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I'm Nobody's Child

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I'm Nobody's Child

*“Oh, why does the wind blow
upon me so wild!
Is it because I’m nobody’s child!”*

PHILA HENRIETTA CASE
Nobody’s Child

I'm Nobody's Child

by

Kenneth J. Herrmann, Jr.

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*This book is dedicated to those children
who have been victims of the system
and their children, whom I pray will not.*

—K.J.H.

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It's difficult to tell the story of the Child Welfare System to the general public. It was particularly difficult to share the story of Kevin Gorski. There were many who helped me through this process.

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K.J.H.

The incidents described here are based on fact. This, however, is a fictionalized account of several actual situations and individuals. All characters, names, agencies and locations are fictitious. The problems are not.

CHAPTER ONE



LOOMING OUT OF THE FOG, the old cottage seemed to weep with the mist of the light shower. Puddles formed a moat which isolated the clapboard, paint-blistered walls from a brown-spotted lawn and a wild field. A grumbling mail carrier trudged past the home. He glared at the hovering, gray clouds.

Spring rains caused a dampness in the home which agitated Betty Gorski. The young mother's patience was as frail as her body. Bob Korb, the boy's father, was not about to help her with Kevin.

"God damnit, Kevin! Eat your cereal!" Betty's temper was fiery, and she was in no mood to tolerate anyone or anything. She mumbled as she washed the dishes, "The bastard can't even eat the way he should."

She paused for a moment and looked at Kevin. He was small for four. He found it difficult to hold the spoon. Kevin was a nervous youngster, and the other children in town laughed at his slowness. He couldn't talk without an effort, and his words were so jumbled that listeners couldn't understand him without great effort. Other children didn't try to understand; they made fun of him. "Kevin's a kook! Kevin's a kook!" They jeered him when he tried to play their games. He stumbled over his clubbed feet when they chased him away. Kevin rarely smiled.

"I wish he'd just do things right." Betty shook her head and continued doing the dishes.

"Done, Mom, done." Kevin apprehensively looked at his mother. "Done, Mom."

She frowned and wiped the milk and cereal from his chin. "Go outside and play. The rain's stopped."

"Me play here." Kevin started to move away.

His mother threw the towel on the table and glared at him. "I told you to go outside. Now, move it!"

The order startled Kevin. His eyes watered, and he stared at his mother. "No, Mom, me play here."

"Damnit, Kevin, do what you're told. Out!" She had no patience with her son. Everything Kevin said or did seemed calculated to upset her. She grabbed his arm and pushed him out the door.

"Me cold, Mom." He looked up at her as she slammed the door. He was alone.

Kevin's blond hair blew slightly in the breeze. He looked next door and saw a few boys playing with toy soldiers. He wanted to play, but he didn't want to be wounded in that war today. The child walked to his private place, his fun world.

Through the field behind his house, Kevin slowly walked, looking for rabbits or squirrels. They often came out after a rain, and he enjoyed chasing them with stones. "Kooky animals. Me get you," he would shout as he'd chase them. They always would get away safely with little effort.

Nearing the woods, Kevin saw the old shed. He walked faster. The small shed had been used for storage at one time, but its rotted wood and disrepair attested to its having been abandoned years ago. Only Kevin used it. He and the shed had much in common.

The boy let his imagination play in this small world. This was his castle. Sticks were his cannons. No one could invade this fortress. Its defenses were impenetrable. At four years of age, Kevin was general, king, and army. He was an adult here. His speech was eloquent. His feet were normal. His strength was great.

"Me good." He fired his cannons at an approaching squirrel. "Bang, Bang." The squirrel looked at the fortress and turned away. "Bang. Bang." It ran for the nearest tree.

Kevin played actively in the shed for the rest of the morning. "Kevin! Kevin!" He heard his mother calling him. The general fired another volley.

"Kevin, get home!" Her shouts each seemed to startle him.

The boy placed the wooden weapon on the floor of his shed, and he left. When he arrived home, his mother loomed in the doorway.

"Get in here, Kevin." Betty slapped him across the face. "I told you to move it. What's wrong with you? Do I have to keep calling you? You come the first time I call. Don't you understand anything?" She held Kevin by his small chin and shouted in his face, "Just because you're an idiot doesn't mean that you can't do as you're told." She pushed him aside. "Wash up for lunch, Kevin. Your father'll be home soon."

Kevin cried quietly as he moved fearfully toward the bathroom. He whimpered, "Bang. Bang."

Betty ignored him. She was busy complaining to herself as she prepared lunch. It was all so routine, so hideously routine.

The door opened slowly, and Bob walked into the kitchen. His expression was sour as he ran his hand through his crew cut. "Can't get a lawyer in this town. They all want one-hundred dollars just to talk with us."

"How much?" Betty was angry. She didn't wait for Bob to respond. "The bastards! Nobody gives a damn about us. We're just crap to them."

"Clean, Mom, clean." Kevin stumbled into the kitchen with his hands outstretched.

"Aw, hell, Betty, can't you shut him up?" Bob threw his cigarette at Kevin.

"What about my father?" Betty asked.

"Want me to call him? That's all we'd need." Bob shook his head in disgust.

Betty grabbed his arm. "You know I didn't mean that. I wonder if he's working with the caseworker. He's always butting in and ruining things." Her grip tightened. "That's it, Bob. I bet he's stirring things up."

"So what? It doesn't take much to know that. He screwed up your life. He's always interfered with us. Now he wants Kevin taken away."

"What if we just moved and didn't tell anybody?"

"Move? You're crazy, Betty. They'd find us sooner or later." He saw Betty look furtively at a picture of her father that she had placed behind a planter on a kitchen shelf. "Running won't help anymore." Korb rubbed his left eye as it began to twitch. He clenched his teeth and rubbed the eye harder with his fingers. "Damn thing," he muttered to himself. This twitching came when he was tense. It had bothered him since his youth.

Bob Korb's grandparents had raised him on their farm after his young mother had abandoned him. He never saw her again. Her parents reluctantly cared for him as best they could. This was the only nervous habit he had not outgrown. He once had suffered from stuttering and a variety of habits which brought a quick-tempered response from his grandfather. Korb had left the farm at sixteen with a feeling of relief and a fond farewell from his caretakers. He never spoke about that part of his life, but his bothersome, twitching eye was a constant reminder.

"Your eye again, Bob?"

"Screw it. It'll go away."

"Clean, Mom, clean." The child held out his hands for inspection.

"Don't you hear us talkin'? Quiet!" His mother pushed him aside. She looked at Bob and said, "What'll we do? The hearing's next Monday."

"I don't know." He paused and added, "Why not just give them the kid?"

Betty shook her head excitedly. "Give them my baby? No, no, he's mine. I can't just give them my baby. No, not Kevin."

Her son seemed to sense that their concern was about him. He pulled on his mother's gray skirt. "Me go?"

Bob looked at Kevin. "He's not worth the trouble, Betty. Let the Welfare take him. Look at him. He's crippled, dumb, and ugly."

"But he's my baby." She pushed Kevin out of her way and sat across from Bob at the kitchen table. "We can't just let them take him." She looked determined. "They can't call us unfit. It ain't true. You know it ain't true."

"They aren't calling us unfit. They're calling you unfit." He paused for a moment, and then added, "I didn't mean that. It's that, well, sometimes I can't take that kid. He's coming between us. It's getting worse the older he gets." Korb moved his hand to her arm. "Listen, it doesn't matter if you're unfit or not. All that matters is that they think you are. Nothing we've tried has changed their minds."

Betty pushed his hand away and nervously began to fold an empty envelope. "That's only because we ain't married. They think that makes us bad parents." She looked at Kevin and felt a twinge of anger. "If it weren't for him, we'd be married by now. You're right. He makes it hard for us. Kid, you're a pain in the ass."

Kevin's eyes filled with tears. He trembled slightly. He had seen that angry look on his mother's face before, countless times before.

Bob spoke matter-of-factly. "Leave him alone. We've got to figure out what to do."

Betty tore the envelope she was folding. She shouted at Kevin, "You rotten thing, all you cause is trouble. Now you've gotten us into a real fix. You won't listen. You won't behave. You're just not like other kids." She screamed, "Drop dead, Kevin!" Betty leapt from her chair, pushed the boy against the cupboard, and flinched at the sting of her hand as she slapped him across his small face. "Drop dead!"

Bob jumped to his feet and grabbed her arm tightly. "Hold it, Betty. Leave him alone. This won't help us any. Leave him alone, I said."

"Don't mess around with me, Bob. You're just like my father." She stood red-faced and shook with rage. Her voice broke as she shouted, "It's always been this way. He put me away when I was a kid because I'd had it with him and the rest of those bastards in my family. Don't start the same crap with me. 'Betty, do this.' 'Betty, don't do that.' Bullshit, Bob. Bullshit!"

Bob replied deliberately, "Hold it, Betty. I'm not trying to tell you what to do. I'm not treating you like some bad kid. I'm telling you how I feel. That's all. It won't help to keep beating on Kevin."

"Why not? He beats on me all the time. He whines, and cries, and he's stubborn and clumsy. You don't know. You're not with him all the time. It sounds crazy, but sometimes he's just like my father, too. He gets to me with his nasty attitude. He really gets to me." She shook her head and tightly gripped Bob's hand. "I, I can't take much more of that kid."

Kevin was screaming. The boy lay on the floor. He was terrified, and his bruised face ached. Betty walked out of the kitchen. Bob followed her. Kevin winced as he rubbed his bruised cheek and stumbled to the kitchen door. Once outside, he headed for his fortress. The boy shouted, "Bang. Bang." He ran awkwardly through the field. Nearing the shack, he slowed his pace. The smudge above his eyebrow contrasted with his light blond hair, which was matted with burrs from the field. Blue eyes darted about as tears trickled down his thin, bruised cheeks and slowly wound their way past his small nose to his trembling lips. Kevin wiped the salty taste with the back of his hand and his nose with the sleeve of his green shirt. He sat alone in the shack. Birds and squirrels wandered by outside unnoticed. The general stared at the rotting wood on the floor.

Martin Freilick had been a social worker for several years. He was still searching for an agency where he could explore new areas of expertise and where he could develop new skills. When he applied for a position at the

Dunhill Home for Children and had been accepted, he was excited.

Freilick was a product of Jewish education. The rabbi would tell him, "Martin, Martin, you have to listen. Listen to what I tell you. You daydream all the time. That won't help you. Open your ears and listen to me. I'm telling you about your fathers. Abraham. Moses. All the others. If you don't listen, you won't learn." He had wondered about the admonitions. They came regularly and frequently in school. He smiled as he remembered his confusion as a child. "I'm telling you about your fathers." The young boy had told his mother, "The rabbi told me I have a whole bunch of fathers." She would shake her head and raise her eyes. "Oh, Martin, flowers are for bunches, not fathers. Is this what I deserve? Go tell your father." She would continue washing dishes as she mumbled to herself. The boy was always too embarrassed to ask his father about the rabbi's comments. He wasn't sure which father to ask.

Freilick was a tall man in a stocky frame. He wore his clothes well and his red hair longer than most of his contemporaries. "His temper matches his fiery hair," his wife would share with friends, "but it takes a heck of a lot for him to show it. It's corny, but he cares too much about his work. I guess I married the dedicated sort."

The social worker had worked as a caseworker for a public agency which dealt with child abuse and neglect problems. There were severe staff shortages in that agency, and Freilick had led public demonstrations protesting these service problems. He was a crusader. Not a Walter Mitty, he chose causes which directly affected his profession. He often felt uncomfortable with this need to lead and questioned whether or not his shouting was altruistic or a craving for publicity. Uncomfortable as he may have been, he continued to speak out.

Jerry Fedele was the executive director at Dunhill Home for Children. He wanted this spirit on his staff. He also knew that Freilick could sometimes be too independent, almost obsessed with a cause. "Better too indepen-

dent than clinging. I don't like little computers. They can't think for themselves. He's no prima donna. He just thinks for himself. Freilick gives a damn. Maybe he wants to prove himself. Who cares? His clients seem to benefit. That's what it should be all about."

Freilick had known Fedele since his days in the public agency. He knew the man's reputation as an administrator with common sense who encouraged his staff to try innovative approaches.

Jerry Fedele was known in social work circles as a man who made things happen. He was direct and effective. When he had gone to Dunhill several years ago, the institution was on shaky financial ground. Its treatment methods were outmoded. He had single-handedly put together a fiscally solvent and dynamic program to treat disturbed children. Perhaps it is not fair to give Fedele total credit. He had handpicked his staff, and he had given them the confidence to suggest and implement program changes.

Fedele energetically ran rather than walked. His short cropped hair was often uncombed, and it wasn't unusual for him to be seen in the same green suit for a week at a time. He was afraid of flying. His wife was a travel agent, and his children loved to travel. He would wish them bon voyage three or four times each year. Then he would rush off to thirty-five year old Beverly Doyle. Doyle was once a business consultant for Dunhill who now sold real estate. She also cared for Fedele when he avoided flying.

Fedele's wife smiled at parties when the staff from Dunhill would talk about his persistent approach to problems and projects. One secretary told Freilick about the director's wife looking at the four Fedele children at one party while another staff member told the woman, "Your husband really produces." "He tries a lot," the wife replied.

Fedele accomplished many of his changes at Dunhill through his personable style. This style was at its best the day he spoke with Freilick in the director's office. "Marty, we've got one hell of a program here, and it's

getting better. The key to me seems to be working with these kids' families. If we can get to them, then the kids will change. I've seen it every place I've worked. It'll be effective here, but it'll take a hell of a lot of effort." He sat back in his chair and looked directly at Freilick. "All I can promise you is support and all the tools you need. We've got the best people available, and we want you to be part of the team. How about it?"

Fedeles enthusiasm was contagious while Freilick sat and listened. He replied to the offer, "When can I start?"

The opportunity to work in a setting like Dunhill was more than Freilick could pass up. They had agreed on pay, benefits, and the other routine items of employment, and the attitude he had felt was that the agency wanted him. He certainly wanted them. This seemed to be a chance to help people rather than spend most of his time fighting bureaucracy, as had been the case at most other places he had been. Here, it appeared, the client came first. That was unusual, and Freilick knew it.

His days during the first two weeks at Dunhill started early. It was a balmy summer, and the humidity was suffocating. Freilick loosened his tie and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. The shirt stuck to his back, and the heat made him edgy. He, however, smiled as he met one person after another. As time passed during the beginning of his employment in the institution, he was further impressed by the caliber of the individuals with whom he would be working. The social worker only hoped he would be able to refine his skills to the level that his new co-workers seemed to have achieved.

Dunhill was an institution for children ranging from eight years to eighteen. They had been sent there by the juvenile or family courts as behavior problems or delinquents. The children had faced various charges, but they all had something in common—their home lives had been fragmented, unhappy, and confusing. Their parents had been just as frightened as the children, but the children had been placed in the institution. The parents had been left alone to deal with a frustrating and destructive

existence. The children were offered help. The parents were left with guilt and shame. Martin Freilick was expected to help these parents through one small agency.

Dunhill was coming of age. It had helped children for generations. In the past, however, when children were ready to leave, the families which had waited for them had not changed at all or their problems had become worse. What frequently awaited the youngsters was a bedlam worse than they originally had left, and they learned at Dunhill that something better existed in life. The result was often more conflict, more frustration, more dissatisfaction, and more problems. The institution had decided that the cycle of placement-release-placement must end and that treatment for the total family would be necessary if this was to happen.

The dining room was hectic. There was laughing and "What rotten food" and "It looks pretty good" from the fifty children who served themselves. Freilick sat at a table admiring the fireplace and the murals on the walls. He drummed his fingers on the table while he wondered if he should begin serving himself.

Jerry Fedele soon joined him. "How's it going, Marty?"

Freilick nervously looked up. "Oh, ok, Jerry. The schedule's pretty tight, but I'm getting a lot of orientation. I'll never remember it all."

Fedele chuckled and whispered, "Don't worry about it. Everybody says that. It's funny, you'll probably say that to everyone who asks you how it's going. It took me weeks to connect all the names with faces. Besides, if they all had faces like mine, they wouldn't want anybody to know their names."

Freilick laughed. "That's for sure."

"You're rotten, Freilick. You'll fit in well here." The director saw that most of the children were eating. "Ok, we can help ourselves now." He took his plate and went to the serving line.

Freilick was relieved. He was not quite sure whether he should wait until the children had been served or not. Even though it was his second week, the routines were still puzzling.

"Chicken and rice is pretty good here." Fedele ate quickly. "I've got an appointment in a few minutes. I'll eat now and taste later."

The rest of the staff slowly joined Freilick at the table set aside for them. After lunch, he saw that a meeting with Hirsch Baum was next on his agenda.

Baum was to be Freilick's supervisor. He had been an impetuous child of Jewish parents in New York City. As he grew, he became more thoughtful. His early school work was troublesome. His father demanded better scholarship, and in college Baum carried excellent grades. It was always with regret that he recalled his father's death a few weeks before graduation. The man would have been proud.

Baum married an Irish Catholic after graduate school and took the first social work opportunity that came along. He had remained at Dunhill. He wondered sometimes if it was because he liked the institution or needed to feed his six children. He settled on both reasons.

Baum was overweight, gregarious, henpecked at home, and subservient at work. He, however, was a good clinician and lower-level administrator.

He spoke of Dunhill as more of a home for himself than just a place of employment. Although he knew that he had reached the end of the line in promotions, he was comfortable with his niche in life.

Baum listened to Fedele a few weeks before meeting Freilick. The supervisor had mixed feelings. He knew he needed the help. He also realized that this new staff member would have skills they could share. He, however, wondered about the reputation Freilick had as being independent. Baum had a personal as well as a professional concern not only for the institution but also for each family and child it served. He wanted to know what every staff person was doing with each child. He was not a person who could disguise his feelings. "Watch him. If he frowns, he's worried about what you're doing with one of his kids. Forget his words. Look at his face." While his feelings about Freilick were mixed, he trusted in Fedele's decisions.

When Freilick arrived for their meeting, Baum listened as the new family therapist described his positive impressions of Dunhill and its staff. Baum found himself modifying his negative feelings about this newcomer.

"You've seen most of what we have to offer. Sounds like you're about ready to receive a few cases."

Freilick sighed, "Glad to hear that." While he had been favorably impressed with Dunhill, he had also been impressed with the need for the services he had been hired to perform. He felt that the humane, concerned, and often effective treatment here had a scope which had been too narrow and traditional. This in spite of Fedele's efforts. Freilick believed in family treatment, and he was anxious to prove its worth.

"I'm assigning you all the families of the boys in Maxwell Division. They'll be one hell of a challenge, eh?"

Freilick had to agree, and he was enthusiastic. "I've seen part of Maxwell during the orientation. Those boys have been around. I've heard the staff there is pretty good with them." He filled his pipe and added, "I understand that not all of those kids are delinquents. Aren't some holdovers from the old program?"

Baum shook his head. "No, only one boy's been here that long. I think all the others were sent by the courts. Let's see." He looked closely at a list of the children in Maxwell. Recently having given up cigarette smoking, he had replaced this habit with chewing on toothpicks. Baum took a toothpick from his mouth, and said, "Right. Only one boy there wasn't a delinquent, but he's had some severe behavior problems."

Maxwell Division was the older boys' unit at Dunhill. The twelve boys in Maxwell were between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. Some of the boys had been there for several years. This was the exception in this institution because Dunhill had undergone a change in its mission five years before Freilick had arrived. It had changed from an institution accepting children who were orphaned and homeless to a facility whose purpose was to treat the delinquent and the ungovernable. Few of the

children remained from the old program. They had no homes to which they could return, and Dunhill continued to care for them. They, however, were rapidly being discharged to foster homes, or they were leaving because of their age to begin a life on their own.

Baum sounded tired from the long hours he had been working. "There are a few boys you'll want to concentrate on, but don't look at any of these cases as routine." He pointed emphatically with his pencil. "Each case needs your immediate attention." He elaborated on the history of each child and the role families had played in the events which led to placement.

Baum sighed deeply as he looked at the list of children. His face showed the strain of his work. "Andy Ingram hadn't been able to sleep without a nightmare in three weeks until his social worker had begun to help him work through his hostile feelings towards his parents. They have a pretty rotten marriage, and that kid has been scapegoated for years. Last weekend they visited him here, and his father got angry and slapped him. Set the kid back at least three or four months." His brow furrowed. "Jimmy Stern's mother has been beating the hell out of him since he was born. She's drunk most of the time, but she denies having any problems. This is really one hell of a job, Marty. Every one of those boys down there could probably make it if we could get to their parents."

"That's why I'm here." Freilick liked the challenge Baum was presenting him.

Baum looked serious. "Don't lose that spirit. Remember that it's not just the kids who are hurting. Those families live with a lot of pain, too. You'll have twelve to work with." He smiled slightly, and added, "It should take all week to solve their problems."

Freilick laughed. "All week? Sounds like a week of years."

"That's more like the truth, I'm afraid. Well, you might as well get started. The best place to start is with Jim Wolf. He's a child care worker there, and he'll show

you around. Jim is pretty close to most of the kids, and he'll fill you in with more specifics."

Freilick was both excited and nervous. He hoped that he would have the ability to make some inroads into solving the family problems he had heard described.

The goal at Dunhill was to send these children home. They had been thieves, truants, and ungovernable children. They had been lied to, abused, and neglected. Their anomalous behavior logically reflected the care their parents had given them. What had started as tears had become hardened attitudes toward life; yet, some still cried at night. There were little children behind facades of anger and belligerence.

Walking down the hall toward Maxwell, Freilick noticed Phillip Daniels, a boy he had met the day before. Phil was a nine year old who was in the younger boy's division. He had severe temper tantrums before his admission to Dunhill one year earlier. Prior to placement there, psychiatric out-patient care had been completely ineffective. Since coming to Dunhill, his behavior had been gradually improving. There were occasional tantrums, however, tantrums so severe that child care workers would have to place him on the floor, sit on him, and wait for him to tire enough to talk with the worker. It seemed the only safe method of controlling him.

He was sitting, leaning against the wall, outside of Brian Webb's office. Webb was the social worker who worked directly with the boys in Maxwell and supervised the child care workers there. He and Freilick would work closely together.

"Phil, what are you doing here? Shouldn't you be in your division?"

He looked angry and sullen. "I wants to see Mr. Webb, and I'm gonna."

"You have another social worker who helps you. Shouldn't you see him?" Freilick knelt on the floor next to the boy.

"He stinks!" spat Phil. He turned and looked at the wall.

"What do you mean, Phil?" He put his hand on the boy's shoulder, but Phil quickly pushed it away.

Phil shouted, "What I said. He stinks, and I don't like him."

"You're not very happy right now. I bet he'd like to help you."

"He don't want to help me. He don't like me."

"How about giving him a chance? I bet he doesn't know you're up here."

"He sure don't." The boy was quiet for a moment, and Freilick stood as if to leave. Phil looked at him and snapped, "You ain't gonna make me go downstairs!"

"No, I'm not. You'll make that decision. If you want to feel better, you'll go downstairs. It'll get pretty boring sitting here." Freilick walked down the hall. He smiled as he heard Phil running back to his division.

Jim Wolf was in his mid-twenties. He had left his drunken parents' home to confront life on his own at seventeen. Confront he did. He fought with the Marines, college, and several employers. Finally, he applied to Dunhill. "I'd like to help troubled kids." He was accepted, and he became one of the more dedicated workers in the institution. Wolf had a natural talent to relate effectively with the children. He, however, possessed them as if they belonged to him. They filled a void in his life, and he in theirs. He had been a child care worker at Dunhill for three years. "There won't be much that you can do for a few of these guys. Did you read their records?" He smoothed his black beard with one hand.

"Sure, I've read them all, but I didn't find any hopeless kids." He filled his pipe and looked for an ash tray for his match.

Wolf pointed at an ash tray on a table in the corner of the room. He smiled. "I think you should have read a little more carefully. I've been in this business for a few years, and there are some problems you can't do anything about."

Freilick bristled slightly over what seemed a condescending attitude on Wolf's part. He controlled the urge

to compare qualifications, and he could feel his face flush. Freilick snapped, "It took several years for you to learn that lesson? Why so long?"

Wolf smiled slightly and nodded as he held up his hands. "Touché."

"Sorry, Jim, you can go on with the lecture." Freilick realized that the child care worker was protecting what he saw as his territory from a family therapist he saw as an intruder. Freilick also realized that he would have to choose his words more carefully.

Wolf sounded apologetic. "Sometimes the social workers try to pull rank. Not so much here, but it happens. Brian Webb is pretty good. He knows his stuff, but I don't think that anyone but a child care worker can tell another child care worker how to do his job. We're with the kids twenty-four hours a day, and, well . . . enough of this. You're right, I'm lecturing." He turned away. "Let me show you around the rest of the division."

This was another lesson for Freilick at Dunhill. It was like all institutions and organizations in many ways. There was an unwritten pecking order with an unofficial authority. He had reacted to threatened insecurity with the same. There was a need to prove his program worthwhile, but he would have to curb his impatience if he was to be accepted by the staff.

Dunhill Home for Children was an old facility. Its buildings were once the summer estate for an affluent family more than 150 years before Freilick had arrived to work there. For nearly 100 of those years, it had housed the children of Dunhill, the unwanted children. It had provided safe haven, reform, and love for children unable to live outside its eighty acres of orchard and lawn. Orphans were its first children. Now it housed what were called "orphans of the living."

Wolf was clearly proud as he conducted this part of Freilick's orientation. The unit was homelike and warm. Its furnishings were not at all institutional, and the atmosphere was comfortable.

"It's old, but it's not aluminum and glass. Kids don't

live in those fancy boxes, at least not the kids we get. Some of the places they build are more for the visitors than the kids. Here they sit in old stuffed chairs in rooms with throw rugs and a little clutter. No mess, but a lived-in look. That's what we have in Maxwell. It's a home, not a reformatory. No locked doors or screened-in windows here." Wolf beamed. "Well, what do you think?"

"Great! I'm impressed." There was a sense of comfort and informality in the division which the social worker liked, but he could still sense a certain aloofness and defensiveness from this child care worker.

