted? Did he know why the fuck I got thrown out of my house? That I'd give my right nut to be here on campus?

“You know where to find me.” His voice was sonorous. But his glance, chill and momentary. There was nothing more to be said.

A drop of cheek-wet spoke for me. In private. With blurred eyes, I stared at my luggage seeing everything, seeing nothing. I was alone in the dorm. Unwelcomed silence would be my companion for the coming week.

I lugged my cherished and irrelevant Western gear up the three flights of stairs in the steamy August heat pondering Mr. Kelly's stern face, condemning eyes, and drill sergeant voice. Kelly was a younger version of the sonofabitch I left behind at the ranch. I'd fucked myself again.

I pulled the letter from my backpack for the umpteenth time: “Please report to the Bursar's Office promptly at 8 a.m. September 4, 1968.” Whoever this money-man is, he wants what I don't have and what my old man refuses me. The fucker wants me screwed. To see my pussy ass in Vietnam. “It'll make a man out of you, girlie-boy.” He prays the heathen communists will kill my heathen ass. There's my fucking future. I could puke.

I threw open the leaded glass casement windows of my stuffy room. The billowing white of pregnant thunderstorms beyond the sun-dappled forest did little to cool the air that rushed against my bare and sweaty chest. I sat on the sill staring at my barren cell, the gray-green plaster walls, the pale terrazzo floor, the well-worn oak dresser and desk, and the thin gray dingy white-striped mattress that barely covered the metal frame.

I'd traded one prison for another. Icy fear filled my chest. In a flash of consciousness, I realized how badly I'd screwed up my young life, my choices, my relationships. Everything. I needed Ridgeston. They didn't need me. I needed a miracle from a god I could no longer believe in.

The sun, the trees, the chirping birds. I stifled the tears as best I could. I slapped my face. I'd waded through shit before and could do it again. It was different shit in a different place, but it was still shit. I reckoned I was the kind of guy who'd always have to carry a shovel in my back pocket. That's the way life is, whether the fuck you like it or not.

I couldn't be the cardinal calling to his mate in the tree outside my window, but I did have my nest here in Taylor Hall as I'd often dreamed. Step one is done, for today. I heaved a sigh, stepped out in the corridor and imagined the dorm full of a hundred other eighteen-year-old guys, making friends, yakking in endless bull sessions, feeling horny. Doing what young guys do.

Comfort sex. That's what I needed now. A healthy rub always cured a funk, and with Mr. Kelly far away on the bottom floor, the gang shower down the hall seemed a most exotic place to pull it off.

I tossed my sweaty jeans and passed my tighty-whities under my nose with a perfunctory whiff of the pungent scent of acrid sweat mixed with the sweetness of semen that had oozed from my overburdened inventory, then caught them, mid-air, and with a second pass beneath my nostrils I closed my eyes and inhaled. And lingered... and thought of him.

My wet-eyed slit stared up at me surrounded by its turtleneck of skin. I cocked my thick branch and let it smack against my abs, and did it again in the reflection of the full length mirror on my closet door. I tugged my foreskin. I was vexed by the sight.

People compliment in all sorts of ways, but they're liars, blind fools. They mostly want something—that something in the mirror. That curse who's painted on the glass.

Six foot with a stretch, taller would be better. Oh yeah, can't forget my butt. I worked my ass off—a lousy saying, not literally true—I've got a damned neat swimmer's ass. Bubble-butt round. And solid, as you'd expect. I grabbed the tape, waist 29 inches, should be 28. Chest 40, inhaled 46, should be better. And the favorite part me, 8 inches by 5, plus a bit. Those are my numbers. That is the whole of me. That is who I am.

I grabbed a towel. I'll be lucky if Ridgeston lasts a week.