"The kids are in school, but they'll be back in a few minutes." Wolf looked toward a small cottage which served as a school building. "They're starting to come back now."

Twelve lively, playing boys actively made their way back to Maxwell. They were not unruly, and the child care worker who accompanied them had no need to shout. She smiled approvingly at the schoolwork a few excited boys handed her.

Dunhill was noisy, but the noises were healthy. Children listening to television, playing games, vacuuming carpets, taking piano or guitar lessons, washing windows, and working on homework assignments all combined to produce a happy clamor. The noise seemed healthy. Fifty children under one roof resulted in an activity mixed with work and play. At first, Freilick had found this distracting. After a few weeks, he had realized that without noise children would not be children. They would be quiet, little robots never misbehaving, never learning, and never growing. This was one of the little things he realized he would have to get used to at Dunhill. It amazed him, at first, how the staff in the living units could control and encourage the innumerable activities in which children were engaged. The child care workers were a special kind of people. Amid all the commotion, noise, and activity, they could individually guide several disturbed children through a controlled and supportive program by assisting in the development of

inner controls and self-understanding for each child.

As the boys returned, the division filled with purposeful activity. Freilick noticed that one of the boys walked alone behind the others. He was tall and lanky. His light brown hair was disheveled as it blew in the breeze.

"Jim, who is the youngster walking alone? Looks sad." Freilick knocked out his pipe in the ash tray and straightened his glasses.

Wolf shook his head and smiled. "Nice kid. He's come a long way in the six years he's been here. You should've seen him three years ago when I first came. He was a mess. I can imagine what he was like when he first came."

"Six years? He came here before the present program, then."

"Yeh, he couldn't make it in foster care, and nobody could find his parents. His county caseworker placed him here. No other place would take him. That kid's got a special place in our hearts. He was about nine years old when he arrived. Couldn't read or write. He had all kinds of problems. You name it, and he had it." Wolf paused and smiled. "Yeh, he's come a long way."

The boy's forlorn look disturbed the social worker. "He looks so lonely, and he seems to be avoiding the other boys."

"That's today," said Wolf. "The other kids just returned from their Fourth of July holiday visits to relatives, and he doesn't have anyone outside Dunhill. He'll feel better later in the week when the other kids talk about something other than their visits." The worker paused, and then, "I have to supervise the boys. They have chores to do. I'll catch you later, Mr. Freilick." He began to leave.

"One thing, Jim. What's his name?"

"Kevin. Kevin Gorski." Wolf rushed outside to meet the active boys.

Kevin smiled as he saw Wolf approaching. That boy, thought Freilick, would present a challenge. He wondered if he could help him.

After six years in any institution, a child became insti-

tutionalized. He thought and behaved in only institutional terms. The real world outside its safe walls became frightening and strange. Rather than looking forward to leaving, the child feared moving out of the womb of the institution. This was especially true for a child like Kevin Gorski. Six years earlier his behavior had been radically different. Freilick thought about what a challenge he would be for family treatment if only he had a family. Those who worked with him during his first few years at Dunhill were confronted with a different type of challenge.

Kevin sat in the corner of the recreation room looking at another boy who worked on school assignments. Kevin had been in Dunhill for several months. Getting used to routines had been difficult. As he sat in the corner, he could feel an emptiness, an all-encompassing hollowness. There was a ringing in his ears. The noise of the busyness in the room seemed to him to echo. The child opened his mouth and stammered, "I, I can . . . can't, I can't." He flushed and began to shake. "I can't. I no. I . . ." His eyes darted about anxiously. Biting his lip and clenching his fists, Kevin felt as if his controls were being painfully pulled from him. He desperately wanted to do his assignment, but something inside was taking over, was blocking him, was about to explode within him. Perspiration formed on his forehead. Through clenched teeth, he seemed to spit out, "Help me. Not do. No want."

A child care worker glanced at Kevin and quickly realized that the boy was about to lose control. She asked the child she was helping to leave the room. The others followed, and she rushed to Kevin.

As he saw her approaching, a torrent of rage was released. Kevin screamed, "Fuck you! No! No! Leave me alone! Bastard!" The boy jumped to his feet and charged at the young woman who wanted to help him. He felt like someone or something was in control of his body. His fists were flying in the air, and obscenities poured from his mouth.

The worker side-stepped the child and grabbed him

around the waist, momentarily lifting him from the floor. She firmly and loudly said, "Kevin, stop this. Stop this right now."

The youngster screamed with rage as his arms and legs flailed in the air. "Let me out of this place, you bitch!"

The worker felt sharp pain between her shoulder blades as Kevin's foot landed sharply. She maneuvered him quickly to a couch, threw him cautiously facedown, and sat on him. "Take it easy, Kevin. No one will hurt you. It's going to be all right. I know you don't want to do this. Calm down. You'll just have to stop this." She repeated these things over and over again with firmness and clear empathy. He continued to shout. The worker could feel her heart pounding, but she held him firmly. Her own hands were shaking as she held the boy in such a way that neither she nor he would get hurt.

After several minutes, Kevin was quiet as he breathed heavily and quickly. He was flushed, and tears covered his little, angry face. The woman asked him quietly as she gently brushed his tossed hair from his face with her hand, "Kevin, can I get off you now?"

Exhausted and confused, Kevin mumbled, "Uh, huh."

She moved slowly from the couch and knelt on the floor next to him. Using a handkerchief, she wiped away his tears. She put her arm around him and spoke softly, "It's all right, Kevin. Things can seem pretty terrible sometimes. It'll be all right." She stroked his hair and smiled at him.

Kevin hid in the cushions. The worker listened to his muffled shouts. "I hate me. I hate me."

"You hate doing this, Kevin," she said.

"I hate me," he shouted but with less conviction. After several minutes of silence, Kevin took a deep breath. He looked at the woman who was still kneeling next to him. The boy rolled over on his back and took her hand. "You hate me, too?"

She looked at his wet, questioning eyes and answered, "No, Kevin, of course not. No one hates you here. We love you very much." She kissed him on his forehead.

Kevin returned her smile and sat up. The worker asked him if he was able to go back to his schoolwork and added, "We'll have a snack when you're finished. Ok?"

Kevin nodded and slowly returned to his table still shaken from the outburst. He blew his nose and began again with his assignment. The youngster felt weak and drained. The scary feeling had gone away, and he was able to complete his work. The child care worker went over the finished assignment with him and helped him to make several corrections. Kevin smiled as she humorously pointed out his errors.

He looked concerned as he asked her, "Better?"

She hugged him and answered, "Much better, Kevin. Things will get better and better. Just watch and see. We'll all work together to make them that way." She stroked his hair and wondered at the frustration and fear that seemed always a part of Kevin. She thought, "God, it must have been horrible for him before he came here." She wiped a tear from her eye with her free hand. She said softly, "We'll keep working together because we love you."

When Kevin was still at home, his parents waited in Family Court for the trial in the child neglect complaint. Betty and Bob sat together in the corner of the waiting room as they watched arguing couples leave the courtroom, juveniles led off to holding rooms, and parents crying as they talked to attorneys and social workers.

Betty's black hair was now tied back with a piece of red yarn, and she nervously smoked one cigarette after another. "Why the hell did we come? We shouldn't have come down here."

"What are you talking about? You know we had to come. We were served with a summons." Bob sounded impatient with his common-law wife. He smoothed his blue sweater and straightened his plaid tie.

"But this whole thing stinks. We didn't do nothing. That petition's just a pack of lies. That damn Welfare should mind its own business." She took one cigarette

from her mouth and lit another. "These cigarettes stink." Her voice quavered.

Betty looked in the corner of the room and spotted an elderly, disheveled man wearing a worn, brown felt hat and smoking a cheap cigar. He noticed her stare and tipped his hat. She shuddered. "Bob, it's my father. He's here. He came for the hearing."

Bob looked straight ahead. "I know. I saw him before. Ignore him, Betty. Pretend he's not here."

She held Bob's sleeve. "What? How can I do that? He's probably why we're here. I can't. I'm scared, scared more than ever."

"What do you want to do? Go over there and yell at him? He's not like Kevin, you know. He'll yell back, and we'll be in more trouble."

Her hand trembled, and she flushed. "He's getting to me, Bob. He's sitting over there staring at us. I can't take it."

Bob looked at him out of the corner of his eye. He stood and looked sternly at the glowering grandfather. As he began to move toward Betty's father, Mr. Gorski quickly looked away, stood, and hurried from the room as he headed toward the elevator.

Bob sat back in his chair with a smile of satisfaction. "That's that," he said to Betty.

"Thanks, Bob. I couldn't stand it much longer." She took a deep breath and held his hand in her own.

He looked toward the door. "There's that Rogers bastard." Betty replied with an obscenity.

Norman Rogers was a caseworker for Seton County Department of Child Welfare. He was untrained and tired. He seemed hardened by years of exposure to child abuse and neglect, never being sure if he was helping. At one time, in spite of his lack of training, he had approached these child caring problems as a challenge. Those days had passed long ago. His approach now was to find the most expedient method of handling a case. Dressed in a conservative and ill-fitting sport coat and tie, his short hair and briefcase gave the appearance of a middle-aged salesman rather than a caseworker.

"Mr. Korb and Miss Gorski, may I speak with the two of you?" He sounded like this was all so routine and boring for him. It was true that his case had become overwhelming and commonplace.

"Sure, what do you want?" Bob's brusqueness was defensive. He feared the caseworker.

Rogers shook his head. "No, not here. We'll talk out there." He pointed to the hallway outside the waiting room.

Betty and Bob squeezed past the crowd who were waiting their turn before the judge, and they followed Rogers into the hallway.

The caseworker avoided looking at his clients as he spoke. "This is only the first hearing today. The entire process could take us several months."

Betty nervously looked at Bob. "It'll cost you your job if you have to keep taking off."

Bob shook his head. He said quickly, "I won't have to take more time off. You're the only one who has to be here."

The caseworker held up his hand. "Wait a minute, both of you." He looked at Betty. "Do you have an attorney?"

Bob answered for her. "No, you said she wouldn't need one."

Rogers nodded and looked satisfied. "That's right. There's really no need for you to have an attorney in this court. You'll save money and time without one. Besides, this is a very informal proceeding. Betty, we're saying to the judge that you didn't give Kevin adequate medical care and adequate supervision. We're also saying that the boy was excessively punished by being thrown, slapped, and struck about his body over a period of time. There's more, but you have a copy of the petition. The point is, all we're really saying is that Kevin needs to be in foster care."

Betty interrupted, "Lies, all lies. We didn't do nothing. Who gave you that stuff? My father?" She shook with anger.

Rogers had seen this same reaction countless times

before. He sighed and began to chew a stick of gum. He offered one to Betty and Bob and said, "Look, you find it difficult to control Kevin. Right?"

"Betty does everything she can. She goes nuts trying to take care of him. Me, too. He's a problem kid. Nothing works on him." Bob put his arm around her as if to protect her.

Rogers nodded. "I understand. That's really why we're here, when you get down to it. Kevin needs care neither of you can give him. We're not saying that you're bad parents, only that Kevin needs special care. Understand?" He continued before they could respond. "If you plead guilty to this petition, all you are saying is that Kevin's behavior is such that he needs help. If you plead innocent, the judge will probably adjourn for trial, and then he'll find you guilty on the evidence we have. You know he will. He might even refer the case to the D.A. Do you know what that means?" He cleared his throat and, again, didn't wait for an answer. "It means that Betty, and maybe both of you, could go to jail. I like you both too much to let that happen. I've seen the judge do it before in cases like this. Remember that pleading guilty doesn't really mean that you did anything wrong, not in these cases in this court. Don't forget that. It really means that you want Kevin to have the best care available for his problems, and only good parents would want that for their son. I think you're both good enough parents to see that." Rogers looked away and waved at a court deputy who passed them in the hall. He casually remarked to them that the deputy was assigned to the judge who would be hearing their case. He elaborated with a smile, "I've known the judge and his staff for several years. They're tough but pretty good people." He told them that he would give them a few minutes to think over what he had said. Rogers walked down the hall to the deputy.

Betty looked frightened. "Bob, what should we do?"

"I don't know. I really don't." He leaned against the wall and stared at the floor.

There was a silence between them. The deputy and the

caseworker could be heard loudly laughing over the noise from the waiting room as they stood down the hall chatting.

The two county employees shook hands and parted. Rogers returned to the confused and frightened parents whom he was assigned to help. They looked apprehensively at him as he approached.

Bob spoke first. "What should we do? We only want to do what's best for Kevin." He looked pleadingly at the caseworker, the man whom he both hated and feared, the man who seemed to control their fate.

Betty began to cry. She glanced at Bob as he handed her his handkerchief. "Mr. Rogers, we tried. We really tried. We don't want to lose Kevin."

Looking at her, Rogers replied, "Just go along with the petition. That will save you time, will get this painful experience over with, and will be best for Kevin and the two of you. It's that simple. It really is." He paused and added, "Why don't you talk about it for a minute or two more? The judge should be ready for us by then. At least, I hope he will. I've got other cases to take care of today, and I'm sure you have other things to do, too." He turned and walked back to the waiting room.

The parents' bravado was gone. They looked at each other, and their sense of failure was almost tangible. They felt as if they were at the mercy of a ruthless, powerful, and unfeeling force which seemed to stand in the way of any choice of action other than that which Rogers had presented them.

Betty whispered as much to herself as to Bob, "We have no choice."

Bob nodded sadly. "No, no choice at all." After a moment, "I wonder if we ever had a choice. I wonder if things could've been different. I don't know. I don't know anything anymore."

They heard the deputy call, "Gorski! Anyone here for Gorski, the judge is ready for you." Rogers and the deputy followed the parents into the closed courtroom. The door shut behind them.

Returning home after a day of work, Norman Rogers

was exhausted. He had lived alone for the past month since his wife had left him. She had taken their children and bank books and had moved out without telling him. Rogers had not recovered from the shock. His work was bothering him more than usual lately. The whole issue of what to do with Kevin Gorski had upset him for weeks. His own problems kept getting in the way when he worked with clients lately. He had lost his temper more than once with Betty Gorski and Bob Korb. He had placed the boy in foster care today after the court hearing. He had mixed and conflicting feelings which disturbed him. The caseworker knew that the boy was not going to die while in his parents' care, but the emotional situation at home was untenable. As Roger's own life became more unbearable, the less he cared about Kevin and his parents. He just wanted to dispose of the case as quickly as possible.

Rogers debated the issue with his conscience as he took a bottle of bourbon from the kitchen cupboard. Pushing aside a pile of dirty dishes, he filled a glass with the whiskey. Rogers had been drinking too much lately, but it didn't seem to matter anymore. He sat in the kitchen thinking about the crying boy he had placed in the foster home earlier in the day, and he drank. He also thought of his wife and children. It had all been building lately, all the personal problems, all the cases, all the petty differences at work, and all the pressures of life.

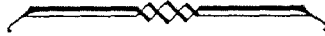
He looked older than a man in his late thirties. His ten years as a caseworker had contributed to his torturous route of ulcers, insomnia, and hypertension. There had been times when he had wanted to leave his job, but civil service security was difficult to leave. He felt that he knew what he was doing as a caseworker, but there always seemed to be situations which were puzzling and problems he did not understand at all. At this point in his career, he admitted that he no longer felt as if he was helping people.

Kevin's screams echoed through his mind as he took off his shoes and fell back in his chair. Rogers looked into

his glass and mumbled, "You'll be better off away from them, kid. You and the thousands like you'll be better off." He took another drink and added, "It doesn't matter anyway. Have your temper tantrum. I'm too tired to have one. Hell, the world's too tired to have a temper tantrum." He could see Kevin kicking and trying to get away as they left the parents' home in the afternoon. His chest muscles tightened. There was a sharp pain in his stomach, and he winced as he quickly finished his drink. Pouring another, he thought of his own family. "The hell with them, the kids, the cases, all of them."

Rogers placed his glass on the table without finishing his drink and walked to the bedroom. He took off his tie. The sharp pain in his stomach made him flinch, and he dropped the tie on the floor. His arms and legs felt heavy, and he moved clumsily. It was cumbersome to undress. He sat on the bed and looked at the antique bedstand next to him. Rogers pulled open a drawer and stared at the polished pistol. "She bitched for weeks until I bought this." His wife had wanted the weapon for protection. He used the gun in an efficient manner.

CHAPTER TWO



"BRIAN, I STARTED THREE MONTHS AGO, and things are beginning to move with most of the families. Progress is slow, but I can see it." Freilick folded his hands and sat back with a smile.

Brian Webb was the social worker in charge of the children's treatment in Maxwell Division. His duties included child care supervision, therapy for the boys, and overall coordination of services within the division. He and Freilick worked as a team, coordinating and delivering therapy to child and family. While the family therapist primarily dealt with families, Webb's responsibility was for the boys in residence. Good communication between the two was a necessity if a solid treatment approach was to be provided.

Webb was in his middle forties. He had become a social worker more than a year before Freilick had begun to work at Dunhill. His new career had begun shortly after he had operated a family business for several years. Webb had told Freilick that this business had involved working with machines. He had wanted to work with people. During those years, he had volunteered his services to a few social agencies. He had found this more rewarding than his own business. In his search for self-fulfillment, he had left his career in business, had entered and completed graduate social work education, and had come to Dunhill to begin a new career. He had found what he

wanted in this institution, and Dunhill had profited as much as he by his choice to change careers. His work here had become an obsession, and he often spent twelve to sixteen hours a day at his desk or in Maxwell. This schedule had begun to take its toll. The problem was aggravated by chain smoking and habitual coffee drinking, but his dedication was admired. The boys in Maxwell idolized him. His work had become his life.

"Marty, some of these kids are beginning to grow for the first time. I think it's because of what's happening with their families. I feel good about the program, but. . ." He hesitated, and his words came slowly. Webb seemed in deep thought as he paused and slowly sipped his coffee.

Freilick looked puzzled as he lit his pipe. "Are you worried about something?"

Webb borrowed the match and lit a cigarette. He said, "Kevin Gorski came to me this morning." He blew out the match and dropped it into a wastebasket next to the desk. "He's the only boy not covered by family treatment."

"I know. Probably because he's the only one without a family."

"Bullshit, Marty. He's got a family."

Kevin had never been referred for family treatment. Freilick had been told that the youngster had been deserted by his parents at four years of age after having been neglected and abused. Webb's statement intrigued him.

"I thought Kevin had been abandoned."

"Sure. That's what the record shows. It's probably true, but he's no orphan. A year ago Kevin had to have an operation to correct an orthopedic problem with his feet. We needed a consent from his legal guardian. The county that placed him here sent us a consent signed by his mother. It seems that she's been around but never involved."

"Does Kevin know about her?"

"No, no, I mean, he's never talked about her." He

looked pensive. "I know he has a right to know that she's alive." Webb walked to the window. "All these years. I've heard what he was like when he came here. I wonder if it would destroy him to start all over again with a mother who made him that way."

"I wonder what Kevin thinks about that."

Webb leaned on the windowsill. "That's why he came to see me. Marty, the kid wants to know what happened to his parents. It tears me apart even to look at him. The staff's seen him develop into one of the nicest kids here. In this business, it's difficult to let go of successes; there aren't that many."

"What did you tell him?"

"That I'd have to talk with you before we could discuss his family."

"Copped out?"

"Yeh, I did. I'm not sure why, and it bothers me. But there's more. I told him we didn't have any information about them." He sat down slowly behind his desk.

"Do we know anything about his parents?"

"Only what's in the record. We don't know where they are now." Webb wiped the sweat from his hands on his pants. "Somebody told me that you can't help clammy hands when you're nervous."

"Brian, Kevin's county caseworker should have information on his parents if she was contacted for a surgical consent." The knowledge that at least the mother was alive and possibly locatable struck a chord with Freilick. Kevin had a right to a family. Even if he might never return to them, he had a right to a choice. This could not be made without some knowledge of them. "I wonder if his mother has any knowledge of what's happened to him over the years."

"Who knows? I wonder about something else. Why didn't she try to see Kevin? At least she could have made some inquiry."

"How do we know she didn't or couldn't? We don't know anything about her."

"Come on, Marty. It's been about eleven years. Right?"

"Just about."

"Where was she when her son was having trouble in foster care. Where's she been since he's been here?"

It was an older home on a hill with other homes crowding its gray-shingled anonymity. Years of disregard had caused a darkened pall over the slum neighborhood which accented the drab existence not only of the buildings but also of those who existed in them.

Betty drank coffee as she read the letter. She nervously toyed with a spoon.

"You've read that damn letter a thousand times, Betty. Read it a thousand times more, and it won't change anything. We've got to call Seton County." Bob's impatience grew as his wife seemed to ignore him. He said loudly, "Can't you get it into your head that we've got to call them?"

She didn't listen. Betty was absorbed in the letter. When it had arrived that morning, the words "Seton County Department of Child Welfare" screamed at her from the stationery. She shivered with a feeling of cold fear. The letter was brief and businesslike.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Korb:

We have been notified by Dunhill Home for Children that your son, Kevin Gorski, is in need of a minor operation to correct an orthopedic problem.

Please sign the enclosed consent form and return to us immediately. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jean Wilde,
Caseworker

"Your son . . ." Betty paled. She shivered. "Your son . . ." She wept.

"Betty, will you listen to me?"

She looked lost as she looked at the page. "Bob, eleven years. It's been eleven long years. 'Your son, Kevin Gorski, is in . . .'"

Bob interrupted her. "Betty, I know what it says, but you've got to listen to me." He reached across the table and took her hand in his. "Betty, look at me."

She stared through her tears at the man with whom she had gone through so much. They had married a year after Kevin had been taken from them. The secret of Kevin had bonded them together. "Bob, I just can't sign this without knowing what's going on, without knowing how Kevin is. I can't. Oh my God, he's still ours. It says right here, 'Your son.'"

"Betty, that's what I've been trying to tell you. We have to call Seton County."

"I know, but I'm scared. I want to know, but I'm scared."

Kevin kicked and screamed as Rogers carried the little boy to the car. Betty clung to Bob. "Please stop him. Please, please!"

"I can't. He's got a court order. We can't stop him, Betty."

Kevin shouted, cried, and kicked. The terrified child was being taken from the rejection and unhappiness he had known to something and someplace he couldn't understand. If what he had known was so terrible, he felt that the unknown must be worse.

"Calm down, kid." Rogers was in a hurry to place Kevin in foster care. He wanted to finish the unpleasant task, and he had a meeting to attend at his agency.

The letter had brought back memories. Betty remembered the haunting screams of her son as the caseworker drove away. She remembered the ensuing sleepless nights. Betty never saw her son again.

"Will you listen? What's past is past. Now we have an idea of where he is, some place called Dunhill Home for Children. Now we have to find out what we can do."

Betty blew her nose and wiped away her tears. Clearing her throat, she sounded more in control of herself. She said, "Bob, he's ours. I don't care what they say. They took him away years ago, but he's still our son. We got a right to find out what happened to him." She sounded

desperate, but she also sounded determined. "You're right. We've got to call them." She added with less conviction, "But I'm really scared."

As Jean Wilde waited for the Korbs, she glanced through Kevin's record. Kevin had been a case, a statistic, to her for several years. She had ignored the boy without guilt. He had been one of the many paper-children in the agency. Someone else had been caring for him. Seton County retained legal custody and paid the bills. That was all. Kevin had been a name on a case file to Wilde, not a person with flesh and blood.

She allowed herself some nostalgia, and she reflected on Kevin's first caseworker. Norman Rogers had been a friend; well, as much a friend as those in the agency allowed themselves to be with each other. She thought, "Strange how the news of his suicide didn't really bother me. I didn't feel a thing. Curious, I suppose."

They had not been back to Seton County since they had moved shortly after Kevin had been placed in foster care. Sitting in the waiting room brought back the feelings of fear and intimidation they had experienced during their meetings with Rogers before Kevin had been taken from them.

"Mr. and Mrs. Korb, I'm Jean Wilde." The caseworker was in her early fifties. She wore no makeup, and her housedress was slightly wrinkled. "I'm sorry you had to wait so long, but as you can see we're very busy today."

Bob replied, "We understand. Mr. Rogers was always busy, too."

"Mr. Rogers? Oh yes, he was the caseworker for Kevin when the child was first placed in our care. Let's not talk about these things out here. Why don't we go to my office? Follow me, please."

They walked through a door marked DO NOT ENTER and down a corridor with posterred walls. The dusty posters displayed smiling children, alone and in family groups. Each had a message encouraging the reader to smile and to appreciate what he had been given in life.

They entered Wilde's office, and Betty noticed a white plaque on the wall with red letters gaily proclaiming EVERYONE NEEDS A LITTLE LOVE NOW AND THEN.

The agency seemed to be filled with observable contradictions. Amid all the encouraging decorations, few people smiled. They rushed about, bumping into each other with no apology. The visitor might notice a pervasive lack of warmth, a cold efficiency. The Korbs had returned to the Seton County's Department of Child Welfare of many years ago. It all seemed unchanged.

"Mr. and Mrs. Korb, I'm very pleased that you've come in to see me, but it really wasn't necessary. You drove all the way here when you could have mailed in the consent form. How long a ride was it?"

Betty was on edge, and she answered quickly, "Just a little more than a hundred miles." She coughed and added hesitantly, "We'd like to talk about Kevin."

"Don't you worry about a thing, Mrs. Korb. The boy is just fine. He has to have some corrective surgery for his feet, but it's nothing dangerous, just routine." The phone rang, and Wilde told the caller that she would return the call in a few minutes.

"Mrs. Wilde, we know you're busy, but Betty and me, we'd like to find out about Kevin." Bob sounded irritated.

The caseworker calmly opened the thick file she had on her desk. "Let me see here."

Betty said, "We'd really appreciate . . ."

"Just a second," interrupted Wilde. "Let me see here." She glanced through the file. "It's been a very long time since we've heard from either of you. In fact, the last contact dictated in the record indicates that you were last seen nine or ten years ago. You've been unlocatable since that time."

"Unlocatable? What about all those letters we sent? Even though Rogers told us in court that we should try to forget about Kevin, we wrote letters here. We even got a lawyer once, but he told us that we'd be better off just

doing what Seton County told us. You make it sound like we didn't give a damn, but that ain't true."

Betty added, "You knew where to send the consent form."

Wilde smiled at the couple. "I'm sorry. 'Unlocatable' may have been a poor choice of words." She turned to Betty and said, "Did you know that your father has called us a few times over the years?" The caseworker shook her head and sighed. "He's been upset about so many things. How is he doing?"

Bob spoke. "We'd like to know about Kevin. That's why we came here." He held his wife's trembling hand. "A lot of things have changed over the years. We tried to do what Mr. Rogers suggested, but it ain't been easy."

Wilde interrupted with, "I can understand all that, but did you bring the consent form with you?"

Bob reddened with anger. "Look, lady, will you listen to us?"

Wilde was surprised by the show of anger. She, however, was not about to be intimidated. "Mr. Korb, let me tell you a few things. Many years ago Kevin was placed in the custody of our agency by the court. He is still in our custody. Nothing in this record indicates any concern on the part of either of you since the boy was first placed. Mr. Rogers was quite clear in his dictation that Kevin should not be returned to you and that neither of you should visit him. The boy has his own life now, as I'm sure you both do. Why upset him? He doesn't need the past, and you are both the past to him. Can't you just accept that?"

The phone rang, and Wilde quickly answered. She smiled. "Lunch? Sure. Where?" Looking at the Korbs, she said, "I'll just be a minute. Excuse me." She turned away in her chair. "No, no, it's all right. I have two people with me, but they'll be gone in a few minutes." She laughed. "That should be fun. I'll be down in five."

Bob shook his head and growled, "Forget it." He stood slowly. Betty followed him. Before leaving, she tossed

the signed consent form on the desk.

Wilde glanced at them as they walked out of the room. She closed Kevin's file as she spoke on the phone. "Are they joining us for lunch?" She laughed, again. "You must be kidding."

CHAPTER THREE



KEVIN WATCHED THE OTHER CHILDREN play basketball while he sat under a tree. He was not following the game. The boy was puzzled by new concerns, new problems and new words, words like "relative" and "parent." He thought that he had known the meanings of these words, but new, more relevant meanings seemed urgently needed. These were once labels which applied to people who would come to visit his friends at Dunhill, or they were people other children would visit off-grounds. These words had never applied to Kevin. They were alien, strange, and fanciful. If they ever had personal meaning for him, the meaning had faded with time and trauma.

Kevin was an adolescent, an age when identity and development often become obsessive. He had questions about who and what he was, why he was at Dunhill, and what had happened to his parents. His curiosity had only been heightened when Webb had told him that he would have to wait to discuss his family until Freilick could be involved. To Kevin this indicated a hope that someone was out there, someone who could give him an understanding of who he was and what his life was all about.

Kevin, however, was worried. Dunhill had meant security and love to him. The world outside the institution was a mystery; in fact, it was a mystery too frightening to explore. There were exceptions. The hot dog stand down

the road was fun, but it was within sight of Dunhill. Shopping in town was exciting, but he could always count on another boy or a child care worker to be there with him if he didn't know what to do. Further, it only took a few minutes to walk into town. The return trip to Dunhill always took him less time.

Kevin toyed with a patch on his jeans. The red cloth had been carefully sewn on to cover damage from a fall from an apple tree in the orchard. Both jeans and leg had needed stitches. He rubbed the dirt from the rough cloth. His hair covered his face as he remembered the look of concern on Jim Wolf's face as the child care worker came running after Kevin's fall. Seeing Jim had dispelled all fear. Kevin knew everything would be all right. Alone he was afraid, with little confidence. A trusted staff member created a sense of safety, a feeling of security. There were so many memories.

These memories were a mix of joy and pain. A year after he had first arrived at Dunhill he could actively play with other children without their frustration with him resulting in fights. His poor coordination and his behavior made other children shy away from him.

"Come on, Kevin. Let's play basketball." The child care worker knelt next to the boy as Kevin tunneled in the sand box with his fleet of cars and trucks. Kevin had been at Dunhill for about one year at the time.

Kevin ignored the invitation. "Look at big trucks."

"The other guys are throwing a ball around. How about it?"

"No, me play with stuff here." He sprawled out in the sand as if he wanted to blend with the world he was molding.

"A little later, Kevin. Right now you should spend a few minutes with the other kids. Ok? Come on with me." The worker smiled, but he made it clear that this was no longer only a request or an invitation. Recreation at Dunhill was not just for fun. It, like all other facets of the program, was an integral part of therapy, of learning how to relate to others.

Kevin knew that he would have to do what he was told. He also realized that if the worker wanted him to try, it probably wouldn't be too bad. They always seemed to be right. "Ok. Me play. Back here when done?" He looked up at the worker.

"Sure, Let's go." The worker ran toward the basketball court.

Kevin looked at the four other children who waited for them, and he glanced at the sand box. It was so much easier for him to play alone, but no one would let him do that as much as they had when he had first arrived. He breathed deeply and sauntered toward the others.

"Come on, Kev! Hurry up! We wanna play." The red headed youngster jumped up and down. "Come on, let's go, Kev!"

The ball came toward him like a bullet and hit him in the stomach. It had actually been thrown lightly by another boy. When Kevin fell to the ground with its impact, the child care worker laughed before anyone became upset. These situations had a tendency to escalate without distraction or humor.

Kevin looked up at the worker and the other boys. The tears in his eyes were more from the fear of failure than injury from the fall. "No play now."

The worker helped him to his feet. "Sure you will. I was a little scared the first time I played. In fact, I remember my father yelling at me to throw the ball. Don't worry about it," he whispered in the boy's ear. "I bet you're better than I am." He handed the boy the ball.

Another child shouted, "Here. Me first. Throw it here."

Kevin threw the ball, and he missed the other child. He seemed confused that the other boys did not make fun of the throw. Kevin stood watching them try to catch the ball. He was surprised to see that they also were no experts. The worker helped them with their poor coordination, and his patience reassured each of them. The next time Kevin had the ball he laughed and threw it back to the child care worker.

The staff called this activity therapy. Kevin soon called it basketball. He laughed, and he ran, and he fell only to get up again to enjoy the game.

Kevin could remember the fear and anticipation that he would only fall again and the joy of not falling but rather of being like everyone else, sometimes better. He smiled as he thought of those early days, but new, more serious thoughts troubled him now. His smile left him. Windblown hair provided cover for Kevin's tears. "What's it gonna be like to have parents?" No one was there to hear his questions. "What if they hate me when they see me?" He knew they existed. They had to exist.

Brian Webb saw Kevin in the orchard across the field. He knew that it was time to talk with him about the very thing both social worker and child were trying to understand but could not. The dependency which had developed over the years of placement had made independence for the boy difficult. Parents could intrude into a close relationship. The boy had found love and security. The worker had replaced an emptiness with reciprocal affection. Why chance the destruction of this secure relationship? But parents were out there, and the family treatment program had added a new dimension to the Dunhill child's world and the social worker's responsibility. Webb walked toward Kevin. It could no longer be avoided.

Kevin smiled at his social worker as he saw him across the lawn. He whispered to himself, "I bet Mr. Webb can help me with this stuff."

"Hi, Kev, what's up?" The social worker smiled embarrassingly at his own show of bravado.

Kevin didn't seem to sense Webb's nervousness. His words came slowly and hesitantly. He looked to Webb for support and strength. "Mr. Webb, can I talk with you about something?"

"Sure, Kev. What is it?" He sat next to the boy.

"This ain't so easy." Kevin picked up a twig and slowly stripped off the bark. "Mr. Webb, what's it like to have parents?" He looked quizzically at the man.

Webb felt a lump in his throat. Answering that question would be difficult. He looked away from Kevin and watched the children across the field. "Are you going to try out for the basketball team this year?" He felt foolish as soon as he had said this, and he corrected himself. "I'm sorry, Kev, but some things can be difficult for me, too." He reached over and put his hand on Kevin's shoulder. "I don't want to see you get hurt. That's all. I just want the best for you."

Kevin looked worried. He looked around and said, "What's wrong? Who'd hurt me?"

The worker realized that his own feelings were standing in the way of helping the boy. "Kev, let's go to my office and talk. I get a feeling that in a minute you're going to become the social worker and I'll be your client." Kevin laughed. He smiled at the boy as they stood and walked back to the main building. "Kev, we have some important things to talk over."

"We sure do, Mr. Webb. I've gotta talk about something that really bugs me."

"Me, too, Kev."

Jim Wolf looked up from the basketball game to see the social worker and the boy walking across the yard. He frowned and muttered, "They'd better not screw up that kid."

An excited twelve year old spotted Webb and Kevin. He shouted, "Hey, Mr. Webb. Watch me throw the ball." Webb paused for a moment, waved, and continued toward the building with Kevin. The boy asked Jim Wolf, "Where's Kev going?"

Wolf caught the ball thrown by the boy. "I don't have any idea. I really don't know." He tossed back the ball.

Betty remembered her own parents. She had been one of several children, but she had never really felt like one of her family. Even her appearance had set her apart. She looked at a family photograph hanging in the corner of the kitchen. She thought, "I don't know why I keep that there." Betty frowned as she saw herself fifteen years ear-

lier, a sad, frail teenager standing beside a smiling group of Gorskis, all happy, all so close. She was the exception. Betty had argued and had fought, showing a fiery temper with her parents. This anger had showed itself in school, and her teachers had been constantly sending home letters reporting misconduct. At the age of sixteen, Betty had been taken to court by her parents. They had her placed in a psychiatric hospital where she was expected to receive help. She could only remember the beatings; the sexual perversions; the hazy, drugged days, weeks, and months of interminable hospitalization. She grimaced at the thoughts of restraint and forced feeding when she had decided not to eat the slop they fed the patients. Betty recalled the echoing voice of her psychiatrist as he probed her feelings and told her to take her medication. His accent was thick, and he called her resistant when she asked him to repeat what he would tell her. It was always asking and never being answered. She had hated those days and those memories.

When she had left a year later, she had tried to stay with her father. The old arguments and misunderstandings would surface anew. Her mother died while Betty was in the institution. When she had returned home, she had found an embittered father who refused to consider Betty changed in behavior or attitude. He had constantly berated and embarrassed her. Her siblings had married and had moved far from the family home. Old animosities and the separation of many miles had severed ties between them and Betty forever. Nothing had improved. Finally, she had moved out and had worked at various jobs until she and Bob had met.

The coffee was too strong for Betty, and she sipped it slowly. Her thoughts were far from the house she and Bob rented. They had other children born after Kevin had left. The noise of Freddy and Charlie playing in the living room was ignored. The boys were four and five. Their active play often annoyed their mother. Lately, however, she not only tolerated the activity, she didn't seem to be aware of it.

The small, blond child seemed almost with her as she looked across the room. "Clean, Mom. Clean." She smiled at him. He looked eager to please, and there was a vitality in his expression she had almost forgotten. She stared at the small boy and his smiling face. "Kevin, I'm sorry that . . . I'm sorry, Kevin." The boy was gone.

She finished her coffee and took the empty cup to the sink. Betty remembered and felt sick. She remembered the tears in his eyes and the hatred she had felt. Her stomach felt queezy, and she could feel her head spinning. She could see little Kevin sprawled on the kitchen floor with a bloody nose and a look of terror on his face. It wasn't like that with her other children. The pain in her stomach was wrenching. She bent over and vomited in the sink. "Oh God. Oh my God." She clenched her fists and tensed. The pain involved more than the sick feeling in her stomach. She could remember it all, all the humiliating and shameful details. All of the sickening events she had tried to forget were flooding her mind and body. "What'd I do? How could I?" She cried. No one was there to help her. After a few minutes, Betty cleaned the sink and sat down. She was weak and fatigued. She allowed herself to drift in thoughts of the past, thoughts of herself and her family. Betty could see her father taunting her, scolding her.

The sound of Bob and the other children walking up the driveway disturbed her solitude. Freddie and Charlie ran to the door to greet their father, brothers, and sisters. There were four other children in the Korb family: Sally, seven; Tommy, eight; Sharon, nine; and Timmy, ten.

Bob looked tired but happy. "Betty, the kids got their report cards today. They did real good." He looked at the children as they busily took off their coats. "Show your mother your cards. Come on now, hurry up!"

Betty quickly dried her tears and feigned an excited interest. "Oh boy, let me see those report cards. They'd better be good." Timmy was the first to bring her his card. "Ok, Kevin, let's see it." She smiled.

Timmy looked puzzled. "Who's Kevin?"

Bob was startled. "What?"

Betty glanced at her husband and shook her head. She smiled at Timmy. "Just fooling, Timmy. Your mother's just kidding. Now, how about it?" She held out her hand, but she felt nauseous.

Timmy proudly handed his mother his report card and stood waiting for her approval.

Betty exaggerated her surprise. "Wow! This is really something. I'm really proud of you."

The other children ran to their mother with their report cards to share in the praise. She waved them away.

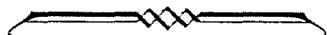
"Just a minute. I've got to do something first." She rushed from the kitchen and into the bathroom. Betty was sick again. After washing, she sat on the edge of the bathtub to catch her breath and to compose herself before facing her family.

Since the disturbing visit to Seton County, Betty had been torn between the past and her family. Kevin was the past.

Charlie tugged at his father's sleeve while the other children went to the living room to play before supper. "Daddy, why does Mommy cry so much?"

Bob forced a smile. "Mommy's tired lately. You know, Charlie, it's like when your tummy hurts, and you feel bad. Mommy'll be ok." He looked toward the bathroom. "What's bothering her will be better soon." Bob looked determined but added with less confidence, "I hope it'll be better soon."

CHAPTER FOUR



FORMAL CONFERENCES AND INFORMAL MEETINGS led to the decision to provide Kevin with family treatment services. His curiosity about his own family background had forced the issue. Freilick saw the endeavor as an exciting challenge. Webb recognized the boy's pain at not knowing his roots. Both joined forces in getting approval for the search for Kevin's parents. It had been decided that not only did he have the right to the details of his past, but, also, he had the right to meet his parents if this could be arranged.

Kevin lay on the ground looking at the ants crawling over the blades of grass, twigs, and stones. He smiled and placed his hand in their path. Scurrying about in confusion, they tested this obstacle and eventually overcame the barrier on their way home. The boy watched them carry what must have seemed like huge logs to the tiny insects. He was absorbed in their industry and speed. What would it be like to be an ant? He wondered about that. But their duties took them elsewhere as they rushed over and past his hand and off through the grass.

He rolled over on his back. The sun hurt his eyes, and he covered them with one dirty hand. Jim Wolf would usher him to the showers today. Playing outside had left him understandably dirty. Kevin didn't care. He could only think about the talks he had been having with Mr. Webb. They troubled him. Mr. Freilick was to find rela-

tives for him. In fact, he might even meet them soon. What did it all mean? What was it all about? He couldn't care less about being dirty.

The boy thought about the staff members who had come and gone over the years. Sheila, the tomboyish child care worker, had tried to get him to study more. Andy, his first teacher at Dunhill, had spent hours with him pronouncing words over and over. "Boy, I talked funny then." There were good memories of this place, happy times, fun times. There also were unpleasant things to remember. Older boys had made fun of him when he had first arrived. Kevin ran clumsily with clubbed feet. His teeth were crooked, and his bite was extremely poor. "Dog face! Dog face!" The jeers had made him cry. Christmas had made him wonder where the other children had gone. He was left alone, and the staff who would be on duty looked so sad when they would stay with him in the division. Braces had corrected his bite. An operation had corrected his feet. The jeers had long since ended. The other children, however, still left Dunhill for many holidays, and he stayed behind.

"Bang. Bang." He remembered a small child playing war. Kevin looked confused, worried. "Who's that kid?" His muscles tightened. "There was a fort in the woods." Perspiration formed on his forehead. "What was goin' on in the fort?" He felt his head spinning. Sounds seemed hollow and dull. He hadn't felt this way for years. It was frightening. There was shouting. Someone was calling him. He screamed, "Leave me alone!" Kevin sat up with a start.

"Are you all right?" Jim Wolf was standing with a baseball in his hand. He knelt next to the boy. "Kev, did you fall asleep?"

Dunhill's records were less than helpful to Freilick. They had been written without concern for Kevin's parents. In fact, there was only brief mention of his foster care history. It therefore was necessary for Freilick to write the boy's caseworker in Seton County. His letter to

her was brief, merely noting interest in any information she could provide him about Kevin's parents and their whereabouts. He indicated his intent to establish contact.

The caseworker's reply was polite and businesslike.

Dear Mr. Freilick:

I have received your letter requesting information regarding the parents of Kevin Gorski. Our records indicate that they have displayed little interest in Kevin since his placement. We were in contact with them one year ago when his mother signed a consent form for surgical care. At that time they were only slightly cooperative, and they exhibited denial and general resistance to our offered help.

Miss Gorski is now married to Kevin's father, Robert Korb, and they no longer reside within our county. Therefore, we have no jurisdiction over them or their other children.

If you wish, you may establish contact with Kevin's parents. We do not plan to do this. They reside at 892 Desmond Street, Millersville. Please keep us advised of any progress. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jean Wilde,
Caseworker

Freilick was upset reading the letter. He read into the letter that the caseworker didn't care about the Korbs or whether or not Kevin had any contact with them. Seton County had taken a child from his parents years ago. He had been neglected by his parents, and they had consented to his placement in a foster home. That same agency then placed him in a series of unsuccessful foster homes. Seton County seemed to have placed his parents in an inactive file somewhere. The whole continuum of neglect, Freilick thought, had continued from the home through a bureaucratic agency concerned with paper,

money, and reports. People were an afterthought. He was indignant as he wondered why the entire Seton County Department of Child Welfare shouldn't be charged with child neglect. He couldn't come up with a reason they shouldn't. They could at least make an effort to work with the parents.

The knowledge that Kevin's case was not unique, not an exception in the system of child welfare in America, helped to upset Freilick as he read Wilde's letter. He had been part of that system for several years. The memories of abused and neglected children shouting and screaming as they were placed in foster care ate at him. His stomach tensed as he thought of the families he could not keep together, and the angry, sullen, frightened children he had placed in foster homes and institutions. There were many children he had returned home, but there were too many he had been unable to help. He knew the system well.

Each year thousands of children like Kevin were placed in substitute homes with surrogate parents and foster brothers and sisters by tax subsidized or public agencies. One-half million children or more are usually living in such care. No one knows the exact number. Far too many of these children would never see their parents again. The lucky ones would return to families which had solved the problems which necessitated their placements with the help of social work professionals. Not all were to be so fortunate. Many would grow up with foster families. Many would move from foster home to foster home every few months or years. Most foster families would love them, but the children's names would never match the rest of the people with whom they lived. Their place in the foster family would be unnatural. They would have a caseworker assigned to them while the foster parents' own children would not. They would lack a complete identity. George Orwell had written about these children in the Child Welfare system without specifically intending to do so in his novel, *Animal Farm*. Freilick had become convinced that Kevin Gorski was not to be a little less equal among equals. This child had a right to

everything out of which society had cheated him, including an identity, a point of reference for his life.

Freilick wrote to Wilde, asking her to arrange for a meeting between Mr. and Mrs. Korb and himself at Seton County. There was no reason to delay any longer contact with Kevin's family.

Seton County was rural and resplendent in its autumn setting. The county seat was a small town with one of those picturesque bandstands ornately decorated with an early 1900 style of carved wood. The town was white-washed, clean, and old. The town square was a one-time place for Sunday gatherings. It had not been used in many years. The residents repaired the bandstand recently less out of pride than nostalgic guilt. The dappled colors of the leaves added a beauty to the small town which tempered the disrepair of the older buildings.

A few miles outside of the town a structure which resembled a one-story discount store sat dully in a wheat field with a large, blacktop parking lot facing the road. This had actually once been a store, but it now provided inexpensive housing for county officials, including the Department of Child Welfare.

The waiting room was crowded with people. A few whispered excitedly with each other about plans and problems. Others waited nervously in silence. The rest slept or looked exceedingly bored. They sat on an old church pew, office chairs no longer used by staff, or gray metal chairs.

"Good morning. I have an appointment with Ms. Wilde." Freilick smiled at the receptionist. He also smiled at his hands as they trembled slightly. The pleasant drive had not calmed his nervousness.

"What's your name?" The expressionless, older woman did not return his smile. She never looked at him as she shuffled paper. The woman seemed busy, and he felt like an unneeded interruption.

The family therapist identified himself and was told that Wilde would be with him in a few minutes. The receptionist curtly instructed him to have a seat and to

wait for the caseworker. It sounded more like a command than an invitation.

Waiting for the caseworker, Freilick found himself trying not to look like the clients in the welfare reception room. He straightened his tie and clumsily took some papers from his briefcase. The papers were meaningless, but no one else wore a tie or had a briefcase or important-looking papers. He was quite sure they would not mistake him for a client. Then he realized how foolish he was acting. His own uneasiness must have been flashing off and on like a neon sign. He shook his head at his own behavior and put away his papers. Freilick wondered at that part of him that crusaded for people's rights and that other part that wanted him to be different from those he tried to help.

He looked around the room and turned to an extremely thin, elderly man who was sitting next to him. "It's a beautiful day today, isn't it?" Freilick turned on as much pleasantry as possible to hide his own nervousness.

The old gentleman looked at him and showed no reaction. He moved slightly and burped. "Yep, nice day," he commented.

The receptionist loudly called Freilick's name. He responded immediately.

"Mr. Freilick, follow the hall to the end, and Mrs. Wilde and Mr. Garfield will be waiting for you there."

"I'm sorry, who's Mr. Garfield?"

"Her supervisor, of course." The receptionist never took her eyes from her papers.

"Thank you. Just down the hall?" He smiled.

"That's what I said. To the end. Mrs. Wilde's waiting." There was no emotion in her voice. He wondered if she was really a recording which would repeat the same message endlessly if he prompted her. He walked down the hall.

Garfield smiled at the caseworker, but his message was more than an inquiry. "Jean, I hear there's a trip being planned." Wilde used her vacation time, and often her

sick leave days, to travel. Much of her work days would be spent planning trips for herself and her husband and discussing the plans with co-workers. This used to result in her supervisor ordering her to do her work. "You're supposed to be a social worker, not a social director on some damn tour," he would scream. Over the years, he came to accept Wilde's lack of discipline, but he was still able to communicate displeasure. It was especially difficult to mask his anger when she complained about the volume of work she was assigned.

"Mr. Garfield, there's a great American Express tour through France. We're thinking of taking two weeks vacation in a few months. Care to join us?"

"If I didn't have the family, I might."

"I've got some beautiful brochures if you'd like to see them."

"I'd rather see some reports on your cases. They're overdue."

"Don't worry. I'll get them to you." She saw another worker down the hall and waved.

"Jean." Garfield was exasperated.

"Yes?"

"Come in and have a seat."

She sat meekly. "I suppose I can get those reports in today."

"No, no. That's not what I want. We've got a meeting of some sort on one of your cases. Which one?"

"Oh, yes. I almost forgot. Gorski. The boy at Dunhill. A Mr. Freilick wants to involve the boy's family in their program. I don't know if we should allow it."

"Why not?"

"He sounded like another idealistic do-gooder on the phone. That child's taken years to settle down, and now they want to do family therapy. Seems like a waste of time and money to me." Wilde frowned and handed her supervisor the letter from Dunhill announcing Freilick's plans to look into the Korb family situation.

Garfield had spent his morning arguing with the

woman who directed the county agency. She was upset over the program's spending. He had asked over and over, "How can we care for kids if we don't pay the bills? It costs us what it costs every other agency like us, about \$15,000 to \$40,000 per year for each kid in placement. Sometimes more." She wanted the costs cut, not excuses. This meant laying off staff. The meeting was followed by a phone call from a county legislator who wanted a favor granted to a relative who was having family problems. Now he listened uncomfortably to Jean Wilde. He felt her style was pompous, and he didn't like it. He looked carefully at the letter.

"I don't care for the idea, Mr. Garfield. I don't like it at all. This case has been quiet for a long time. They should leave well-enough alone. Don't you agree?"

The supervisor seemed sullen as he nodded his head. "You're probably right. I don't know this case. It's your's, and you know best. This Freilick's coming today?"

"He's due here now. The boy's parents will be here later."

"Well, let's see what he has to say for himself." He knew he was risking an argument, but he added, "Sounds like Dunhill's done well up to now. Maybe we should let them do what they feel is best. Maybe not."

Wilde snapped, "Best? Do what they think is best? What about what I think? I don't care if this person meets the Korbs, but I don't want him getting carried away, or we'll have a lot of work to do."

"Look, Jean, we'll move slowly regardless of what happens, and we'll keep a close watch on what they do. You know I think that what you do is extremely important, and, as usual, I'll give you a free hand. Don't I always?"

"You do," she said. Wilde smiled. "I suppose I find such a quick change in this case unsettling."

The supervisor's secretary called to announce Freilick's arrival, and Garfield asked Wilde to greet the visitor. As the caseworker opened the office door, she saw Freilick approaching.

"Mr. Freilick, I'm Jean Wilde, and this is Mr. Garfield, my supervisor."

Freilick was polite but reserved. The history of the case and Wilde's letter had upset him, and he came half-expecting to do battle. They were both friendly enough, but he was cautious. This cautiousness resulted not only from the control of his feelings but also because this agency had placed Kevin in Dunhill. They paid the bills, and they could discharge him whenever they wished. If they were no longer satisfied with the services they were receiving, they might remove the child from Dunhill's care only to place him in another facility. Freilick couldn't risk that.

Wilde spoke first. "We're quite pleased with the progress Kevin has made at Dunhill. The reports from Mr. Webb and the social workers before him have been very thorough and complete. You've all done a fine job, and we're pleased."

Garfield looked at his worker. When she had finished, he added, "Fine job. Yes, fine. We're pleased." He glanced at his watch. "Mr. Freilick, I won't be able to spend much time with you and Mrs. Wilde this morning, and I know you've got a lot to talk about. What I'd like to know is what you plan on doing with this family. It's unusual for institutions to get so involved and . . ."

Freilick interrupted, "That's exactly why I want to work with the Korbs. Mr. Garfield, the usual approach has kept Kevin in an institution and away from his family for too long."

The supervisor tapped a pen on the desk as he spoke rapidly. "I don't know how much you know about this family, but Kevin has been much better off in care than he ever would have been at home. As we've been talking, I'm remembering a lot about this case." Shaking his head, he pointed his pencil at Freilick and said, "The Korb parents beat the boy, neglected him, and practically gave him away in court. They were just like thousands of other parents who should never have had children in the first place. They didn't even try to fight his removal from

their custody. In effect, they just told the court to take him off their hands. I don't think any child should remain in such a situation."

Wilde had been listening attentively. She asked if Freilick would need background information on the parents.

Before he could respond, her supervisor said, "I have to leave you in the efficient hands of Mrs. Wilde. I'm sorry I have to go, but I'm glad I had a chance to meet you. Mrs. Wilde will give you any assistance you need, and she speaks for our agency. I have to run. Good luck with this, and I hope to meet you soon, again." He turned and left before they could shake hands.

The family therapist tightly gripped his pipe and observed coldly, "He's a busy man."

"Yes, he is." Wilde looked at the record on the desk and skimmed lightly through the pages of Kevin's history. "A deeply disturbed child while he was in foster care," she remarked. Never taking her eyes from the record, "We only placed him at Dunhill because we had no place else to put him. No other foster home would take him." She sighed and sat back in the chair. "My goodness, his behavior was intolerable. It looks like we'd have placed him anywhere. He was quite a chore. Imagine the poor caseworkers who had to put up with him."

Freilick sarcastically interjected, "I pity them."

Wilde ignored his comment, shook her head, and closed the record. "I've had other children like Kevin Gorski. They can wear you out. What they need is firm control."

"And more love than firmness?" Freilick asked.

"Perhaps, Mr. Freilick, but a firm hand would have taught Kevin right from wrong." She smiled.

"A firm hand caused the problem." He returned the smile.

"I suppose. Why don't I leave the record with you for a few minutes? Would you like to look it over?"

"Yes, yes, I would. It would save time, and I'm sure it'll help me to get the information I'll need." Freilick

didn't want to lose the opportunity of finding out as much as possible from the case record before meeting the parents.

"Of course. Take your time with it. Please be careful, though. You know, last week I misplaced a child's record, and I forgot which foster home he was in. That was embarrassing."

"I'm sure it would be." Freilick tried to avoid looking at the caseworker.

"Kevin's parents will be here in an hour. Would you like some coffee?"

He accepted and began to page through the rather voluminous file marked "Kevin Gorski #9073."

Opinions, judgements, fillers and miscellaneous material filled the record. Freilick found throughout the thick file that most of the dictation and paperwork actually had little to do with Kevin. It was filled with authorizations and forms and bureaucratic insertions. Kevin and his parents seemed like the excuse rather than the focus of the record and its recorded activities. His siblings were merely mentioned. His parents' efforts to locate him were partially recorded, hinted at. Freilick shook his head over the apparent neglect by an agency which taxpayers supported in order to fight child maltreatment. It was clear that this agency existed for this agency. Clients were tangential at best.

Freilick had worked in several agencies before coming to Dunhill. One of these was a public children's agency. He knew that it was not uncommon for children to be taken from parents at the whim of an administrator or for children to be used as pawns in petty bickering between a caseworker and a supervisor. Nor was it uncommon for families to be excluded from the life of a child because of the prejudice of a frustrated caseworker whose effectiveness was often in doubt but whose civil service protection was beyond reproach. No wonder other agencies shook their collective, professional heads when they looked at the work of many public agencies. He had worked with excellent caseworkers whose professional

accomplishments often meant no more to their agency than the unethical work of many other caseworkers. Even they would become bureaucrats after awhile, or they would leave the governmental world of public welfare.

This record mirrored much of his own experience. He had seen the scandalous casework described here in many other files. Kevin's case was not unique.

Freilick read of a young, unmarried mother and her boyfriend whose child was hyperactive and had other physical and expressive problems. The mother was subject to episodes of severe and agitated depression. Her boyfriend, the child's father, tried to be supportive, but he would withdraw and would create stronger feelings of isolation for the mother. Clinically it sounded all so abstract and psychological. The tragedy was poignant in its stark simplicity. This was a family beset by emotional problems which were severe but not hopeless. They could have been helped. There was no reason to punish the family Kevin at the same time feared and loved. Also, there was no reason to punish Kevin.

During the lengthy period of Kevin's placement, the record noted occasional contact with Mr. Gorski, Kevin's grandfather. The man would call a few times each year to tell the agency that his daughter was mistreating her other children, but there was no information about the names or ages of the other children. He alleged heavy drinking and casual sex, but there was no information about what the county had done, if anything, with these complaints. Apparently, they were merely put in the record.

Freilick knew well that all mistreated children feared their parents, but this did not mean that these parents should have their children taken away never to be seen again. The "Man Without a Country" approach was ridiculous in punishing treason, and it now was no more effective in treating cases of child neglect or family problems. The only civilized approach was to find the problems both within and outside the family which adversely

affected the family members, to change these situations for the better, and to return the child to his own parents, a family without threat. Freilick felt strongly that a child had a right to his own loving and nurturing family. Kevin had that right, and a child welfare agency could not arbitrarily and permanently take it from him. Children had to be protected, not repossessed.

The man could feel himself perspiring as he waded through the record. He became more bewildered as he read. The narrative took him through a maze of foster homes through which Kevin had traveled. While Freilick's experience reminded him of the loving, caring persons who served as foster parents, Kevin had lived with the exceptions. The abuse from which he had been removed had been compounded by continued cruelty. One foster parent was an alcoholic, another sadistic, another demanding and unyielding. The list went on with horror stories made more terrible only by the fact that the record only hinted at the reality. He had learned to read between the lines, to sense the bureaucratic language in which problems were hidden, only to be discovered by the individual skilled in the use of imprecision. The boy's reward for perseverance in surviving these placements was to be moved to live with foster parents who also were exceptions. As he traveled, he moved farther away from his parents and further into himself. Kevin's eventual abandonment at Dunhill was merely a minuscule part of the crime.

Wilde was clearly impatient as she walked into the room. "The Korbs have arrived and are waiting in the conference room. We can begin whenever you're ready."

Brian Webb sat behind his desk looking at Kevin. They had been talking for only a few minutes. A tension had developed which had brought tears to the youngster's eyes.

"Do you remember where you were before coming to Dunhill?"

Kevin shook his head and snatched a tissue from a box

on the social worker's desk. There followed a long silence. Kevin then spoke in a whisper. "I guess I was in a foster home, but I don't remember much about it." He turned away from the tension in the room toward a window which looked out on the spacious lawns surrounding the main building at Dunhill. The scene looked more like a grand fantasy of Elizabethan England than the reality of a children's institution.

Webb watched Kevin closely. The boy's face brightened appreciably. He asked cautiously, "What are you thinking about, Kev?"

"I think they had a puppy."

"Who had a puppy?"

"The foster family." He smiled. "It was happy, but it cried a lot. I think it did, but I don't remember too much. They lived someplace in the country. I don't know." He turned to the social worker. "Mr. Webb, I don't, I don't know if I want to remember. I do but I don't. Know what I mean?"

Webb smiled warmly, but he could feel the tightness in his stomach and shoulders. "I understand, Kev. I really do. It's difficult to think about all you went through, and there's lots of time to remember."

"But Mr. Freilick's in Seton County today. Isn't that where my caseworker is? You told me that."

"That's right. Ms. Wilde works in Seton County." Each child at Dunhill had a caseworker responsible for him. The caseworker was to visit the child at least yearly in order to evaluate progress in treatment. Too often, however, caseworkers did not bother to visit. They presumed a child was receiving adequate care, and written reports were accepted in lieu of visiting. These caseworkers failed to realize the importance they held in the lives of their wards. They were a link with the child's own world, a connection with the world from which the child had come and, hopefully, to which they would return when their stay at Dunhill had come to an end. Kevin was no exception to this problem. He had never met his

caseworker. This only served to intensify his feelings of rejection.

"Will Mr. Freilick ask my caseworker to visit me? They visit some of the other kids." Kevin knew that the family therapist had gone to Seton County to meet not only his caseworker but also his parents.

Webb understood that Kevin's concern about meeting his caseworker was valid. He also knew that talking about the caseworker at this point was partially avoiding the major purpose of Freilick's visit.

"I'd like to meet her," Kevin said meekly.

"Is it only your caseworker you'd like to meet?"

"Well, you know, I'd like to meet that other lady, too."

Webb hesitated and, then, asked guardedly, "Your mother?"

There was a pseudobravado in the boy's voice. "Sure. Why not? I'd like to meet her, too." He looked into the eyes of the man to whom he felt so close. Kevin's eyes watered, and his voice cracked as he said, "I want my mother. I want her so much, Mr. Webb. I really, really do." The child began to cry. Webb moved his chair next to the boy's. He held him. Kevin sobbed, "I want my mother. I want her so much." All the years of rejection and abuse and heartache had not blunted his ability to feel sharply the pain of loneliness.

As Webb held the crying boy, his own eyes began to water. "Go ahead, Kev. It's ok to cry. Go ahead." Webb fought back his own tears without success. The sessions he had been having with Kevin to help the youngster to explore his experiences prior to Dunhill had become steadily more intensive. Kevin had never expressed these feelings for his mother with Webb before.

Wilde's introductions were made quickly. She took a seat in the corner, leaving Mr. and Mrs. Korb and Freilick the use of the round table in the center of the room. There was a tense silence. Freilick felt ill-at-ease as he took a yellow pad from his briefcase. The paper fell to the

floor, and Freilick blushed. He noticed his palms sweating. "I'm sorry. A little clumsy today."

Bob cleared his throat. "Betty's really nervous. So if she seems upset, well, I mean we're both pretty nervous." He was aware that he was not expressing what he wanted to say. The cigarette he held in his trembling hand spilled ashes which he self-consciously brushed from his tan jacket bought for the meeting today.

Bob looked considerably older than a man in his late thirties. He was short and quite thin. His pock-marked, reddish complexion deepened in color as he tried to communicate his fear.

Betty wore an old, black sweater which, although clean, obviously had been worn for more years than most would have tolerated. It partially covered a new blouse which she straightened as Bob spoke for both of them. Her hair was held back severely by a rubber band. She smoked nervously as both her arms and legs were closely crossed in what seemed an attempt to defend herself from the threatening situation. She tried to feign a nonchalant attitude, and she spoke as if to refute her husband's explanation. "Your name is Mr. Freidick?"

"No, Freilick, Marty Freilick."

"Well, let me tell you what." She dropped her cigarette and paused. Picking it up and covering the ashes with her foot, she continued, "I mean, let me tell you why we ain't asked about Kevin in such a long time." She seemed to search for words.

Bob looked concerned and quickly interjected, "You see, we tried to contact him. Betty's been really upset, upset to the point of getting sick sometimes."

"I can talk, Bob. Let me talk to the man." She reached out and held tightly to her husband's arm. "When Kevin was grabbed away from us, we didn't know we'd never have the right to see him again." Her voice quavered. "We, we tried to get a lawyer to try to get him back, but we didn't have money. The one we talked to just told us to cooperate with the authorities here in Seton County,

and we did." She looked at Wilde. "Mrs. Wilde, didn't we cooperate?"

Wilde nodded in agreement. She added officiously, "We, of course, would have liked more involvement on your part, but I presume you did your best. Yes, I suppose you've both been cooperative."

Bob looked at the caseworker and said angrily, "Do you remember what happened last year? We came here to talk about Kevin, and you gave us the cold shoulder. We felt like a couple of real bastards when we left. That's the way we've felt ever since Rogers started investigating us when Kevin was just a little kid."

"Remember, Mr. Korb, that there were problems with Kevin back then that made it impossible for him to remain with you." Wilde sounded condescending as she added, "Let's not forget the poor care he was given, either."

"Problems? Sure, there were problems. Rogers told us Kevin'd be better off in foster care, but we never thought we'd be giving him away forever." He looked at Betty. "We thought we were doing the best thing for all of us."

There was a period of uneasy silence before Betty looked at the representative from Dunhill and asked hesitantly, "How, how is Kevin? Is he ok?"

Freilick glanced at the notes he had brought with him. "When Kevin came to Dunhill, he could neither read nor write. In fact, it took about a year to get him to the point where he could sit still and could concentrate long enough to learn anything in school." He smiled. "By the end of this school year he should be ready for public school, for his normal grade level in a regular school." Freilick paged through the rest of his notes as he spent several minutes describing Kevin's progress from the boy's placement to the present. Both parents listened attentively without interrupting. Both smiled at each other when he told them of the particular activities in which the child had excelled and of the exceptional progress Kevin had generally made. The tense defensiveness

seemed to ease following Freilick's report.

Betty smiled and said, "I'm really proud of him. I bet he's really grown-up."

"Would you like to see Kevin's picture?" Freilick had brought a recent snapshot with him anticipating an interest on the part of the boy's parents.

Bob swallowed and sat on the edge of his chair. "Would we? We sure would."

Freilick handed Mrs. Korb the picture of her son. Her hands trembled as she took it. There were tears in her eyes. "He sure has grown. Bob, look at this. See him?" She rapidly blinked her eyes to hold back her tears. "Look how good he looks. He sure is big and healthy." Bob leaned toward his wife and looked closely at the picture. He held firmly to her hand and smiled.

"He's in excellent health, and he's doing quite well. A cold sometimes, but nothing worse." Freilick wanted to reinforce their interest, but soon found that this was not necessary. After the parents had seen the photograph, they asked a torrent of questions about Kevin and his activities. There was an atmosphere of concern and excitement. An underlying uneasiness, however, remained.

Betty and Bob recounted for Freilick the details of their past. They had met less than a year before Kevin's birth. Neither had finished high school. Both had held a series of non-skilled jobs between long periods of unemployment. Their relationship had begun with a meeting in a bar when both were feeling depressed and experiencing enormous surges of self-pity. They had gone to Betty's apartment and had remained together since that first night. Following Kevin's birth, financial problems compounded regular arguing with mutual feelings of panic, insecurity, and uncertainty.

Betty looked at the floor and spoke haltingly, "We've talked a lot about those days. Kevin got the worst of it. He used to cry all night. He'd cry a lot, and it got to us, especially me. It wasn't his fault. I know that. In fact, I guess I really knew it then. There didn't seem to be any way out." She cleared her throat and looked at Bob.

"Money was short, and we weren't getting along. Well, we tried, but things were pretty bad. My father was part of what was goin' on. He didn't want me to have Kevin, and he hated Bob. We'd argue about him all the time. He'd call us just to stir things up."

Bob looked at Freilick and then at the caseworker. "We ain't making excuses. We'd just like to explain."

Freilick responded, "I can understand what it must have been like for you. Sometimes with all those pressures it seems like the whole world is coming down around you." Their story had been told with a depth of feeling that, according to indications in the county's case record, they were incapable of having. These were people who clearly had experienced a personal hell, a hell they had not conquered, and Freilick could sense their frustration.

Betty looked at him, lowered her head, and wept.

Bob seemed to apologize. His voice was breaking, and he tried to choke back his emotions. "Mr. Freilick, excuse my wife. I mean, this ain't easy for her."

"I doubt this is easy for any of us," Freilick said.

Kevin's father nodded in agreement and wiped a tear from one eye. After a moment, Bob said in a near whisper, "Ain't we all been punished enough? It's been so many years. Yeh, we did things we shouldn't have, but it's been so long. We're different." He held his head in his hands and said, "Will it end?"

Wilde responded forcefully, "Mr. Korb, no one is being punished by our agency. We are not policemen here; we are here to help you. You should know that. We have always tried to do what is best for Kevin. Seton County has been successful in helping the boy, and you and Mrs. Korb should be grateful."

Freilick's face reddened, and his fists tightened. While he felt anger building, he recognized that it was his feeling and that the caseworker meant well. He, however, said, "Ms. Wilde . . ."

She interrupted, "Mrs. not Ms., please. I'm a little touchy on that."

"I'm sorry. Mrs. Wilde, there really doesn't seem to be

any need to defend your agency at this point. Things have been done by quite a few people over the years that are indefensible. You know that." Not allowing a reply from her, he turned to the Korbs. "We can talk about the past forever. There's plenty of time for that. Today isn't the time to go into everything, and I'm sure this is painful enough for you. Why don't you share with me what is happening with your family now?"

Betty took a tissue from her purse and dried her eyes. She accepted an offered cigarette from Bob. Freilick lit it for her. She was still upset, but she seemed happy to change the subject. "Things are going pretty good now. Maybe they could be better." She paused and then added, "We've got six kids, six healthy kids." She seemed to brighten as she described how the four school-age children were doing in school and how all six were involved in their church's youth program. Both she and her husband described eagerly the children, the family's activities, and how their relationship had changed with the birth of the children after Kevin had left them and with the passing years. They told Freilick about their home as they apologized for the poor neighborhood in which they lived.

Bob noted, "It ain't the best place to live, but it's the best we can do. Betty's a real good housekeeper, and she keeps the place real clean. We do what we can."

Betty said, "We're good parents to all our kids. They do good in school. They get their medical checkups regularly. All of us go to church on Sunday, and Bob's a good provider. He gives his check to me right after work on Fridays, and we pay all our bills right away." She tried hard to impress.

Freilick smiled and asked Bob, "Does she give you an allowance?"

He looked surprised at the question, but he answered with a grin, "She sure does; at least, when I behave myself."

They all laughed. Wilde laughed the loudest, stood,

and spoke to the Korbs. "Mr. Freilick will be working with you, and I've told him that our agency will be most happy to cooperate to the fullest." She continued to speak as she gathered together the papers she had brought with her to the meeting. "I hate to laugh and run, but I do have other appointments. Mr. Freilick, if you could stop by my office before you leave, I'd appreciate it. Mr. and Mrs. Korb, thank you very much for coming here today, and I'll be in touch in the near future. Please don't hesitate to call if you have any questions."

There was a telling silence following Wilde's leaving the room. Betty was the first to speak. She said, "Will you let Kevin know that we, we love him? He, he must hate us more than anything."

"Mrs. Korb, I don't think he hates you. You and Bob are a mystery to him." Freilick paused and asked, "Would you like to visit your son?"

"See him?" She looked shocked. "I thought we couldn't see him." Betty looked at Bob in disbelief of what she had just been asked by Freilick. Countless thoughts raced through her mind.

Bob looked equally surprised. "Mister, are you sure? Are you sure it's ok?"

"There's never been any court order stopping you from visiting with Kevin since he was removed from your custody." He felt that they should know their rights even though it appeared to him that Seton County had ignored and had trampled on these rights for years.

Both parents sat dumbfounded by the offer and Freilick's comments. "Mr. and Mrs. Korb, my job at Dunhill is to work with the families of the boys who live with us."

Bob interrupted, "Sorry to break in, but I've got to know. Mrs. Wilde told us that, but she didn't say anything about visiting, about being able to see our son again."

"Well, I think Kevin has the right to see his family." He added cautiously, "However, we'll have to work

slowly. It hasn't been too long since he's begun to ask about you, and he can only take it a step at a time."

"He's asked about us? What, what's he been told?" Betty asked.

"Nothing, really. We didn't have much information." Freilick explained in more detail that it would take some time for the boy to adjust to the knowledge, let alone the implications, of their existence. Meeting them would involve even more adjustment. He carefully explained what it would mean to a child deprived of parents and a family to suddenly discover that they had existed all the time. The parents listened attentively and actively engaged in a discussion of how to arrange for such an initial contact. It was decided that Freilick would travel to their home to meet the other children first and that all of this information would be shared with Kevin prior to a visit. He suggested that the first visit with their son be at Dunhill. They agreed that it would be best for Kevin to see them where he would feel more at ease.

Betty was genuinely excited. "Bob, I don't believe this. Oh my God, this is too good to be true. Wait 'til the other kids find out. Boy, will they be excited."

"Betty, I, I, oh hell, this is great!" They embraced and laughed.

Freilick smiled and said, "I don't want to upset your excitement, but when do you think it would be convenient for me to visit with you and your children?"

Betty smiled. "Whenever you want."

Bob nodded and added, "We want you to meet our kids and see for yourself. We've got nothing to hide. Please feel free to come down any time."

They made an appointment to meet at the Korbs' home the following month, and they discussed a tentative timetable. It was decided that following Freilick's visit with them arrangements would be made for Kevin to meet with his family at Dunhill. They were impatient, but they agreed to cooperate for Kevin's sake. The family therapist gave them his card and Kevin's picture.

They left thanking him and excitedly discussing this new turn of events in their lives.

Freilick went to see Wilde before leaving. She clearly was not sharing in the optimistic mood.

"I've got a feeling this will never work, Mr. Freilick. Their history doesn't show enough strength to indicate an ability to handle this constructively. They'll never follow through. I'll go along with you, but I'm pessimistic at best." She glumly looked at the case record.

"I hope you're wrong. For Kevin's sake, I hope you are. They really do have strengths, Mrs. Wilde. It'll be my job to help them develop these strengths. They're interested. They have several other children who seem to be doing well. They seem to love each other. We have a boy who is really interested, has made great progress, and who deserves to meet his family."

Wilde shifted in her seat and seemed annoyed as she adjusted her brassiere strap. "Rights? You talk about rights? Sure, everyone has rights. I hear that all the time. Rights are important, but people hide behind them. Common sense can get lost in a discussion of rights, but it strikes me that a child's right to a family that you're so concerned about must be carefully weighed against his right to security and safety." Freilick started to respond when Wilde held up her hand as if to stop him. "Let's skip the political philosophy for a minute."

He interjected, "I agree, but who's talking philosophy?"

"Never mind, Mr. Freilick. I want to get something more important off my mind. There was something you brought up during the conference with the Korbs when I was in the room."

"That almost implies we were talking about you when you left. We didn't. This isn't some game we're playing, and I don't want to argue with you. I really don't."

"Good. I don't either, but there was something. You seemed to be condemning what our agency's done in this case, and let me tell you we've done our best. When Mr.

Rogers handled this case, he worked very hard to keep this family together. Everything he tried failed, and Kevin had to be placed in foster care. The workers who followed Rogers also tried to help, but not much came of their efforts."

"I'm not condemning," he responded. "I suppose I'm trying to point out that this long separation was tragic and senseless. Those two people we just met with are parents who had trouble being parents. Maybe they still have trouble. Is this a reason for them to never see their son again? Does it mean that Kevin should live in foster care or an institution for the rest of his life without the knowledge of who he is and where he came from or where his family is? I hope not." He had expected resistance from Seton County in the form of a lack of concern because of what he had read and the history of the case. This threatened attitude of the caseworker was unexpected and was making him angry. He continued. "There is one other important thing to keep in mind. If we work at cross-purposes, this effort will only fail."

Wilde looked wide-eyed. "Work at cross-purposes? Why, Mr. Freilick, I'm sure that won't happen. As far as our agency is concerned, you can do whatever you feel is best in this case. The only request we make is that you send us regular progress reports. We'll leave Dunhill pretty much on its own in this situation, and, oh yes, good luck." She smiled with more than a hint of sarcasm.

"Be assured, we'll do our best, Mrs. Wilde." He took his briefcase and was about to leave when he remembered one last piece of business. "I almost forgot something important that Brian Webb would like to know. It's been several years since Kevin has seen a caseworker from here, and I'd be happy to arrange for you to visit with him at your convenience."

"My supervisor and I have talked about that. I'd like to meet him and feel a little guilty about not seeing him before. It's one of those things that gets pushed aside with everything that has to be done. I'm sure you under-

stand. Let's set up a meeting some time in the future. I'll call. Would that be ok?"

"Sure. Fine. Whenever you can spare the time." Freilick left with a wave and strong feelings that Wilde and her supervisor were frustrated, burned-out, little welfare computers who did not give a damn about Kevin or his family.

Sitting in his car, he glanced over his notes. The public agency's case record contained some interesting material. Betty was referred to as "mentally retarded." Bob was described as "mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed." Those freely used and frequently repeated labels were rubbish. Freilick thought that it should have been obvious to any untrained person that neither parent was mentally retarded, and Bob did not strike him as emotionally disturbed. Yet, a series of caseworkers over the years had repeated the labels in an official government record. With the exception of Rogers and Wilde, none of the four other caseworkers who had been assigned to this situation had even met the Korbs. Misinformation had been compounded by misinterpretation, presumptions, and faulty judgement. The result seemed to him to be out and out slander perpetrated and perpetuated by a government agency. It seemed ironic that part of the taxes paid by the Korbs were used to finance such slander. He put away his notes and started the car. Freilick's feelings were ambiguous. He was happy that the Korbs seemed interested, and he was furious over the way they had been treated by Seton County. He snapped to himself, "I've got to get the hell out of here," and drove away quickly.

Jean Wilde looked at the clock on her office wall. As the minute hand clicked to five o'clock, she smiled and pushed aside a form she was filling in. "Time to go into the real world." She stretched and listened for a moment to the office doors closing and the babel of voices walking down the hall.

The caseworker drove slowly toward the old farmhouse on the country road and saw her husband walking

toward the barn. They had owned the worked-out farm for more than twenty years. They raised a few goats, pigs, and two or three cows more for show at the local fair than any other reason. Her husband drove a truck for the town's highway department.

Wilde drove into the driveway, and her husband looked out of the barn and waved. He shouted, "Jean, what time do we eat?"

She shouted through clenched teeth, "What time do you think, Bill?" Muttering to herself, she slammed the car door. "For over twenty years, we've eaten at the same damn time. He always asks the same stupid question."

Bill Wilde smoothed his graying black hair and pulled up his sagging jeans. "Ready whenever you are, Jean."

Her husband poured coffee for both of them as she prepared hamburger and rice. "Anything new at the Welfare?"

"New? Same old thing. Fill out forms and keep Garfield happy. It helps to pay the bills. I did see some new travel brochures today, but I had a long meeting and didn't get a chance to read them closely."

"Bring 'em home?" he asked.

"They're in my purse."

"I'll look at 'em later."

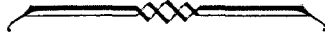
"Bill, we've said the same thing for twenty years. I wonder sometimes what we'll say when we retire."

"We'll go to Florida and soak up the sunshine."

"You'll find a barn there, too, and you'll soak up manure."

"Maybe, Jean. I just might do that."

CHAPTER FIVE



FREILICK WALKED INTO HIS SUPERVISOR'S OFFICE and noticed that Baum had replaced his toothpick with a pipe. "When did you start smoking a pipe? I thought I was the only one with a boiler sticking out of my mouth."

"Just yesterday. A friend had bought this as a birthday present for his father, but the man gave up smoking. My friend asked me if I wanted it, and, well, here I am. What can I say? Do I look debonair?" Baum smiled holding the pipe awkwardly and puffing smoke.

"Hirsch, it gives you a certain sophistication." Freilick laughed.

"I've always had that." He chuckled and glanced at the paper on his desk. "Well, sophisticated or not, before you have me doing television commercials, which is a good idea, I guess we have to get to work. I'm wondering what's new with Kevin and his parents?"

The worker described the month's work following his meeting with the Korbs in Seton County. He had visited them and had found their children healthy and normal. "They're active kids, and Mrs. Korb has her hands full with them. Bob Korb's phone conversation with me yesterday was interesting. He thinks Betty's attitude has changed appreciably since our meeting in Wilde's office and my visit to them. He described her as being calmer, smiling more often, and easier to get along with than before. I guess that our involvement's taken away some

of the accumulated stress which had built up over the years. I'm not sure, but I do know that she's pushing me for her to come up here to meet Kevin. Bob's doing the same."

Baum listened attentively and waited for him to finish. "Sounds good so far. We'll have to proceed very carefully for everyone's sake, but so far so good." He puffed on his pipe and looked at it quizzically, puffing harder.

"Hirsch, don't . . ."

Freilick was too late. Suddenly smoking tobacco erupted from the bowl and blew over the desk. Baum jumped to his feet and excitedly began to extinguish the tobacco with a pad of paper. "Oh, hell, look at this mess. What the hell!" He moved about the desk furiously recovering the ashes.

Freilick quickly recovered from the surprise of the mild, volcanic eruption and began to laugh. All of the tension and concern over what would be the administrator's attitude toward the family therapy approach in Kevin's situation seemed instantly transformed into hilarious laughter. Tears came to his eyes, and he held his stomach. He roared while he looked at Baum, seeing him clumsily trying to recover the burning tobacco. "I'm sorry, Hirsch, but . . ."

Baum blushed as he laughed. "Damn pipe. What'd I expect for nothing?"

After cleaning up the mess, he threw the pipe into a desk drawer and rummaged through another drawer looking for something. He recovered a toothpick, stuck it into his mouth, and sat back in his chair smiling with a satisfaction that comes from overcoming an embarrassing situation. "Now, what about the Korbs' problems? What's in the future?" He chuckled. "This is incredible. Another successful supervisory conference," Baum commented shaking his head.

Jerry Fedele joined the meeting abruptly as he peeked past the office door. "Sorry. I hate to disturb the troops at work, but, Hirsch, I'll need those reports I asked for before tomorrow."

"Ok, Jerry. They're being typed now. What's the rush?"

"The wife and kids are off to California to visit her parents for a week, and I'm taking a few days off to rest. This place will have to survive without me for awhile. By the way, what stinks in here?"

Baum answered, "Burning tobacco and paper. We were playing with matches, and it got out of hand. You'll still get those reports this morning."

"Don't burn down the place. Thanks. Sorry to interrupt." Fedele left wondering if his friend, Beverly Doyle, would get the flowers he had sent before he would arrive later in the day.

Baum and Freilick went to get some coffee and shared with the secretaries Baum's tale of disaster and near self-immolation. They returned to his office to continue the conference after Baum had reminded his secretary to rush the reports for Fedele.

Freilick reviewed the information covered before the accident and Fedele's interruption. They shared impressions of what he might encounter as future events would take place during therapy. Baum approved of the projected timetable Webb and Freilick had formulated.

The plan was tentative but something both social workers could agree seemed sensible while one worked with the child and the other with the family. Freilick would contact the Korb family to arrange for a meeting with Kevin at Dunhill. Letters would be exchanged prior to that meeting. He would take Kevin to his family's home for a brief visit if all went well during the visit at the institution. During this period, Webb would continue to work closely with Kevin and Freilick with the boy's family. This was as far as they could plan ahead.

Freilick admitted, "There's a big element of optimistic speculation in even this brief plan."

"Even so, I like the way you and Brian are working together in helping the boy and his family. That's good. Keep it up, Marty. You've got a solid approach." Baum looked pleased.

The orchard at Dunhill with its surrounding pines and maples seemed designed to provide an October spectacular. The day was perfect. It was late in the month; the sun, blue sky, and warm but not unpleasant temperatures provided perfect picnic weather.

The two social workers had planned for just about anything that could happen. They had tried to anticipate all reactions from Kevin punching his parents to his unrestrained crying. The planning did not make the waiting less intolerable. The Korbs had agreed to be at Dunhill by eleven o'clock. The first hour was to be spent with the parents, with Kevin, Webb, and Freilick meeting and getting over the initial curiosity. Then a picnic was planned to give Kevin the opportunity to meet his brothers and sisters. This would be followed by a family tour of the institution led by Kevin. A final few minutes with Kevin, and his family would return home. It was hoped that before they would leave, however, arrangements would be made for the next visit.

Webb would lend support to Kevin, and Freilick would help the parents, but no one could help these social workers. This was one morning they felt that they needed professional help.

Webb poked his head past the family therapist's door. "Hear from the Korbs?"

"They called at nine-thirty this morning and said they were leaving. I guess they'll be here by twelve. A little late, but not bad." He smiled at his nervous-looking colleague and added, "Brian, calm down. This is the third time you've asked."

"Keeping count? Me? Nervous? Hah! He walked to the bookcase. "You're as nervous as I am. Don't you think I've noticed you pacing about? And smoke! My God, this office is filled with smoke. You'd think ten people were smoking in here."

"Come on, Brian. The window doesn't open, and the air conditioner doesn't work. I think the fan's broken." Freilick was the picture of calm, but he was very much on edge. He had spent the earlier part of the morning

waiting for the Korbs to call. After they did, he had been unable to concentrate on the work he had to do in his office.

Webb laughed. "Doesn't work?"

"Pardon?"

"The air conditioner doesn't work?"

"No, why? Want to repair it while we wait?"

"Sure, Marty. I'll do it." He pushed the plug into the electrical socket next to the machine, and the air conditioner began emptying smoke from the room. He shook his head. "Ok, Mr. Confidence, I'll calm down. Good advice. I'll calm down."

Freilick blushed. "Hell, Brian, I wish this day were over."

"That's two of us."

Kevin was about to meet his parents for the first time since the traumatic separation so many years before, and this would be his first meeting with his brothers and sisters. Freilick had actually met with the family twice in their home since the meeting in Seton County. He had been favorably impressed. Betty and Bob seemed to have raised a family with love and concern. This was puzzling in the light of Kevin's history. The parents' strengths were obvious to the family therapist, but they still had problems, problems which did not seem insurmountable. Betty was high-strung and nervous. Bob was uncertain of his ability as a father. The children were active and demanding. But the family's physical needs were being met. The parents did their best. The children were healthy and normal. There were still questions about the active rejection suffered by Kevin, but there certainly existed a family which seemed to have the ability to become reinvolved with him.

Webb had been seeing Kevin daily and had been giving him all the information Freilick had been gathering: The boy's curiosity and excitement had increased, and the trust he had developed in his social worker had made this information-sharing bearable. He had known that the staff would not allow him to be hurt, and he had told

Webb this. He was giving them the responsibility to protect him. They hoped that they could live up to his expectations.

The administration had certain reservations about what Webb and Freilick were doing. They had committed themselves to a family treatment program, but Kevin was a special case. Special cases tended to test commitment. They remembered what he had been like when he had arrived at Dunhill. They had seen him grow and prosper under the love and care of the staff, and they did not want to see him harmed. They also knew that his family had not contacted Dunhill during the seven years he had been there. The reasons recently discovered were acknowledged. The acceptance of these reasons did not come easily. The fact was that they had seen him suffer when other children had visitors and when other children had gone home. The staff had felt his pain. Kevin indeed was someone special.

Arrangements had been made for Kevin to meet a foster family which lived in the neighborhood of Dunhill several years before. Kevin keenly remembered the time he almost had a family. He had discussed this with Webb during one of their sessions together.

The foster parents waited for the child in the conference room on the second floor while Kevin fumbled nervously with his buttons. He was no longer the uncoordinated boy with severe temper tantrums and halting speech. Three years of treatment in Dunhill and the concern and dedication of the staff had enabled Kevin to overcome many of his problems. He needed something the institution could not give him. He needed a family.

His social worker had located a foster family who had expressed interest in taking a child from Dunhill, a child without a family. The screening interview of the prospective foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Mastrowski, had been incomplete and superficial. They had no children of their own, and they were impatient. They wanted to see the child they might take home with them. A meeting had been hastily arranged before they would change their

minds. Kevin had been prepared, perhaps too prepared.

"Will they like me? What do ya think? Maybe I'm too dumb. What do ya think?" The youngster's anxiety was screaming out at the child care worker who helped him.

"Hey, Kev, don't worry about yourself. You're ok, kid. Anybody would like you."

Kevin stopped buttoning his shirt and looked surprised. He seemed confused as he turned to the worker. "Me? Nobody wants me. That's why I'm here, isn't it? I'm nobody's child." His words were direct and forceful.

The worker felt a lump in his throat. "That's not it at all. You've got some problems, Kev. We've all got some problems. That doesn't make you any less than anyone else. Don't forget that."

The boy blinked and fought back his emotions. He sounded angry as he said, "Yeh, but you're not in a home like this for your problems."

The worker quickly responded, "You won't be here forever, Kev. That's what today is all about. Let's hurry up. You've got some people who want you who are waiting upstairs."

After the youngster was dressed, the worker tied the boy's tie. Kevin looked at himself in the mirror. He smiled and said with an air of approval, "Hey, I look pretty good. Never wore a tie before."

"You look great, Kev. Let's go."

The child care worker accompanied Kevin to the social worker's office. The child's anxiety was rising as the social worker coached him on how to behave when he would be introduced to the foster parents. Most of the words were not heard by the boy. Kevin could feel his muscles tighten, and the sound of the social worker's voice was hollow and jumbled. As they walked toward the conference room, Kevin clenched his perspiring hands. He nervously wiped them on his suit coat.

The social worker opened the door to the conference room and greeted the foster parents who sat across the table facing the door. "Mr. and Mrs. Mastrowski, this is Kevin Gorski." They stood and smiled. Kevin could feel

the pressure as he walked toward the room. His foot caught the edge of the doorway, and he fell clumsily to the floor.

"Kevin, are . . ." The social worker reached out to him.

The boy was breathing heavily. He blushed, sprang to his feet, and ran crying from the room. "Sorry. Sorry." His words echoed down the hall as he rushed back to his division.

The Mastrowskis listened to the apologies from the social worker. They were clear about their decision. "We can't take a boy like that into our home. If you have boys that aren't defective, give us a call."

Kevin's accidental fall had saved him from a placement with unfeeling and self-centered people. He was not aware of his good fortune. The entire plan was a tragic mistake. It took months for him to recover from the trauma. There had been visits following this with staff and volunteers, but no other efforts had been made to find him a more permanent placement outside the institution. No one at Dunhill laughed when they listened to a fellow member of the staff recount Kevin's meeting with foster parents. Kevin rarely talked about that day.

The administration's reservations were understandable. Freilick, however, took solace in the fact that they had never met this family, as he had, and that their fears were based on other situations where families did not follow through with a proposed involvement with their children. The Korbs appeared to be strong enough to follow through. At least, Freilick was convinced they were.

The phone rang, and Ann, Freilick's secretary, sounded jovial. "Marty, are you sleeping?" Ann had been at Dunhill for two years before Freilick had arrived. She was young, attractive, bright, and sometimes overly efficient. She would nag a little for overdue paperwork, but she used humor to prod lagging staff. It worked well for her. She was well-liked by the staff. It also worked well for her recent marriage. Her work at the institution was her first job after high school, and it helped to supplement

her husband's college tuition costs. One of her favorite themes was that her husband would buy Dunhill once he finished college and found an executive job. She threatened to convert Dunhill into a restaurant. She always added, "Hirsch can hand out toothpicks to the customers."

"Wrong, Ann. I'm not sleeping. I'm reading a dirty book and sipping scotch. Care for a drink?"

"I'll skip the drink, but I'm glad you're having a normal day. I hate to break the routine, but you have a call from Mrs. Grayson. She'd like to visit her son next Sunday."

"Ok. Any calls from the Korbs?"

"Not a sound. Not since they called to say that they were leaving."

"Thanks." Freilick talked with Mrs. Grayson and made the arrangements for her visit. He was thankful for the diversion from the day's obsession.

The phone rang again. Ann announced the arrival of the Korbs. Freilick rushed to greet them.

"Mr. Wolf, what shirt should I wear?" Kevin's hand was trembling, and he bit his lower lip.

Wolf smiled and understood the boy's anxiety. The youngster had not slept well for the last few nights, ever since Webb had told him that his family would be visiting.

"Come on, Mr. Wolf, what do you think? The brown one or the green one?"

"Kev, the brown one looks great. Wear that one."

"Ok." Kevin began to put on the shirt. "What do I say, Mr. Wolf? I mean, what do I, what do people say to parents when they meet them?"

"Didn't you and Mr. Webb talk about that?" The child care worker wanted to be sure not to tell Kevin something which would contradict the social worker even though his protective instincts made him want to say volumes to the boy.

"He told me to say what I want to and to do what I want to." He finished buttoning his shirt.

"Makes sense to me, Kev." The phone rang in Maxwell. Wolf answered and grunted a positive reply. Putting back the receiver, he smiled at Kevin. "Well, Kev, you have some visitors. Mr. Webb wants to see you now."

Kevin felt a knot in his stomach. He held his hands together and then crossed his arms across his chest to stop his trembling. "Ok. See you later." His eyes watered.

Wolf put his hand on Kevin's shoulder. "Don't worry, Kev. Everything's going to be all right. Remember that both of your social workers will be with you. You don't have to worry about a thing." He paused, and he could feel himself choking with emotion as he said, "I'm really happy for you, Kev. We're all happy for you. It doesn't matter what happens. Today is a big day for you." He added, "You'd better get going. They're waiting for you."

Kevin shook the child care worker's hand and rather solemnly said, "Thanks." He walked stiffly from the division toward Webb's office.

Wolf went into the recreation room to supervise the other boys. He cleared his throat and called to the boys to keep down the noise. They were not unusually unruly, but Wolf was particularly on edge. The entire issue of Kevin's being re-involved with his family seemed a dangerous venture. Parents were often an inconvenience at best to child care workers, and Wolf looked at his job as helping children who had been damaged by parents. He felt that he had to re-build after parents had destroyed. His advocacy on a child's behalf too often ignored the importance of a child's family in the life of that youngster. In Kevin's case, his opposition was particularly strong, but he was willing to try anything to help the child. He sensed Kevin's basic need for identity, security, and family ties. He hoped the social workers were not involving Kevin and his seemingly inept, rejecting parents merely for the sake of a successful family treatment program but rather for the child's best interests. Wolf had serious questions about what was happening in this case. Both Webb and Freilick had tried to explain the pro-

gram's intent in Kevin's situation and the history of the Korb family as they understood it. Wolf was convinced, however, that his reservations would lessen only as progress was seen.

Another child care worker saw Wolf returning to the recreation room and heard him quiet the boys. "Jim, it's incredible. Kevin's really going to see his parents."

Wolf nodded. "Yeh, incredible. Too incredible. It's my gut. It hurts when things are no good, and my gut's killing me right now."

Betty and Bob Korb sat in Freilick's office looking at him with intense interest as he talked in general about Dunhill's history. The information was not very stimulating, and he shared it in order to calm them - or himself; he was not quite sure. The small talk, however, quickly led to the immediate business. Freilick explained that Kevin would be quite nervous and that the purpose of today's visit would be merely introductory. He actually said, "Merely introductory." After all those long years, "Merely." He understood the irony in the word.

Webb called on the phone. "Marty, we're ready when you are. How are the Korbs?"

"Ok, Brian. We'll see you in a minute." He looked at the anxious parents. "Kevin and Mr. Webb, the social worker I told you about, will be right down."

After a knock on the door, Kevin entered with Webb. The boy fixed his eyes on Freilick. His mother smiled and tightly gripped the edge of her chair. His father looked from the boy to his wife, not finding the words to introduce himself. Webb immediately introduced himself to the parents, and Freilick introduced Kevin. The boy glanced furtively at his parents as he sat down.

Betty stared at her son. "You look just fine. How are you, Kevin?"

Kevin began to reply but stopped when he had to clear his throat. He was able to say, "I'm fine." He restlessly smoothed his hair and moved uneasily in the chair.

This was followed by silence. The initial encounter was uneasy and tense. No one really knew what to say.

Freilick thought that should be put into words. He looked at Betty and said, "It's been so many years that it must be difficult to know what to say to Kevin. Sometimes people can think of a million things that must be said, but when the time comes, all those ideas go away."

She looked at her son and spoke forcefully more out of anxiety than intentional emphasis. "Kevin, we tried to find out where you were, and we didn't know we could come to see you when we did know where you were. At least, not until Mr. Freilick here told us." She paused to collect her thoughts. They raced through her mind. "I, your father and me, never wanted you to be taken away from us in the beginning." She took her eyes from Kevin and looked out the window. Betty continued. "It must have been rough, but it's been hard for us, too." She looked at the family therapist for help.

He said calmly, "Kevin, your mother's finding it difficult to say how she feels. There's plenty of time for all of us to understand what's happened over the years."

Bob looked at his son and said, "We're really happy to see you."

Betty commented, "He sure has grown."

The boy had a large envelope he had been toying with during his mother's attempt to explain herself.

Webb asked Kevin, "Is there something you'd like to share with your parents?"

Kevin quickly took from the envelope a series of report cards and several certificates he had won in the recreation program. "These are things I've won for swimming and stuff at Dunhill." He shyly handed them to his mother.

The rest of the session went rather smoothly, but the tension for everyone was extremely high. Both child and parents were clearly uneasy. Webb talked about how Kevin's behavior and schooling had appreciably improved over the years and that at the present time he was doing quite well. Freilick directed his comments to the family situation. Both parents talked about Kevin's siblings who waited in the Home's living room with a

child care worker. When the tension seemed to lessen somewhat, Freilick asked if everyone would like to have lunch in a local park. "We've arranged a picnic. Kevin, you can meet some very happy children who have been waiting to meet you for some time."

Webb asked Kevin, "How about meeting those kids?"

Kevin looked at him wide-eyed. "Heck, yes. Let's go."

The children were all smiles and curiosity when they met their oldest brother. Kevin immediately began to play with them when they arrived at the park. The lunch was filled with loud laughter and fun. Much of the tension found release in active play, and a return to Dunhill found the swings and recreation area practically monopolized by the Korbs. Both the family and Kevin avoided asking questions about the past. They all ran about the ground, throwing balls, playing tag, and enjoying the present.

Kevin then took his family on a tour. One of the boys from Maxwell asked him, "Who're these people, Kev?"

Kevin replied with pride, "My family! These people are my family."

The Korbs drove away after making arrangements for another visit to Dunhill. Kevin ran to his division. The social workers staggered to Freilick's office.

There had been no relaxation for the two of them during the visit. They had listened carefully to each word exchanged. Each facial expression and each move had been carefully observed.

Webb said, "Kevin really handled himself well. I think it all went smoothly."

Freilick loosened his tie and deeply sighed. His hands were shaking, and he held them out to Webb. "Damn, I'm still tense, but I'm amazed, too. I didn't know what to expect. Thank God, that's over." Kevin's record was still on his desk. He skimmed through it. "Now the real work begins. We've opened the door for better or worse, Brian. Now we have to walk in to sort through the garbage that's accumulated for years. It's too late to turn around now."

Webb replied, "I think it'll work. I do. His parents want it to, and so does Kevin." He asked Freilick for a match and lit a cigarette.

"Agreed, Brian. I feel it. It'll work."

Webb stretched his stiff legs, and he casually brushed ashes from Freilick's desk. "This place is a mess. Got the time to stop for a drink?"

"Hell, yes. Let's get out of here." Freilick left his notes and records on his desk commenting, "This can all wait until tomorrow."

The drive into town was filled with a discussion of the day's events. The social workers' energies had been drained, but they were caught up in the excitement of the family meeting.

Freilick smirked sarcastically as they walked into the bar. "You really chose a sleazy place for a couple of sharp guys to unwind."

"What do you mean? It's the only place I know that would serve you." Webb laughed and waved to the bartender. "Two beers, Mike."

Freilick drank quickly and ordered another. The older social worker drank slowly.

"Mike, give me a pack of cigarettes, please."

He handed Webb the cigarettes. "You've got 'em. Brian, you look beat."

"You're observant. Working with this guy is enough to wear out an elephant. Let me introduce Marty Freilick."

The bartender shook Freilick's hand. "You work with the kids?"

"And their parents."

"Rough work, I bet. Old Brian here is a good man. That place is lucky to have him."

"You're right there, Mike," Freilick said. The bartender wandered to the other end of the bar to take an order from another customer. Freilick asked his colleague, "Brian, you've been at Dunhill for more than a year. What do you honestly think of the place?"

Webb shrugged his shoulders. "It has its good and bad points. Most good, I guess. I'll stay here until something

better comes along. But who could leave if we always had days like today?" He asked the bartender for a match. "The place almost becomes your second, no, your first home. I'll probably start looking around in a year or two. Don't get me wrong. It's not that I don't like what I do. I love it, but it gets pretty confining."

Freilick emptied his pipe into the ashtray and nodded. "I know what you mean. I get to go out to families and other agencies. Working inside the institution all the time would probably drive me nuts after awhile."

Webb shouted to Mike, "Two more beers."

"You got 'em."

Staring at the beer, Webb said, "By the way, Marty, you're doing one hell of a good job with the Korbs."

"Thanks." Freilick felt embarrassed. "We'll see what happens now."

"God, I hope it works out. For Kevin's sake, it had better."

"At least he's seen them, Brian. Even that's something he didn't have before today."

Webb ordered pretzels. "You're right about that. He knows now that he's not alone."

"Something else happened today, Brian. I really felt like I had a shot of adrenalin. Things started to happen. Right now I feel lucky to work at Dunhill."

"Hell, it's not that good."

Freilick smiled. "I know it's not perfect, but there's a dynamism in Dunhill."

"Staying here forever, Marty?"

"I doubt it. But it's a good place to try out some ideas, like some different kinds of family treatment. The profession has pretty much accepted family treatment."

"Not everybody at Dunhill," Webb said.

"They will when they see what it does for the kids."

"Impatient little bastard, aren't you?"

"Yeh, I guess I am."

Webb looked across the bar at the clock. "So is my wife. I'd better get going." He finished his drink. "Come on, I'll drive you back to your car."

Freilick was still excited as he drove home. Kevin's introduction to his family had been accomplished. His re-involvement would now begin. The social worker was surprised at the relative ease of the meeting. Although there was a nervous tension and a lack of expressed, strong emotion, there was a sense of trust expressed by Kevin and his family in Webb and himself. The feeling was so strong that Freilick thought he could almost touch it. He thought of Mr. and Mrs. Korb as they were about to leave. They shook hands with everyone and thanked them for everything. They looked at Kevin, and his mother said, "We'll see you in a couple of weeks, son." The word "son" was said with warmth, gratitude, and a smile. Kevin's reaction was filled with a confused happiness. He was no longer alone.

Freilick's apartment was located in a new building complex. It was dark when he placed his briefcase on the hall table. He fumbled at the wall switch, and he began to make coffee in the small kitchen.

His wife, Julie, appeared rubbing the sleep from her eyes. Her red hair was rather disheveled, and her trim figure showed through her housecoat.

"I'm sorry, Julie. I tried to be quiet."

She kissed him warmly. "I was waiting for you."

"You look like it."

"What do you mean? This is my new formal gown. I dressed up for you. Sexy?" She pulled her housecoat around her and mocked a pose.

"Want some coffee?"

"Meany!" she teased.

"The hell with the coffee. I'm too tired to lift the cup anyway."

His wife looked at him coyly. "Too tired to lift me?" She noticed her husband's weary smile. "Marty, a bad day?"

"No, no, not at all, Julie. Not bad, just draining." He smiled at her. Freilick put his arms around his wife. "We're lucky, Julie. God, I look at those kids at work, and I realize how lucky we are."

The next visit to Dunhill was made only by Betty and

Bob Korb. Freilick and Webb had felt that it would be best for Kevin to have the opportunity to spend time solely with his parents without the distraction of his brothers and sisters who might take away from the chance to deal with long latent feelings of doubt and guilt.

The second meeting was an awkward session spent dealing with the painless areas of information sharing and storytelling. As the meeting progressed, however, the unavoidable confrontation seemed to become inevitable.

While Mrs. Korb talked about how well her other children were doing in an arts and crafts program at their church, Kevin felt tension building. Finally, he interrupted his mother. He said in a near whisper, "I'm wondering about something."

Betty glanced at Freilick and then looked at her son. "What's that, Kevin?"

The boy shifted in his chair and stared at a photograph of his family which his parents had brought him. His words came with difficulty. "Well, I've, I've been wondering why I'm here."

Both parents looked apprehensive. They clearly needed help in responding to their son.

Freilick said, "Kev, do you remember what it was like when you first came here?"

The boy answered quickly, "Sure. We didn't have much to do here then."

The family therapist grinned. "Maybe, but that's not what I meant. I mean, do you remember the problems you had when you first came to Dunhill?"

Kevin hesitated and stared, again, at the picture. There was a long silence while Kevin seemed to search for words. Then he spoke slowly. "Yeh, I guess, I couldn't get along with anybody." He looked at his parents and said forcefully, "I can now, though."

Freilick noted, "You sure can, Kev. You've changed a lot over the years. Before you came here, you were in foster homes. Were there problems there, too?"

"Mr. Webb and me, we've been talking about them."

He looked sullen and said softly, "I wonder." After mustering more courage, he added, "I wonder why they gave me away."

"Who, Kev?" asked Freilick.

"Them." He pointed to his parents.

Bob looked squarely at Kevin and said, "We didn't give you away, son. Your mother and me had some real bad problems back then, and we had trouble taking care of ourselves, not only you." It obviously was difficult for Bob to continue, but he persisted. Shifting in his seat, he added, "We were taken to court by the people in Seton County, and they sent you to a foster home. I guess we did some wrong things, but we've been trying to make it up. It's been pretty rough on you, I know." He shook his head and looked at his wife. "Betty, you tell him."

She butted out her cigarette and nearly whispered, "We love you, Kevin." Betty reached out to her son and put her hand on his shoulder. This was the first time since their re-introduction that they had touched.

Kevin stiffened at the touch. "Mr. Webb told me not to rush things." He looked at Freilick and wiped tears from his eyes with his sleeve. "He told me it'd take time to understand."

Freilick felt a rush of emotion, and he said, "Kev, do you understand what your parents are trying to say?"

The youngster looked at the floor and said almost inaudibly, "I think so." A tear fell from his cheek. "They love me."

"Don't cry, son." There were tears in Betty's eyes.

Bob said, "I think I understand, Kevin. I feel the same way."

Kevin looked surprised as he raised his head. He smiled slightly and wiped away a tear with the back of his hand. He took the photograph from the table, looked at it, and commented, "Look at my family, Mr. Freilick."

Following this second meeting, there were reports of more independence shown by Kevin. He was beginning to assert himself. The staff was pleased, still very cau-

tious, but pleased. The boy was showing signs of real maturity in the program. He was no longer the seriously disturbed child who had come to Dunhill years before.

Kevin bounced a ball off the wall behind Maxwell, and he thought about how he had handled himself during the day. "Mr. Webb tells me to take it a day at a time. Today was pretty good. School was ok. Work was ok. I acted ok in the division. I guess I'm ok."

"Hey Dummy, what ya doin'?"

Kevin recognized Phil Daniels sauntering across the grass. Phil's tantrums had subsided over the previous month or two, but he had a "tough guy" attitude that invariably got him into trouble.

"Bet ya can't throw that as good as me, Dummy." Phil spit out the words.

"Bug off, Phil. I'm busy. Besides, you're supposed to be in your own division." Annoyed, he squeezed the ball.

"I can be where I wants. I wants to be here."

Kevin tossed the ball against the wall and caught it on the rebound. "Wise up, Phil."

"Wise up yourself, Dummy."

"Watch your mouth."

Jim Wolf was observing the boys from the doorway. Kevin's usual response to this kind of provocation once had been to run in fear. As he grew more confident, the youngster began impulsively to engage in fairly violent fights. He had been better able to handle himself lately. Wolf was interested in how he would handle Phil. The child care worker resisted the impulse to intervene.

"Hey, Dummy, I wants the ball." The younger boy shoved Kevin aside and grabbed the ball as it rolled on the ground. Phil ran across the lawn, and Kevin was after him.

It took little effort for Kevin to catch him. He tackled him, and both boys rolled over each other on the grass. "Give me the ball, Phil, or you're gonna get hurt," Kevin shouted.

As Kevin wrestled the ball away, Phil began to shout and scream. Kevin lay across him as the boy flailed at

him. "Call me 'dummy' now, Phil. Go ahead, call me names."

Both boys were flushed and wet from rolling on the lawn as Wolf approached. He shouted to Kevin, "Don't hurt him. He's smaller than you."

"I won't if he'd cut out swinging his arms."

Wolf helped Kevin off the other boy. Phil seemed furious, but he was out of breath and too tired to continue fighting. The child care worker said sternly, "What did you get out of that, Phil? It doesn't help to push people around."

Kevin sat on the ground to catch his breath. He said, "Especially people like me."

Wolf sat next to the two youngsters. "What do you mean, Kev?"

"Hey, Mr. Wolf, you've got a bad memory. I used to do stuff like Phil. Remember?"

The worker nodded. "So?"

"So, I know what it's like, and I know how to handle it." He stood and brushed the wet grass from his jacket.

Phil leaned back on the grass and looked puzzled. He asked, "You know? You do, Kev?"

"For me I do." Kevin picked up the ball. "Come on, Phil. Let's throw the ball."

"I can show you something, Kev."

Wolf laughed as the two shouting boys ran toward the basketball court. "The kid never would have been able to handle that a year or two ago. Hell, he probably couldn't a few months ago."

Phil and Kevin sat down on the court after playing basketball for a few minutes. They watched Wolf walking toward the building. He glanced at them as he walked away, and they both waved.

"He's tough," said Phil.

"He's ok," responded Kevin.

Phil rolled off the court to the lawn and propped up his head with his hands. "My old man's tough. He picked me up and threw me across the room once."

"Man! Across the room?"

"Yep. He always does stuff like that."

Kevin thought for a moment and looked off into the distance. "I had a foster father once who told me he'd burn my hands."

"Yeh? How come?"

"Matches. I was playing with some matches."

"What'd you do?"

"Burned some leaves in their yard. Wasn't much."

"Did ya think he'd burn your hands?"

"Uh huh. He burned my foot once with his cigarette because I kicked him when I was mad." He bit his lower lip.

"What'd you do when he did it to ya?"

"Cried. I cried a lot there. I never thought about it until now." Kevin pulled a few blades of grass and threw them into the air one at a time. "I wanted to burn the house down. I hated it." He paused and turned away from Phil. "Scares me to think about it."

"Nothin' scares me," said Phil. "Someday I'll throw my old man across the room"

The administration continued to advise caution regarding Kevin's re-involvement with his family, but it was satisfied with the progress to this point. Seton County's Child Welfare still wished Dunhill luck. Brian Webb continued to see Kevin on a regular basis to help with his adjustment to having a family. It was all very confusing for Kevin. His acceptance and understanding came slowly, but it did come. Letters and telephone calls were exchanged regularly between Kevin and his family. Things seemed to be moving with slow, anticipated progress and improvement.

The first visit Kevin made to his parents' home was indicative of the trust he had placed in Freilick, not in the man as an individual, but rather in him as a staff member of Dunhill Home for Children.

"I'm ready, Mr. Freilick." Kevin stood in the doorway with a suitcase in his hand. The expression on his face was a mixture of fear, anxiety and anticipation. He had talked of nothing else for days but this first visit home.

The boy had been hurt before. The memory of foster parents deciding not to take him had left deep scars. He feared more rejection.

"Kev, what's in the suitcase? We're only going to Millersville for the afternoon."

"Oh, I bought some gifts for the kids."

"Your brothers and sisters?"

"Yeh, for the kids, and I got something for my father and mother, too." He lifted the suitcase to the desk and sat in the chair next to Freilick.

"Want to show me what you bought for your family?"

Kevin grinned broadly and opened the suitcase. "This is for the kids. I got two different games."

"Great, Kev. They'll like those. What else?"

The boy proudly unfolded a towel and held it out for inspection. "This is for my parents. I bought it in town yesterday. It's got this horse on it."

"Say, they'll like that a lot." Freilick smiled at the large, galloping, pink horse on the towel and Kevin's pride in his purchase. "The sparkling glitter on the horse is a nice touch."

"Yeh, I thought so, too." The boy carefully folded the towel and gingerly put it back with the games in the suitcase. He asked, "How far is Millersville?"

"A little more than one hundred miles. It should take us about two hours to get there."

"Wow, that's a heck of a drive. I went camping once with Mr. Wolf. I wonder if we went farther than that? Bet this will be more fun. I hope it will, anyway."

"Nervous?"

"I guess so." He placed his suitcase back on the floor.

"What are we waiting for?"

"Ready?"

"Oh man, I've been waiting for a long time." He picked up the suitcase.

"You sure have." Freilick took his coat and said, "If you're ready, so am I. We've got some people waiting for us in Millersville. Let's go."

Kevin talked little during the first thirty or forty miles;

but as they came closer to Millersville, he began asking questions. The youngster had brought a road map his teacher had given him. Each town they passed he would carefully check with a pencil.

"How much farther, Mr. Freilick?"

Freilick answered, "About fifty miles, Kev."

"What do my brothers and sisters do all day?" He looked at the houses speed by them.

"About the same things you do. They go to school. Freddie and Charlie play at home. There's a playground down the street from your house, and they all play there sometimes."

"What'll I do when I visit there?"

"What do you think?"

"I guess, whatever I feel like doing. Mr. Webb told me not to worry, that it'd be ok if I was just myself. Will it? I mean, I hope it will."

"It will, Kev. It's a little scary now, but when it's over, you'll wonder why you were so worried."

"Yeh, like when I first met my parents. Boy, was I ever scared. I felt like I was gonna fall over or something. Afterwards I felt good. I was still nervous, you know, but it was ok." He looked at his map and asked, "How many miles is it now?"

Freilick laughed. "About forty-eight, two or three less than the last time you asked me."

Kevin seemed more relaxed and quietly excited during the rest of the ride.

The youngster looked wide-eyed at his family's home as Freilick parked his car in the driveway. He said excitedly, "Man, it's big."

"Not as big as you're used to, but it's a good-size house." He noticed the Korb children looking out the kitchen window. "Looks like some little people are waiting for you, Kev."

The boy jumped from the car and headed for the house. His parents warmly greeted him at the door. Betty smiled broadly and said, "Hi, son. How are you? It's sure good to see you."

"Come on in, Kevin." Bob shook Kevin's hand and called to the social worker, "Come on, Mr. Freilick."

Freilick took the suitcase from the car and hurried to join Kevin and the family inside. Kevin excitedly followed his equally excited brothers and sisters as they took him on a tour of the house. Betty had prepared lunch for everyone, and Kevin ate like he had not been fed in days. "Mr. Freilick didn't stop for lunch," he explained.

The visit went well for him and his family. His fear of not knowing what to do was needless. The other children kept him quite busy playing and having fun. The surprise of the gifts Kevin had brought with him had been a highlight of the visit. Kevin beamed as his family thanked him for his thoughtfulness.

The purpose of the day's excursion was to expose Kevin to his family at home. He had experienced what to him had always been a fantasy. As he and the family therapist drove away, he waved to his family until they were out of sight.

His eyes danced as he talked on the way back to Dunhill until the excitement and the emotional drain of the day finally caught up with him. Kevin slept for the last hour of the ride. As Freilick parked the car next to Maxwell's entrance, however, Kevin ran like a flash to share the story of the day's adventure with the staff and the other boys. He knew that his family was real, and he had actually visited them. Like all the other boys, Kevin had gone home for a visit.

CHAPTER SIX



SCREAMS FILLED THE NIGHT with a chill of horror. "Oh God, no! No! No! Ahhh! Leave me alone!" Betty woke with a start. She was pale and shaking. Her body was wet with perspiration.

Bob came running from the living room. "Betty, Betty, what is it? Are you all right?" He rushed to the side of the bed.

"Another nightmare, Bob. Oh my God, it was terrible." She cried, and Bob held her. He stroked her long, black hair. She trembled as she wept.

"It's ok now, Betty. It's ok now. Calm down. It was only a dream."

"I remembered terrible things. Horrible. They seemed so real. They couldn't have happened, but they were so real."

"It's ok. It was only a dream."

She spoke rapidly and desperately. "I was holding a baby. I think it was Kevin. I don't know, but I think it was. I was holding him by one of his legs, one of his little legs. I'd let him fall on the bed. He kept falling closer and closer to the edge of the bed. He'd scream and cry and turn blue, but I'd keep doing it. And I was laughing. I could hear my father laughing, too. I didn't want to laugh, but I couldn't stop. How could I, Bob? How could I do that to a baby?" She was shaking with terror, and she held tightly to her husband.

Bob tried to remain calm. He spoke deliberately. "You didn't do that to him, and you know you didn't. Don't even say those things. You know they're not true. You're a good mother, and don't even think things like that ever happened." He held Betty in his arms until she began to relax. "It was only a nightmare. Forget it now, and get some sleep. Just remember, it was only a nightmare. None of it was real. Ok?"

She was badly shaken, but she managed a tentative smile for her husband. "Ok. It's ok now."

Bob pulled the blanket around his wife, kissed her, and quietly left the bedroom after telling her that he'd go to bed in a few minutes. He worried about his wife. It was difficult for him to understand what was happening. She had seemed happier since Kevin had reentered their lives, but her nightmares had become more serious. They had come more often than in the past. He knew something was wrong. Bob thought about her description of the nightmare, and he felt a chill go up his spine. Mr. Gorski's mocking laughter was no mystery. He was a constant threat. Bob knew what it was like before Kevin had been taken from them by Rogers, and he was frightened.

Bob awoke at dawn to find himself in the living room. The house was quiet and chilly. He rubbed his eyes and stretched his arms. He thought of the disturbing night before. Bob looked toward the stairs leading to the bedroom. He walked stiffly to the kitchen to make coffee. His muscles were sore from sleeping in the chair all night.

Betty smiled as she heard her husband in the kitchen. She whispered to herself, "Listen to him. He's trying to be quiet. Doesn't want to wake me, but what a racket." She sat up in bed and looked out the window. Seeing the snow falling lightly, she took her robe and slipped it on. Betty clearly remembered the nightmare, but she curiously felt in good spirits this morning.

Betty and Bob spoke with each other only in passing as the day passed. Betty sensed an aloofness on her husband's part, but she felt it best not to push him about

what was bothering him. She knew that it would pass or that he would eventually talk with her about it.

The two youngest children were quietly playing in their bedroom, and the other children were in school. Betty was in the basement washing clothes. It was Bob's day off. He sat in the living room reading a sports magazine. Bob was troubled, and he looked up from the magazine and stared at the wall. So much had happened during the last few months. Kevin's re-emergence had brought new joy to his family, but it also had brought back old memories and had created new doubts. Could he and Betty handle not only the new responsibilities but also the unsettling memories that tenaciously refused to die? Kevin didn't have the problems he did when he was younger, but had they really become strong enough to cope with him and with their own feelings? Had all the old problems really gone away? He was not sure that it would all work out. Betty's nightmares concerned him. They were exaggerations of what it had been like, but they were not entirely fictitious. It had not just been Kevin's behavior that had caused the child's maltreatment. Their marriage had been filled with stress. His father-in-law's phone calls had been unsettling. Betty had not been emotionally stable. The slightest thing would set her off. But what troubled him the most was his recognition of the fact that he too played a major role in the problems they had suffered through at the time. He had to talk about it with his wife. Bob was not sure that Kevin should become part of their life again. He was plagued with self-doubt.

Betty came into the living room with a basket of clean clothes. She was slightly out of breath, and she said to her husband, "We're going to have to get a new washer some day. Sounds like it's about to die."

Bob did not respond. She busied herself by folding the clothes. Finally, not being able to avoid bringing up his fears, he said, "Betty, we've got to talk."

She sounded relieved. "I didn't know how long it'd take you, Bob, but it's about time. Something's been bothering you all morning. What is it?"

"Me. I've been thinking about Kevin and us. Maybe it'd be better if I'd move out."

Betty was shocked. She sat on the edge of the couch next to her husband. "Move out? Why? What are you saying?"

"I've been thinking that maybe it'd be better if I did. I've been remembering what it was like before Kevin left, and, well, I think I was the real problem. It's just that I don't want it to happen again. That's all." He avoided looking at Betty, and he made an effort not to cry. Bob rarely showed his emotions. He now felt confused and powerful feelings welling up inside him.

Betty moved closer to him and spoke slowly. "Bob, I've been thinking a lot, too. You've got it all wrong. You didn't cause what went wrong back then. Nobody did. It just happened. It won't do us no good to blame anybody. You've got to understand that what's past is past." She held on to his arm and said forcefully, "Don't even talk about leaving us, Bob. That's crazy talk. I don't want to hear it."

Bob cleared his throat and looked at her. "It's been so terrible all these years, Betty, so God-damned rotten seeing you eaten up with worry and all those memories. All those nights we couldn't sleep after Rogers had taken Kevin. Afterwards, it was just that we didn't talk about it. The hurt didn't go away. It was under my skin. It didn't show, but it was always there. It ate at me and ate at me until sometimes I wanted to yell and scream and throw things. Then we found out about Kevin, and things began to change a little. But inside I'm afraid. Betty, I'm so damned afraid that things won't work out. I don't know why, but I am."

Betty said firmly, "They will, Bob. Things'll work. We've got a son who is healthy and doing good at the institution. The people up there at Dunhill are real cooperative. They'll help us and Kevin. It'll all work out ok. I believe that."

Bob smiled slightly and took his wife's hand. "I want it to. I really do. You know that."

The doorbell's buzzing startled both of them. Betty stood quickly. "I'll get it. Probably some salesman."

She opened the door to see a young, smartly-dressed woman carrying a small, brown briefcase and a notebook.

The visitor smiled at Betty and asked, "Mrs. Korb? Mrs. Betty Korb?"

She wanted to dispatch the visitor quickly. "Yes, that's me. I'm busy now. What can I do for you?"

"I'm sorry to bother you. My name is Margaret Brown. I'm from the Millersville Children's Aid Society. May I talk with you for a minute?"

Betty was puzzled. "Children's Aid? What do you want?"

"We've had a call that you might need our services, and I'd like to see if we can help you in any way." The caseworker was pleasant enough, but she left no doubt that she planned to come in to talk.

"Who is it, Betty?" Bob had heard the caseworker.

"Some lady from Children's Aid. Somebody called her." Betty was frightened. In Millersville, Children's Aid provided the same services as Child Welfare in Seton County.

Bob came to the door, and the caseworker introduced herself to him. She added, "There's been a complaint about the care of your children. I have to talk about it with you. May I come in?"

Bob was shocked. He glanced at his wife and saw her frightened stare. Stammering, he admitted the caseworker and asked her to be seated in the living room. "What, what's this all about? We didn't do anything."

Betty trembled as she asked, "Who called you? What's the complaint?"

Brown had worked full-time at Children's Aid for more than one year. She studied at night for her master's degree in counselling and found her work both exciting and gratifying. Her enthusiasm made her popular with her colleagues. Her clients more often than not responded positively to her sincerity. She brought a fresh,

lively attitude with her when she met clients. Brown saw herself as a helper, not an investigator. Most of her clients could sense her concern, and this helped them through some very difficult times. Brown's busy schedule still allowed time for political involvement with a state lobbying group concerned with conservation, and she somehow found time to engage in outdoor sports with the same excitement she brought to her work.

She brushed aside her brown hair and smiled at the frightened couple she had come to visit. She could sense the tension her arrival had caused. Brown sounded almost apologetic. "First, let me assure you that I'm not accusing you of anything. There was a call from an anonymous person, and we have to check it out. Can you understand that?"

The Korbs nodded and asked for the details of the complaint. The caseworker slowly described the call which alleged that the Korb children were being regularly left alone at night, that they were inadequately fed, and that their parents were constantly screaming at them because they were unable to control the youngsters. The parents listened in disbelief. Anger grew with each additional piece of information.

"All I can say to you, lady, is that this is nothing but a pack of lies, damned lies." Bob stood and shouted, "You can get out of my house. I don't want to hear any more." He shook with fear and anger as his eye began to twitch.

Brown remained calm. She looked at Bob and responded, "Mr. Korb, please sit down. Please." Bob sat next to Betty and mumbled to himself. The caseworker continued, "I'm not charging you with anything. Please understand that. I merely have to talk with you about this. Would you rather that I had kept this complaint a secret from you? Don't you think you have a right to know about the call?"

Betty agreed that it was better that they know about the complaint. After talking with Brown for a few minutes, the parents sensed that the caseworker was there not to accuse but rather to help. The immediate fear of

another Seton County investigation lessened. As the discussion went on, they felt that they could trust this caseworker, and they described their reasons for their original show of hostility. They found it comfortable to share their apprehension and ambiguity when faced with Kevin's re-introduction and their fear of the past which still haunted them. Betty half-smiled as she lit a cigarette. "It's funny. We never talked about this with a stranger."

"I admire you for being able to talk with me about this. It's been terribly difficult for you."

"Sure has," Bob said.

Brown listened attentively. She had seen enough to develop an ability to tell when clients were lying. The Korbs impressed her with their openness and sincerity. She felt that the initial complaint was groundless. Brown, however, sensed that there was stress in the home which could easily lead to future problems. She offered her services to them.

Bob hesitated. "You seem like somebody we could talk to, but we already have a social worker at our son's institution."

Betty disagreed. She said, "Mr. Freilick can only get down here once a month or so, and, well, we need somebody to talk to about things. But we don't want any trouble."

Betty was concerned about her earlier conversation with Bob, and her recurrent nightmares worried her as much as they did Bob. The caseworker seemed concerned, and they both felt that they could talk with her. Bob's hesitancy was less an inability to face the reality of their problems than a fear of history repeating itself. He, therefore, found it difficult to accept Brown's offer of help. Counselling in the past had meant disaster. Caseworkers, at the very least, had meant interference. He felt that social agencies had used gestapo tactics which had led the family to seek fantasy rather than reality and social isolation rather than openness. Dunhill, however, was a social agency, and both Webb and Freilick were

social workers who had been accepted by Bob and his family. These ambiguous feelings surged through him as he debated whether or not to accept the offered help.

Bob looked at his wife and spoke clearly and emphatically. "Ok, Betty, I'll go along with this." He looked at Brown and pointed his finger at her as if to lend emphasis to what he was saying or to make a point. "Betty and me, we both need some help. There's no doubt about it. But I don't know if we'll get into this counselling too much. Don't get me wrong, I don't want to insult you, but we never met you before. Besides, we don't have too much money."

Brown shook her head and answered, "All I'm offering is counselling for you and your wife, not a lifetime subscription to dance lessons. We're not going to charge you anything. I can understand your hesitancy, though. I'm sure you don't fully trust me, and I don't blame you. How could you? You've just met me. I know it's not easy to accept help for difficult problems. I understand that. All I'm saying is that if both of you feel that I might be of any help in any way, I'm available. We've already been able to talk. Maybe we can continue what we've begun today." She laughed and added, "Let's not make this mountain bigger than it is. I won't force you into anything."

They liked her forthrightness, and they made an appointment to see the caseworker in her office the following week. What had begun as the greeting of a feared visitor promised to become an involvement with a helping friend.

Their relationship grew. For the next several months, the Korbs saw Brown weekly. They had begun to explore seriously their problems with someone they knew they could trust.

The knowledge of Brown's involvement had initially startled Freilick. The caseworker, however, became an asset without which his work with the Korbs would have been most difficult. Not everything went smoothly and

without incident even with the local Children's Aid caseworker, who could lend support to the family he could not see weekly because of their distance from Dunhill. Brown soon restored Freilick's faith in public agencies. She put her clients first.

Brown and Freilick occasionally saw the Korbs together. It was after one such meeting that they stopped at a local diner for lunch.

Freilick ordered a sandwich. He looked at Brown and said, "No lunch today?"

"I'm on my weekly diet. It seems that even air and water make me gain weight."

"Come on, Marg. Thin people always use a line like that. It's calculated to make them seem humble."

"No, I mean it. It's true. Most people don't know that there are evil calories in oxygen."

"Marg, maybe, if you'd work harder, you'd lose a few . . ."

Brown interrupted, "Work harder? Watch it, Freilick, or you'll wear that sandwich. Nobody works harder than a caseworker in my job."

The waitress brought Brown's diet drink, and Freilick asked for a napkin. He looked at Brown and nodded in agreement. "I can't argue with that." He thought for a moment and added, "You know, when I first heard about you, I wondered if you wore a white or a black hat."

"Decide yet?"

"Definitely white, Marg. Pass the catsup, please."

She handed him the bottle. "I'm not so sure of that, but sometimes I think we're the new cavalry. Kids cry, parents scream, and we are supposed to rush in to save them all."

"That's a problem?" Freilick asked.

"Problem? The problem is there aren't enough soldiers, and the gas for the horses costs too much. No, I think the problem is that we don't even know who the enemy is. The parents who beat up their kids don't wear war paint."

"They're the enemy?"

"Parents? Kids? No, neither. Who knows?"

"Maybe old Pogo had the question, Marg. 'Is us the enemy?'"

"Those of us who don't do anything are. Those who hide in their split-level covered wagons and shake their heads about the other people who have problems. They're the enemy. We might as well give them bows and arrows."

"Marg, you mean all those folks who are just trying to live and let live?"

"You've got it. Those rugged individualists who are the first to point fingers when a kid is hurt by some parent. Can you believe it? Those self-righteous fools who probably know about some kid going through hell but won't let us know about it, are the first ones to shout that somebody should have done something. They bitch about paying for programs with tax dollars. They bitch about what we do or try to do. You know, we can't get funding for training, but we're supposed to do flawless work. Those people burn me up more than abusing parents." She finished her drink. "But even they will see the light someday," she said with a smile.

"All that doom, Marg, and a glimmer of hope?"

"No kidding, Marty. A hundred years ago nobody cared at all. We're beginning to listen. Slowly, maybe, but that's progress."

"I'll drink to that." Freilick and Brown toasted with empty glasses.

CHAPTER SEVEN



"I DON'T CARE WHO SHE IS. She's still nuts. She is." Kevin was not about to accept excuses from Brian Webb. He had been talking with his social worker for more than an hour about feelings for his parents. "I like the kids. They're all right."

"You mean your brothers and sisters?" Webb clarified for emphasis.

The boy frowned. "Yeh, my brothers and sisters." He then added sarcastically, "That lady yells a lot. I think she's nuts."

"That lady? What lady, Kev?" Webb sat back in his chair and lit a cigarette.

"My mother. Who else?" Kevin turned and looked at a picture on the office wall. "That's a neat picture." He played nervously with his hands.

Webb said, "It sure is. It helps to change the subject. What do pictures have to do with mothers?" He leaned closer to the boy.

Kevin looked embarrassed. He brushed hair from his forehead and looked at the door. "Mr. Webb, it's hard. I mean, I don't want to say I don't like my mother. At least, I don't want to. She's nice to me when I see her, but I, I don't know." He was unable to explain his feelings, strong and important feelings, but mysterious ones.

Kevin would think at night about this stranger-woman and stranger-man who suddenly had become his parents.

The staff members told him that his parents had always been out there. As far as he was concerned, they had just materialized like television and dreams. To connect them with reality was difficult at best and impossible at worst. His siblings, however, were children. He had lived with other children for years at Dunhill, and he found them easy to accept. They liked him, and he found that as an older brother he was respected by the other children in his family. This was a new experience for him. It had not been that long since other children had joked about Kevin and had played tricks, cruel tricks, on him all the time. The taunting and mocking had caused pain, pain not easily forgotten. His emotional scars were more serious than the physical ones. They healed less easily. The Korb children never did these things to him. He liked them, and he could accept them without reservations. He could not accept his parents with such ease.

"Kev, if your parents were here right now, what would you like to say to them?"

"I don't know what I'd say. I think it'd depend on what's goin' on at the time. I don't know."

Webb asked, "You're afraid to tell them how you feel?"

"Maybe."

The session continued for another hour without much progress. The social worker and the boy were unable to probe deeply into the long repressed feelings Kevin had covered during his lifetime. The child wanted to have a family so strongly that any angry or hostile feelings threatened this desire. Webb wondered if Kevin would ever be able to express what he really felt. Would he be able to tell himself? Was the youngster afraid that the Korbs would run from him because of fear and guilt? The child had been the victim of outrageous acts of abuse and neglect. Should just the mere passage of years absolve the parents of blame? Could Kevin ever feel anything positive toward his parents? Had those very basic nerves become deadened with each slap, each shout, and, finally, by the years of separation? Would answers even be necessary? Would it not be even more important for

everyone to accept where they found themselves at the moment and to grow from that point? Immersing themselves in old horror stories could obviate any progress toward re-building relationships, but could anyone be expected to forget?

"When do I go home for a visit?" Kevin looked tired.

"How would you like to go home for the next holiday weekend?"

"How would I? You're kidding, Mr. Webb. It'd be great."

These conflicting and powerful feelings were frustrating for both social worker and child. Webb hoped that Kevin was indeed happy over the developing involvement with his family, but Webb knew that the novelty was wearing off. It would have to wear off before Kevin could face squarely the myriad of patchwork feelings he had regarding his family. Webb and Freilick had talked endlessly about this.

Freilick saw Kevin whistling as he walked from Webb's office. The boy waved at him as he headed for Maxwell Division. Freilick stuck his head past the office door and asked Webb, "Have a minute?"

Webb was startled. "Huh? Oh, sure. I didn't know anyone was here."

"Tie loosened and sleeves rolled up. Must have been a heavy session with Kevin."

Webb nodded. "Things are moving slowly, but they're moving. It'll take time." He reached for a pack of cigarettes. "Marty, I'm glad you stopped by. Two problems. First, I need a match."

"Here, keep the pack."

"Second, we've got problems with Allen. This is more difficult than the first problem."

"Slightly," said Freilick as he fell into a chair.

Allen Brokaw was a fourteen year old who had been in Dunhill for six months. He had run away several times during his stay. Dunhill had no locked doors, and a child who constantly ran could be sent back to the court for placement in a more secure institution. When this hap-

pened, there was a general feeling among the staff that they had failed with a youngster.

"He's run again?" asked Freilick.

"About eight this morning. He was supposed to be getting ready for school. One of the child care workers went to get him, and he was missing."

"Any clue as to why he ran this time?"

Webb shook his head and looked disgusted. "I don't know. This is his fourth time. We've tried about everything we can think of, but nothing seems to get through to him. He had a good night, and this morning he seemed to be in a good mood. I don't have any idea why he ran."

"I'll notify his mother, Brian. He ran home the last time. He might go there again. Did you call the police?"

"Yeh. They'll bring him back if they spot him, but I wonder if we should try to keep him. He won't stay here, and we can't lock him up. If he won't stay, we can't help him." Webb looked exhausted.

"Brian, it might help to know that I've been feeling the same way about Allen's parents." Freilick's words came rapidly. "They've been here every week or two for the last two months. I still can't get them to realize that they're not going to help their son by telling him that he has no problems. They still think he's only the victim of brutal policemen who were out to get him. I mean, the kid's been thrown out of two schools, he's been arrested twenty times on minor delinquency charges, and he has a rotten attitude. They don't think he has any problems at all. It doesn't stop there. His mother's been married four times. Each of her husbands has been an alcoholic or a criminal. She has six other kids. Each has been in an institution because of juvenile delinquency, and the family doesn't have any problems. What the hell, maybe I should leave them alone."

Webb stared at the floor and mechanically lit another cigarette. "That won't help anybody, Marty."

Freilick agreed. "I suppose, but will anything?"

Allen's parents had never helped him to adjust to a society in which he would have to exist. Worse, however,

than that neglect was Allen's inability to exist with himself. The tragedy was compounded by the fact that Allen was not completely unique. He was one of the millions of unhappy children who marched out of step.

Children did not usually come to Dunhill because they found themselves in trouble for the first time. Institutional placement most frequently was used only after every other possible alternative had been exhausted in the child's community. It was often the end of a vast spectrum of services which included social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, school counsellors, police, probation, and others. Finally, there would be several court hearings. Many would call most of Dunhill's families hopeless. The staff could never accept that, and the very dogged approach they used was frustrating and demanding.

When Freilick had first come to Dunhill, he had found it difficult to understand the long hours spent by Webb in the institution. However, when sincerity, consistency, a variety of techniques, innovation, and staff changes would not combine to solve a child's problems, the next approach was simply to spend more time in an attempt to do what could not be done before. The family therapist had slipped into the same trap. His normal thirty-five hour week had nearly doubled. His frustration had escalated with the increased involvement. He, however, was still able to function in high gear. Webb was beginning to slow down.

As Freilick toyed with his pipe, he felt concern for Webb. His colleague continued the conversation, and he shifted the topic back to Kevin and the Korbs. Freilick noticed that Webb's hands were shaking.

"Marty, I worry about Kevin." His speech was too labored, too deliberate. "I wonder where he's going." He sipped some coffee and winced at the taste. "The coffee's rotten today."

Freilick asked, "I thought we had a pretty good idea of where this family was heading. What's the problem?"

The match shook as Webb lit another cigarette. Blow-

ing out smoke, he sat back in his chair and looked at the diplomas on the wall. He pointed with the cigarette. "You've got those. What do they mean? Six, seven, eight years of college? A license to get into somebody's head? How about a master's degree in being a nice guy?" He shook his head and turned to Freilick.

"I guess it's not Kevin, is it, Brian?" He could feel the tension.

Most of the staff had been concerned about Webb's seemingly being driven to work, his forcing himself to do more and more. The man had been like an engine racing faster and faster. They wondered when he would run out of gas or explode. No one had discussed this with Webb for fear of hurting him. He was sensitive and highly dedicated to social work. He ate, drank, and breathed people's problems. His fuzzy sense of objectivity would disappear in the tears and anger and sweat of a therapy session with a child. Webb could feel others' pain in a unique, almost personal way. He loved his boys. They were much more than clients. They were people who hurt, and he desperately wanted to help them.

Webb was perspiring, and his face flushed. "Marty, do you sleep at night?"

"Usually. Sometimes I have trouble." He was uneasy with his answer. Freilick continued as he straightened a paper clip, "I worry a lot about the families I work with. I suppose there are times when I force myself to forget about them. When I start losing sleep, I try to slow down." Freilick knew that Webb was worried about more than sleeping patterns. "Brian, what are you driving at?"

Webb seemed ill-at-ease. He glanced from the window to the floor and cleared his throat. Coughing, he put out his cigarette. Webb looked philosophically at Freilick and lit another. He looked away and stared at the burning ash on his cigarette. "You know, Marty, sometimes I wish there was a way to take these kids, put them back into their mothers' wombs, and let them start over. Just keep returning them until they get life right. We'll get out of this psychotherapy game and into the shrinking kids and

pushing them back business." He slumped in his chair. "I've been thinking a lot lately, Marty." He smiled. "Maybe too much. I don't know, but I know that the pressures are getting to be too much. I know that, but it doesn't help. Lately, I've been poking around in the corners of my life, and I don't know if I like what I see. You know those little dust balls you get when a room is dirty? I've got those inside my head. I don't know if I'm doing any good here."

This surprised Freilick. "Are you kidding, Brian? If you'd just slow down enough to look at those kids in Maxwell and compare them now with what they were when they came here, you'd see how much good you're doing. What the hell do you expect of yourself?"

"Have you ever really wondered about people like the Korbs and Kevin? They don't have shadows, Marty. They're typed, penciled, and filed away. Jesus, what the hell have we done to them? The system's two-dimensionalized, condemned, compressed, and laminated the poor bastards. Now we're expected to pump air into them and make them human again."

"Watch it, Brian. They chased Dr. Frankenstein all over hell for trying that."

"Yeh, but his monsters looked like Boris Karloff. Monsters are ok if they play the game and look like everybody else."

"Feel like you're playing God?"

"That's it, Marty. That's what bugs me. People want us to be gods. Agencies want paper to file. And you and I have to make up our minds who we'll please. In the end, we don't have any choice. We'll please the people, those people without shadows. They have more sense than the rest of us, anyway." Webb coughed and smiled. "They run the show, and we do the filing."

Freilick frowned. "You've lost me."

"Hell, Marty, I don't make any sense. Don't worry about it." He paused, breathed deeply, and coughed again. "But sometimes it eats away at me."

"Brian, those kids wouldn't have a chance if it weren't

for what you've done for them." Freilick seemed to search for something else to add. There was a nervous silence.

Webb nodded his head. "Mental health first aid? Huh? Want to give me a happy pill?"

"Come on, Brian. Hell, all I need is for you to crack up on me."

Webb stood and brushed some stray ashes from his pants. "Don't worry about that." He sighed heavily. "We're human, too, I guess."

"That's for damn sure."

"Marty, how's your ulcer holding up under all this?"

"Ok. Haven't had any trouble since coming here. I haven't had any time to have ulcer problems." Freilick laughed.

Webb joined him in the joke, and then added, "I think I'll get a decent cup of coffee. Want some?"

"Sure. Thanks."

"I'll get it. Wait here."

Freilick inspected the diplomas on the office wall after Webb had left the room to get the coffee. He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. Whispering to himself, he said, "I'm beginning to know what those papers mean."

When Webb returned with two cups of coffee, he sat and looked at Freilick. "Have you ever tasted pain?" He asked.

"Worse than the coffee?"

"Worse than straight vinegar, Marty, and it stays with you. I think it can stay forever." Webb pointed at Kevin's name on a roster hanging near his door. "Look at that. Kev's just a name on a list, little more than a number. That doesn't give us any idea of the pain he carries around under that sometimes shaggy exterior. We've spent thousands of hours at Dunhill probing into that kid's mind and soul. There's enough psychic pain inside him to make every sadist throughout history grin with envy."

"I know. It's tragic."

Webb waved his hand, but as he was about to comment, Baum walked into his office. Freilick's supervisor handed Webb some papers.

"Brian, I present some amazing treasures from the archives of Dunhill. I found these in the back of my desk drawer."

Webb looked at them and said, "These are from kids' records."

Baum smiled in an embarrassed manner. "They are. Yes, indeed, they are. My filing system failed again. Sorry, but I'm a few years late in getting them to you." He noticed that Webb was not smiling. "I, uh, I've got to meet with Jerry. See you later." He waved a goodbye and commented, "Any questions, let me know."

"I should have known, Marty." He shook his head and gritted his teeth. "Jesus, this stuff is from Kevin's case record. It's pretty old, but ..." He sighed. "Look at this." He handed a letter to Freilick from the papers he had been given by Baum.

Freilick read the letter. "This is from a foster parent who cared for Kevin before he came here." After reading the letter, he handed it back with the comment, "She didn't like him very much."

"Like him? She calls him a 'retard who should be shut away.' I haven't seen verbal garbage like this since reading the literary journal on the lavatory wall in my high school."

Freilick nodded. "It gets easier to understand why Kevin's favorite goal in life isn't returning to foster care. How much rejection can a kid take?" It was clear that he was not looking for an answer to his question. "My wife once asked me if the system we work for was set up to eat its young. I thought she was kidding."

"I think your wife's more insightful than we are."

"That's even scary to joke about, Brian."

"I'm not in a joking mood, Marty."

After Freilick had left, Webb sat alone. He listlessly toyed with a cigarette and slowly tore open the paper so

that tobacco fell on his desk. He brushed the tobacco into an ash tray and took an overdue report from a drawer. "I'll work on you for awhile."

As the months passed, Kevin's new-found family came to mean more than reunion and readjustment. He began to lose his uniqueness at Dunhill. Among his peers, he was no longer the orphan remaining from the old program. He began to merge into what was expected behavior; at least, expected by the other boys in Maxwell. The introduction of parents, brothers, and sisters gave Kevin an interest beyond Dunhill. More of his thoughts, energies, and interests were to be invested outside the treatment program. Dunhill Home for Children was no longer his only home.

Kevin whistled as he returned to Maxwell from Webb's office. Jim Wolf looked up from the schedule on which he had been working for the last several minutes. "Kev, how did it go with Mr. Webb?"

"Ok." The boy began to move bouncingly toward the door. He took his jacket from the coat rack.

"Hey, Kev, come here. I want to talk with you for a minute." Wolf's tone was authoritative.

The boy was nonchalant as he sauntered over to the child care worker. "Here I am, Sir Wolf. What can I do for you?" He affected an arrogant tone with the worker and stood with his hands on his hips.

Wolf looked at Kevin with the expression of an angry first sergeant about to erupt with rage. He said sternly, "Listen to me, you big tub of crap." He jumped over the desk which separated them, and both he and Kevin began to laugh. He chased the boy around the recreation room and out the door toward the basketball court.

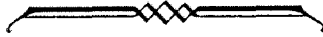
Kevin shouted, "You'll never catch me, Mr. Wolf. You're getting too old and fat."

The child care worker slowed down and, finally, stopped. He watched Kevin run across the basketball court toward a group of boys who were taking an archery lesson. Kevin waved back at him and stuck out his

tongue laughingly. He sat on the grass to watch the class. Wolf smiled and walked back to Maxwell.

Kevin's thoughts were far from the archery class. He saw his brothers and sisters playing in the family's living room. His parents were playing cards in the kitchen. He wanted to be there with them, and a longing surged through him. His ambiguous feelings for his parents did not stand in the way of wanting to be with them in Millersville. He was becoming impatient waiting for the next visit. At the same time, he was afraid to go home, again. It was all confusing for him, but he was sure it would all be resolved. He knew it would be all right because he wanted it to be. The people at Dunhill would make sure it would. He believed that.

CHAPTER EIGHT



THE CHRISTMAS SEASON AT DUNHILL was quite busy. The children were running about the buildings busily preparing to go to their homes for holiday visits.

This had always been a sad time of year for the staff when the subject of what to do for Kevin would be discussed. He usually would spend the holiday with a staff member, and there were times when the child care workers would come in just to care for Kevin. This year was to be different. The boy was to spend his first Christmas at home in eleven years.

"Oh wow! Oh wow, Mr. Webb. Me? I'm goin' home for Christmas? Are you sure it's ok?" He looked shocked when the social worker had given him the news even though they had discussed the possibility of such a visit several times before.

"How do you feel about it?" Webb felt a shiver going up his spine as he saw the excited expression on Kevin's face.

"Great, Mr. Webb. Oh man, it's all set. I'm goin' home for Christmas vacation. Oh man, I feel great." His eyes watered, and he smiled broadly.

Freilick had met with the boy's family several times prior to the last visit Kevin had made to his family's home in preparation for Christmas. The Korbs also had made a few visits to Dunhill during this time. Several of these visits were used by Freilick to help Kevin's parents

to probe their own feelings. On one such occasion, Freilick spent some time with Kevin's mother while Kevin and his father talked in the Home's living room.

It was a long and painful process for Betty to begin to deal with the shame of her own feelings of rejection for Kevin. Laborious and often startling sessions helped her to purge herself of the massive guilt which stood in the way of an acceptance of where she was in the present.

Freilick's arms rested on his chair. He leaned forward with interest. "So, neither you nor Bob wanted a child at that point?"

Betty rolled her burning cigarette between her fingers. "No, we weren't ready. Heck, we didn't even get along too good together." She pulled back in her chair and looked at Freilick. She grimaced. "The pregnancy was horrible. The doctor told me I'd have problems, but it was horrible, not like with the other kids."

"Sometimes it's more difficult with the first."

"Huh! Difficult? Mr. Freilick, I was sick right from the start. Every damn day I hated to wake up. It was nearly always the same. I always had to go to the bathroom, and it hurt real bad. The vomiting and headaches were too much." She looked uncomfortable, and her stomach felt queezy. "I don't like to think about it."

"Was Bob helpful?"

"Oh, sure. No, he really was, but he couldn't make me feel better. He, he was workin' real hard, and he'd get layed off and work a few part-time jobs. It was real hard on him, too."

The family therapist noticed her hands shaking nervously. She seemed to pale. "Betty, was the delivery normal?"

"There almost wasn't any."

"What do you mean?"

"My father again. He wanted me to get rid of the baby."

"Abortion?" Freilick asked.

"Yeh. He knew some guy who'd do it cheap and would keep his mouth shut. It wasn't legal then. Bob and me

wouldn't go for it. Then he wanted me to give the baby up for adoption. 'No way,' Bob said. I agreed." She felt her head spinning.

"So you decided to have the baby and to keep him. What was it like when he was born?"

She stood and walked to the window. "Mr. Freilick, I'll just take a minute." She stumbled to the door.

"Are you all right? Can I do something for you?" Freilick was on his feet.

She waved him away. "No, I'll be ok." Betty rushed from the room.

Freilick watched her go into the rest room and returned to his office. He jotted down a few notes from the session. Betty was very nervous during the discussion of the pregnancy. He had the feeling that this woman who had been rejected by her own family was unconsciously setting the stage during her pregnancy to reject her own first child.

The door opened, and Betty walked slowly into the office. She held one hand across her stomach and a glass of water in her other hand.

"Are you ok?"

"Sure. I've got a bug lately. I'll be ok."

"Are you sure? We can continue some other time if you wish. Bob and Kevin are downstairs. We can join them."

Betty thought for a moment and lit a cigarette. The pain had not dissipated. She seemed to be struggling with something, something so terrible that she was afraid to continue with the interview, but she knew she must. She gathered all of her strength and said, "Mr. Freilick, I, I never talked about this. I never, even with Miss Brown, even with Bob. I, I've got to talk about it now." She fidgeted with her clothes as she spoke slowly. "When the pains, when I knew that Kevin was goin' to be born." She lapsed into silence.

"It's difficult."

"Sure is."

"I'd like you to go on, but I know it hurts."

Betty butted out her cigarette, and she lethargically lit

another. "I went to the hospital. Bob took me." She searched for words as she looked about the room carefully avoiding eye contact with Freilick. "The labor took nine or ten hours."

"That must have been awful for you."

She nodded her head and looked at the floor. Betty continued in a near whisper, "When the doctor held him up, I saw this bloody slop all over his body. He looked so slimy, and I, I saw it drip on me." She lowered her quivering body in the chair as if to hide. Her hair covered her face. "Oh my God, when he held him up by his legs, I started screaming, 'I hate him! Kill him! Kill him!'" She held her head in her hands and let her cigarette fall to the floor. "Oh my God." Her words were muffled by her sobs.

Freilick picked up the cigarette and put it into the ash tray. He put his hand on her shoulder to comfort her. "Cry, Betty. It's good to cry. You didn't want the baby. You were afraid." He wanted to scream, "How the hell could you have lived with this inside you all these years?"

"Oh God, I wanted to kill him. I wanted to kill Kevin, and he was just a baby, a new baby. Oh God." She sobbed.

Freilick tried to comfort her with words, but he couldn't speak. No one else had known this mother's depth of rejection, guilt, and shame. If anyone had come close to sensing it over the years, it had been Kevin himself. Even he could not be expected to understand. Freilick could feel the mother's pain and anguish. She had bared her soul to him, and part of her agony had now become his. His stomach tightened. His neck muscles tensed, and he wiped his damp palms on his pants. Words rushed endlessly through his mind, but he couldn't say them. Nothing seemed appropriate. He reached toward the woman and gently held her in his arms.

She cried for a long time, and, finally, she took a tissue and blew her nose. "My God, you must hate me."

"Hate you? No, Betty, I don't hate you," he said with a smile. "All those empty, rotten feelings you had. It must

have been terrible keeping them inside for so long."

"There's more." Betty labored to continue. "When I was in the recovery room, my father came in. He had a pen and a piece of paper. He wanted me to sign that damn paper. He didn't even tell Bob. It wouldn't have been no good anyway unless Bob signed, too. At least I don't think so."

"What was the paper for, Betty?"

"To give my baby away." She began to cry again. "The son of a bitch. My own father wanted me to give my baby away right there. We told him we wouldn't before, but he wouldn't give up. He never gives up." Tears streamed down her face, and she took another tissue. "He's always hated me. Ever since I was little, he's hated me. Maybe I wasn't no good, but that didn't give him the right to do that. Did it, Mr. Freilick? Did it give him the right? He didn't have a right to try to take Kevin away, did he?"

"Did Bob know what happened?"

"He, he came in a few minutes later and saw what my father was doing." Her breathing quickened, and perspiration mixed with her tears leaving a salty taste on her lips. "Bob started screaming and pushing my father against the wall. A nurse ran in, and my father left in a hurry. I really think Bob would've killed him. I never saw him so mad." There was a long silence. Betty dried her tears. In a quiet voice, she commented, "It was ok, though. I had Bob and the baby to love me. They would, even if my father never would."

"Were you and Bob ever able to talk with your father about what happened that day in the hospital?"

"Are you kidding? We didn't see him for a long time after that. It was a few years, I think. He'd call sometimes, but we'd always end up hollering at each other and hanging up." She was exhausted, and she shook as she wiped away her tears.

"How do you feel now?"

Betty breathed deeply and sat back in her chair. She stretched her legs and coughed after sipping some water. "Better. I feel a lot better. Thanks."

The walls of self-hatred had begun to crumble. Freilick continued to work with her on these long-latent feelings. She gradually grew out of her pathology with both Freilick's and Brown's help. Brown had kept him informed of the progress she had been making in counseling with the Korbs in Millersville.

Discussions between Freilick and Brown resulted in the decision that Kevin could spend a few days with his family without risk. It was arranged that the family therapist would take the youngster to Millersville and that he would drive back to Dunhill after the visit. This would provide Freilick an opportunity to spend several hours with Kevin and his family in their own home.

Webb worked to prepare Kevin for his first Christmas at home in more than a decade by using more than counselling. With the help of the staff, Kevin was trained in the use of the telephone to call Dunhill if the need should arise, what to expect on Christmas with his family, and how to buy needed items in the store in Millersville. Many of the routine tasks people accepted as part of their daily lives could be alien to a child raised in an institution. This had nothing to do with Kevin's intelligence. His social skills, however, had been neglected during his life at Dunhill. This was a deficit the staff was desperately helping him to overcome.

When Ann told Freilick that Mr. Gorski was calling him, he thought she had confused names and had meant that Mr. Korb was calling. "Good afternoon, this is Mr. Freilick."

The voice was unfamiliar, deep and distant. "Mr. Freilick, are you the one working with Kevin Gorski?"

"I'm sorry, who is this?"

"The boy's grandfather. Are you the one?"

"I work with his family." Freilick had been caught off guard. He was aware that the man was angry by his tone of voice, and Freilick felt defensive. He also felt somewhat guilty over not having contacted the man sooner. Mr. Gorski played an important, if somewhat sinister,

part in Betty's life. "I'm pleased to hear from you, Mr. Gorski. I should have called you before."

"Wouldn't have mattered. I just wanted you to know that things are pretty bad in Millersville. Those kids have it pretty rough."

"I was there the other day, and things were going well. Did something happen?"

"Did something happen? Something's always happening. I hate to say it, but that daughter of mine's no good, mister, and her husband's no better. You probably don't know it, but I had to put her away when she was younger. She's always been a handful, that one."

"She has told me about that, Mr. Gorski. I imagine that you're happy she's changed." Freilick thought it best to accent the positive.

"Hell, mister, she's no better than she ever was. I couldn't control her before, and I still can't. I just hope that Kevin never has to go back to that woman. You know, I didn't want her to keep him from the start, but she wouldn't listen to me. Turned out that I was right, but she wouldn't listen. Never did, and never will."

"I understand you've had trouble getting along."

The grandfather continued talking. He alleged child neglect, marital infidelity, heavy drinking, and every other conceivable attack on the Korbs.

Freilick could sense hurt mixed with hostility as the man spoke. His own defensiveness melted away as the family therapist began to feel empathy for the elderly, angry man who continued to project his own rage on his daughter and her husband. Finally, he said, "Mr. Gorski, I understand your concern, but the situation is quite good in the Korb home. Betty and Bob have been working closely with me, and I feel optimistic at this point."

"Well, I guess there's no use trying to talk with you." The irate caller hung up the phone.

The day before Christmas Eve was rather quiet at Dunhill. Most of the children had left for their homes. Kevin, however, was not actively playing in the recrea-

tion room or busy doing chores as would have been the case in previous years. He was packing to go home. He and Allen Brokaw were in the dormitory.

"Hey, Allen, are you goin' home for Christmas?" Kevin busily packed his clothes in a suitcase.

The other boy sat on his bed looking out a window at two child care workers talking in the yard.

"Hey, Allen." Kevin was annoyed over being ignored by the other boy.

"Don't 'Hey, Allen' me." His blond hair was disheveled, and the Christmas spirit had not affected him. He had been brought back following another runaway a few days before. He was still angry and sullen. Allen walked to a chair in the corner and sat down, biting his fingernails and thinking about his parents fighting before the police came to take him back to Dunhill. "What do ya wanta go home for?"

"What?"

Allen shouted, "What do ya wanta go home for?"

"Why not, man?" Kevin looked over the clothes he had selected for the visit.

"This place ain't so great, but it's better than home." He was depressed, and there was anger in his voice.

"Heck, you run home all the time."

"So what?"

"What's so great about this place if you run home all the time?"

"Nothin'. This place's rotten." Allen looked at the bedspread and pulled nervously on a loose thread.

"That's crazy."

"No, it ain't." He wanted to talk with someone, and Kevin was convenient. "Do your parents like you?"

Kevin stopped his packing and turned to Allen. "Yeh, I hope they do."

"Mine hate me. The shits!" Allen spit out his words.

"Why don't you talk to Mr. Webb?"

"He ain't no good, and Freilick's worse." He lay down on the bed and stared at the ceiling.

"You've only been here eight or nine months."

"I'm not gonna be here all my life like you."

"I haven't been here all my life," Kevin shot back.

Allen held up his hand. "Ok. Ok." He rolled over and looked at Kevin. Allen whispered, "You wanta take off?"

Kevin shouted, "Are you kidding? No way. I'm not getting in trouble now. Man, Allen, you can go home to visit, and you want to take off. That's stupid."

"Come on, Kev. Let's go. Wolf won't catch us."

"No!"

"Ok. That's up to you."

"Are you runnin'?"

Allen thought for a moment. He sat up and stretched his arms. "Guess not. I'm goin' home tonight. My old lady's goin' to pick me up at six." He began walking toward the door.

"Where to?" Kevin resumed sorting his clothes.

"To see if I can see Webb." Allen sounded almost nonchalant.

"Thought you didn't want to talk with him."

The boy snapped, "I can talk to anybody I want. Mind yer own business." He walked slowly toward the door.

Wolf passed him in the hall. "Allen, where are you heading?"

"To see Webb," he said gruffly.

"Mr. Webb?"

"Yeh. Mr. Webb."

"Ok, Allen. I saw him in the dining room. If he's not there, let me know. I'll find him for you."

The youngster began running down the stairs until Wolf told him to slow down. Allen then took one-step-at-a-time in smart-aleck fashion. The worker ignored him and went to see Kevin.

"Mr. Wolf, what about these clothes? Are they ok? Do my shoes look ok? They're a little scuffed. How about this stuff from school? Should I bring it?"

Wolf smiled at the excited child and nodded his approval. "It's all fine, Kev. Everything looks good. Bring the schoolwork. You might have to work on it. If not, that's ok."

"I've got this stuff in a bag. Is that ok?" The boy tripped and dropped the bundle he was carrying.

"Slow down, Kev. You've got time before you leave. What's in the bag?"

"This stuff? Presents for my family. I wrapped them myself." He took a few gaily wrapped boxes from the bag and proudly held them up for inspection by the child care worker.

Wolf grinned. "They look great. Don't tell your family what you bought. It should be a surprise on Christmas morning. Mr. Freilick said that that's when they exchange gifts. Remember?"

Kevin said, "Sure, I remember, but I didn't buy anything."

"Well, what did you get for them?"

"I made stuff in Arts and Crafts." He smiled proudly. "My teacher said that would be better. Boy, I'll bet they'll really be surprised."

The drive to Millersville was filled with Kevin's constant chatter. Freilick found himself caught up in the youngster's happiness, but there was a slight apprehension that it would not work as the social worker hoped it would. He, however, was confident that this visit would be an event neither Kevin nor the boy's family would ever forget.

The Korbs were so excited that they found it difficult to talk. Betty ran from room to room serving snacks and making sure that her children were on their best behavior. Bob proudly showed Margaret Brown and Martin Freilick their Christmas tree and decorations. The younger children were dressed in their best outfits. They eagerly showed Kevin the brightly wrapped gifts under the tree in the living room. Kevin acted somewhat aloof. He was unable to easily handle all of this activity comfortably. The boy put on a sophisticated, reserved air. A smile never left his face. His joy over being at home for Christmas was obvious.

The older children returned home from a church party after Freilick and Kevin had arrived. The youngsters ran

to Kevin laughing and cheering. They all talked and sang and shared holiday greetings for a short time before Brown and Freilick had to leave. Brown left first, wishing everyone a happy holiday. Kevin shook Freilick's hand as the family therapist was about to leave. The rest of the family thanked him for bringing Kevin. He left reminding them that he would return in four days to bring Kevin back to Dunhill. The boy's first Christmas visit had begun well enough.

During his visit, Kevin was treated to all the joys of a family holiday season. He accompanied them to their friends' homes for visits, trips to local stores to see the decorations, a Christmas play at their church, and the general warmth of festive activities. All of this was new for the child, and his wide-eyed wonderment increased the joy of his parents.

Freilick arrived at ten in the morning to drive Kevin back to Dunhill. Betty answered the door and seemed devoid of the high anxiety she had shown during most of his previous visits. She, her husband, and Kevin sat with him in the kitchen as they described in detail each activity of the previous four days.

Betty grinned. "It was really wonderful, Mr. Freilick. We had a wonderful time. You should've seen Kevin on Christmas morning opening his gifts. He was so excited, I thought I'd burst."

Freilick laughed. "He was so excited, but you were going to do the bursting?"

Betty blushed and said, "Well, I guess that I was just as excited."

Kevin added quickly, "She sure was. I thought she was goin' to knock the tree down trying to take pictures."

Bob laughed. "It's a good thing she didn't. Kevin might have eaten it. He ate everything else we had. Mr. Freilick, the boy eats like a horse."

Kevin eagerly responded, "My mom's a good cook. The food was sure better than at Dunhill."

"You'd better not let the cooks hear you say that," noted Freilick.

The youngster blushed. "Gee, don't tell them. I was just kidding. Just like my grandfather."

Freilick was taken by surprise. Mr. Gorski, to the best of the family therapist's knowledge, had never spoken to his grandson. He looked to the boy's parents for an answer.

Betty said, "It was Christmas, Mr. Freilick. My father calls on Christmas, and Kevin answered the phone. It was about time that he spoke with his grandfather. It's the only grandfather he has." She paused and winked at her oldest son. "Go ahead, tell him what your grandfather said to you."

"He wished me a Merry Christmas, and he wanted to know if everything was all right here, what we had to eat and things like that." Kevin appeared rather quiz-zical. "He asked me why I didn't stay at Dunhill, and then . . ."

"I took the phone away," Bob interrupted. "I told Kevin that his grandfather was kidding him and that it takes a lot of time to get to know him."

Kevin frowned. "Uh huh. A lot of time."

Betty walked to the tree and picked up a box. "Look at this, Mr. Freilick," she said proudly. "Kevin made it himself for us. It's a bookshelf. Isn't it beautiful?"

It was clear that Kevin enjoyed his mother's praise. He looked at the social worker for a reaction.

Freilick was preoccupied with the strange conversation between Kevin and his grandfather. He was puzzled and somewhat disturbed.

The door opened, and the other children trooped in from the snow. They were accompanied by an elderly neighbor who seemed less than cheery.

"Well, here's the rest of the brood. Mr. Freilick, this is Mrs. Luellan. She lives in the house behind us, and she was good enough to invite the children for breakfast. Kevin didn't go because he wanted to be here when you arrived." Betty sounded pleased and confident.

Mrs. Luellan was a woman in her late sixties. Her gray hair was tied in a bun on the top of her head, and her

plaid coat was old and worn. She seemed deeply worried and very anxious. The woman ignored the introduction and spoke directly to Betty. She said loudly, "There's been a problem this morning, Mrs. Korb, a real serious problem. I don't know how to tell you, but I left Sally only for a few minutes with my brother. I didn't see no harm in that. It was only for a few minutes." There were tears in the woman's eyes. Her mouth trembled.

Bob stood from his chair. "What happened?"

The woman looked at him and paled. She looked away and took a step back. "I found Johnny in the upstairs bedroom, and he was fooling with Sally. They didn't have clothes on. I yelled, and they dressed right away."

Betty screamed. Bob slammed his fist against the wall. The neighbor continued to express her shock at finding the man with the child.

"Jesus Christ, the fifty year old son of a bitch with my seven year old baby. The son of a bitch, I'll kill him." Betty was red with rage. "Sally! Where's my Sally? Sally, get out here!" The mother's arms waved wildly in the air.

Sally ran to her mother. The little girl stared blankly with fear and shook nervously.

Kevin looked on, biting his lip and quivering. He was terrified at this horrible and shocking turn of events. Freilick, too, was stunned. He looked at Kevin and realized how frightened the boy must be.

There was a loud knock on the door. Betty cried, "Who the hell is it?" She was overwhelmed, and she stood, staring vacantly, holding her daughter close to her. Sally began to cry, and Betty stroked her hair. The mother breathed rapidly in short gasps.

Bob shouted, "Somebody get the door." Without seeing an immediate response, "Oh hell, I'll get it." He rushed to the door and opened it. Two police officers greeted him. Bob was startled. "The police! Come in. Who called you?"

The one officer explained that Mrs. Luellan had called them. She told Bob that when she had discovered her brother and the little girl in the bedroom, she had run to

the phone to call the police. She didn't know what else to do.

Freilick identified himself to the officers and had everyone sit in the living room. The police then took charge of the situation. Their authoritative and business-like approach seemed to calm everyone. The rage and confusion quickly subsided for the moment. After receiving the details of the incident, one of the officers called the local hospital and arranged for Sally to be examined. One officer said, "Probably no harm done, but best to have a doctor look her over." They assured the distraught parents that they would take care of everything, not to worry about their daughter, and that it would all work out well.

Freilick asked Betty if she would like to call Margaret Brown. She went directly to the phone. The mother called the caseworker without hesitation and arranged for her to meet them at the hospital. The family therapist spoke briefly with Brown and asked that she call him the following day with information about what happened at the hospital.

"Oh man, this is something." Kevin shook his head and looked around the room.

"It'll all be ok, Kev," Freilick said calmly, but he could feel his own legs shaking. "Don't worry. Believe me, everyone's upset now, but things will be all right." He reached out and held the boy's hand.

Kevin held the man's hand tightly. He looked at Freilick and said, "Wow! This is something." The boy paused and added, "I'm sure glad you're here."

Driving back to Dunhill, the two spent all of their time discussing not only the incident involving Kevin's sister but also the entire visit home. The family therapist hoped to balance the tragedy with a discussion of the other events which Kevin had experienced during the last four days. Aside from this incident, the rest of the visit went well. Freilick could only hope that the trust Kevin had developed in him would help the youngster to handle his first experience of family crisis.

The months following Christmas were filled with stress for the Korbs.

"I'm tired, Bob, so tired that I don't care anymore. He keeps calling and screaming at me. Even when I'm sleeping I can hear my father telling me how rotten I am, how I can't do anything right, how Sally wouldn't have been hurt if it weren't for us, how Kevin shouldn't come home to us. It goes on and on. I can hear him, Bob. It's not like a dream or anything. He's there, looking down at me, waving his big hands and shouting, 'You're no good, Betty. That's why we put you away. You're no good to anybody.'" Betty looked through her wet eyes and saw the blur of the man she needed by her to survive. "Bob, he won't ever let us have Kevin. He wants to take away the other kids, too. But he'll never let Kevin come home. I know it."

Bob couldn't put his thoughts into words. He had said them all before, countless times. Why repeat them again? Why say reassurances over and over until the words sounded hollow and canned? Betty seemed so helpless and vulnerable. She was like the girl he had met in the bar so many crisis-filled years ago. He held her hand as he had then, but he could not say the words she so desperately needed to hear. He felt inadequate, weak, and ineffective.

"Bob, I want to run at him and hit him, but I want to run away, too. I don't know what I want to do." She bit her lip, and her grip on his hand tightened.

"I know, Betty. I, I don't know what else to say. I love you." He took her into his arms and held her. They wept.

Sally wandered sheepishly into the room toward her parents. She saw them holding each other and said, "Don't cry."

Bob cleared his throat. He forced a smile and said, "Come here, baby."

Betty straightened her shirt and held out her hands for her daughter. The little girl ran to her parents. They held her warmly.

"I don't wanna go away," cried Sally.

Betty was alarmed. "She heard us talking. Oh, Sally, you're not going anywhere. We don't want you to go anywhere. We wouldn't let you leave us."

Sally whimpered, "I love you, Mommy."

The man who molested their daughter was imprisoned only after weeks of court hearings. Sally was not physically harmed, but her emotional condition was not quite so benign.

As the time passed, the Korb family began to recover from the problems surrounding the incident involving Sally. The wounds, however, healed slowly.

The little girl stood on the couch as she looked out the front window. Her short, brown hair framed her pouting face.

Betty shouted, "Until you settle down this morning, you're goin' nowhere."

"I don't care. I'll sit here forever," said Sally.

Betty looked into the living room. "Sally, off that couch!"

Sally ignored her mother and licked her lips. The ice cream truck was parked down the street, and cheering children ran toward it with change clutched tightly in their eager hands.

"Listen, young lady, off that couch! Now!"

Sally flopped onto the couch. She propped up her head with her hands and stared at her mother. "Can I get ice cream, Mom?"

"Ice cream? You started a fight with Sharon, and you want a treat? Huh!" Betty continued sweeping in the hall.

The little girl sat up slowly. "Gee, Mom, I'm sorry."

"You'd better tell Sharon that. She's the one you hit. You've been pretty bad lately, Sally."

The child could feel tears welling up inside her. "I'm not bad."

Her mother placed the broom against the wall and went to the girl. She sat down beside her. "No ice cream, Sally. Not after being bad. You're just goin' to have to stop fighting like this." She sighed and put her arm

around her daughter. Smoothing back the girl's hair, she spoke quietly. "Don't you worry, Sally. All of us love you a lot, but you've got to be punished like the other kids when you've been bad." She bent over, looked into Sally's still-pouting face, and smiled. "Ok, little lady?"

Sally could not hide a smile and begrudgingly said, "Ok, Mom."

Sally was difficult to control both at home and in school. It was frequent for Sally to angrily strike out at other children. She immediately knew she had done something wrong, but it was not easy to stop. Brown became more involved with the Korbs and took on the responsibility of therapy for Sally.

"Miss Brown, she's been through a lot, but she's a real snip at times. In fact, she's little, but she knows a lot, and, I don't know, but I wonder." Betty took a cigarette from a pack and offered one to the young woman.

Brown shook her head. "No, thanks." She looked at the young mother who was experiencing the same uncomfortable doubt—often not expressed—as most of the mothers she had counselled in the past following the sexual abuse or assault of their young children. One of the fastest rising crimes in the country was the sexual abuse of children in the form of incest, rape, or molestation. Brown had seen many such situations. She had become keenly aware of the importance of the family's reaction to the injured child. She asked Betty, "You're wondering? What's bothering you?"

"I know that Sally's a cute kid. She and her brothers, well, she's curious now, more than ever before. Don't get me wrong. I mean, she's just a little kid." She lit her cigarette. "I must sound pretty terrible to you. I do to me. Miss Brown, I don't mean that she wanted that bastard to do anything, not that. I, oh, I don't know."

"Betty, Sally's curious because all children are curious about sex. She was molested, and that was traumatic for her. She's not clear about why there's so much fuss, but she knows that something bad happened. I wouldn't worry about this causing lasting bad effects, though.

She'll get over it if you, Bob and the other kids can. One other thing to keep in mind, she didn't seduce the man."

Betty blushed. "Well, I never meant to say that she did."

Brown raised her eyebrows. "Oh? It's not unusual for parents to think that. It's unthinkable, but those unthinkable things are the ones that bug us the most. Did my little girl ask for it? Did she do something she shouldn't have? Say something? Whatever. People react with doubt. Keep in mind that the man was sick. He could just as well have beaten Sally as sexually molested her."

Betty pondered the social worker's words for a minute. She smiled. "You're right. I suppose I was wondering. It's a terrible thing for me."

"It's difficult to get straight in your own head, Betty. I understand that. Give it time."

"And patience," Betty added. She looked at Brown and asked, "Can I get you some coffee? Say 'yes' so I can have some too."

The stress led to some resurfacing of marital problems for Betty and Bob. Their fighting led to occasional behavior problems for their older children. Freilick's monthly visits increased in frequency. He went to the Korbs' home every week or every other week in an attempt to help them weather these storms. Kevin remained in the shelter of Dunhill Home and viewed these problems through the perspective of his treatment sessions with Webb and through the support of the child care staff. There were times when the situation looked quite bad, but the basic strength of this family grew despite the outside forces and the internal stresses which threatened to destroy it. The parents and the children used the services of Children's Aid and Dunhill Home wisely. The crises slowly subsided. Problems, however, did not magically disappear.

"Look, you two've really been good to us." Bob spoke with Brown and Freilick during one of their visits to his home. "That slob who's in jail screwed up things for us,

but we're not going to let him ruin everything." Bob pointed emphatically with a spoon. His expression left no doubt of his resolution to keep the family together.

Brown said, "That's the way to look at it. There's no reason things can't be better for all of you."

Bob scratched his head and said, "You know that things sometimes get a little rough around here, but, I don't know, things are really getting better."

Betty said to Freilick, "When Kevin was little, I always felt attacked. We talked about that."

Freilick nodded.

"When he'd cry, I'd scream inside and sometimes at him. Do you know what I mean?"

"You felt like he was tearing you apart," Freilick answered. He slowly sipped the coffee Betty had given him.

"Sure, but it was worse than that. Some of the things I'd do made me even feel worse."

"You felt trapped." He could empathize with this mother. Freilick was beginning to realize that she was trying to tell him that things had changed.

"With you and Miss Brown here, things are looking up. They're different now," Betty said. "At Christmas time, I felt like a new woman. I knew things were different, but when Sally was hurt, I was afraid all those old feelings had come back and would never leave. I wanted to kill. But somehow I didn't. Bob and me, we talked a lot, sometimes all night. Miss Brown'd come by, and you'd stop. I guess we didn't feel alone so much."

Bob smiled and toyed with his spoon. "Things are better. Those old days are gone."

Brown asked, "No more problems, Mr. Korb?"

"Are you kidding?" He shook his head. "They won't ever all go away. Heck, work's not steady. Never was. The kids are a handful, and we hope Kevin'll be back soon. No more problems? God, there'll always be problems."

"Impossible ones?" she asked.

"Maybe." He looked at his wife. "But I think we can

get along. We can make it now." He smiled.

Freilick asked Betty, "How about it? Can you make it?"

She said, "I think so." Betty glanced at Bob and added, "We'll need help, though. I guess that's a change for us. We know we need help, and even that makes us feel better."

CHAPTER NINE



DUNHILL CONTINUED TO EVOLVE from its orphanage origin to meet the needs of today's children. The trend in child care was toward more open settings in which children could learn to exercise more responsible behavior after having received treatment in the institution-proper and before returning home. There were two such divisions at Dunhill. One home in town housed six boys and provided them with the delicate balance between structured, disciplined care and the freedom of living in the community. This home had functioned successfully for several years, and because of its success, another was to be opened on the boundary of the institution. This new division was to be housed in the old, stone building which at one time served as living quarters for child care staff. Children's institutions once commonly provided housing for their staff. Dunhill had been no different. As times changed, however, so did child caring facilities.

When the house, renamed Wright House after a benefactor, opened, it was organized so that boys with few behavior problems would be placed there. Their treatment was to be less structured. They would be given more freedom and more contact with the community.

The process of change which Jerry Fedele had brought to Dunhill had not begun without opposition. The laundress and her janitor husband, Mr. and Mrs. Higgins, had been working at Dunhill for more than forty years. Their

nostalgic perspective was not always amenable to Fedele's plans and new programs. The laundress, a stocky woman in her late sixties, had told anyone who would listen of her consternation over the changes which had come with the years. "You should have been here in the old days. The boys used to dress up in white shirts and ties on Sunday mornings, and the girls would get all dressed up, too. We'd drive them all to church and back to Dunhill for a big breakfast. They'd all line up to greet visitors to the Home in the afternoon. The wives of the Board members would serve tea to the visitors. Used to happen every Sunday. Never happens at all anymore." She would sigh and look out over the grounds which had come to mean so much to her. Several staff members had tried to explain to her that the children in Dunhill at the time were orphans and that the visitors were prospective adoptive parents. Those children and those days were a part of the past, but she and her husband found the past preferable to the present. They loved the children who continued to come to Dunhill, but the young child care workers who wore casual clothes and the family treatment program and the credentials for professional staff and the variety of other program changes puzzled them.

Fedele presided at the morning staff meeting to explain the need for Wright House and to introduce the social worker who would supervise the new division. Maureen Mohan was young and aggressive. She came to Dunhill with little experience in institutional settings, but she impressed the staff with her initial willingness to listen and her dedication to developing a program which would move the children to their own homes in the shortest possible time.

Fedele wore a sports jacket his wife had purchased on one of her trips. It was a loud combination of checks and plaids with red and blue patches. He walked into the meeting and arranged papers on the table in front of him.

Baum asked, "Is that a jacket for the executive director or for those who work on the road at night?"

Fedele grinned. "I'm still not sure if it glows at night."

He held his hands in the air and said, "I really am Jerry Fedele in this crazy jacket." The staff laughed. "I'd like to begin with a joke this morning, but I can't remember the punch line. Maybe later." He cleared his throat and continued, "However, the business at hand is that Dunhill's program is expanding today with the opening of another division." The director continued by explaining the need for such a move. He was met with the positive response of most of the staff. Mrs. Higgins looked at her husband, and he shook his head. She shrugged her shoulders and looked at the floor. At least, most of the staff were happy to see the expansion. Finally, Fedele introduced Mohan.

"There really isn't much for me to say at this point. It's exciting for me to be part of Dunhill, and I hope that Wright House will be as dynamic and effective as the other divisions here. I'll need help from all of you."

Jim Wolf offered, "I'd be happy to help you any time." He grinned.

Mohan added, "Yes, even from the chauvinists on the staff." She smiled at Wolf and sat down.

Webb looked at Freilick and whispered, "She'll do all right."

Fedele rose and continued, "Wright House will be populated with three boys from each of the two boys' units. Maxwell will send Albert Roberts, James DeJur, and Kevin Gorski." He listed the other boys, but Freilick did not hear their names. The family therapist knew that Albert and James were going to move, and he had involved their families in the process of the change. He, however, had not been told Kevin was definitely to be included.

Following the meeting, Freilick asked Webb to meet him in his office. "Brian, what the hell is going on? Is Kevin going to Wright House?"

Webb sat next to the window and lit a cigarette. "It was decided yesterday that he'd be going for sure. He's been in the main institution for too long. Kevin needs more community contact, and Mohan's program seems tailor-

made for him." Webb paused and reached for an ash tray. He continued, "I know you should have been involved with this, but you weren't here yesterday." It was not Freilick's prerogative to determine treatment for a child in the institution, but every change with the child would affect the family, and Webb and Freilick worked closely in coordinating treatment in order to avoid conflict. Webb asked, "Do you think the Korbs will be able to handle the change?"

"Sure, but I'd have liked to have prepared them for it." Freilick added, "Hell, I'd like to know if I were a kid's parent."

"I suppose the process was a little sloppy, but we'll survive."

Freilick asked, "How does Kevin feel about the change?"

Webb replied with a smile, "I saw him last night and again this morning. He seems excited about going down there. It's not as if he'll be leaving us, and I think that it'll be a good bridge for him between the institution and discharge."

Freilick thought for a moment, and then said, "You're probably right, but it's a real surprise. I wish there could have been more planning. When will he move?"

"A week from next Monday. We'll transfer all the kids who are going on that afternoon. That should leave enough time for Maureen to meet with each of the kids she'll be getting before they actually move into Wright House." Webb loosened his tie.

"What do you think about the move?"

"Marty, whenever a kid leaves, it's difficult for me." He coughed and added, "Kevin? Well, I know this is best for him, but he and I've gone through a lot together. Sure, I'd like him to stay, but that's my feeling. That's what they taught us in school. Remember? Objectivity and all that good stuff. But it's true. He should move on. It's especially good now that his family is getting itself together." He smiled. "He should be ready to leave Dunhill, I even get a chill when I say it, in about six

months. If he'd stay in Maxwell, we'd be holding him back. Wright House is what he needs. That's what my head says. My gut wants to keep working with him, but I know the rules of the game. He's got to move on, and now's the time."

Freilick nodded. "His family should be ready for him by then. At least, they'll be as ready as they ever will." He opened his appointment book and paged through it. Finding what he was looking for, he said, "Well, let's see. I'll be meeting with them in Millersville next week. I'll explain things to them then. Better to do it in person."

"But you think they'll understand the why of the transfer?"

"Sure. They'll understand that it's best for Kevin, especially if it means he'll be closer to discharge. I'll let them know that we didn't have a chance to involve them earlier. It should be ok."

Mohan went to her office after the meeting. She was excited. "Imagine this. I've finally landed a desk and an office of my own."

Freilick passed her office after leaving Webb. He looked in the door and smiled. "Maureen, you probably weren't told that we wanted to store liquor in here, but they couldn't find a lock strong enough to keep everyone on the staff out."

"Oh, hello. I hope I'm not spoiling plans by taking over the room." She wiped off her newly framed diploma with a damp cloth. "This has needed a wall like this."

Freilick nodded and said, "I know what the first job is like. It's quite a thrill after the rigors of graduate school."

"You know it." She looked at Freilick. "I don't want to seem rude, but..."

He chuckled. "No problem. I'll let you decorate." As he was leaving, he added, "Just yell if I can help. I'm just down the hall."

"Thanks, Marty. I will."

"By the way," he said as he stuck his head back in the office, "lunch is in about an hour here if you're eating in the dining room. May I escort you?" He bowed.

"Sounds very formal."

"Class, Maureen, chauvinist class."

"My comment at the meeting revisited. Ok. See you then."

Freilick laughed and left her alone.

Mohan's goal had been clear to her since she began college. She had wanted to work with disturbed children. After graduation, she had sent resumes to a variety of agencies. A setting like Dunhill Home for Children was ideal for her. The opportunity to begin a new program was more than she had dreamed of being able to do.

She happily hummed to herself as she straightened the diploma on the wall. Studies had been relatively easy for her, and her lively personality had contributed to her being a popular student with faculty and other students. There was always a nagging fear that it had been too easy, but she accepted her success. Mohan's parents were quite affluent. They felt even more rich when their daughter called to tell them about her new appointment. "It's everything I've ever wanted. I can't wait to begin."

The Korbs' cooperative involvement in Kevin's treatment and their own had been encouraging since they had first met with Freilick in Seton County. It had not taken long for them to take the initiative to seek solutions to their problems with the aid of Brown and Freilick. The introduction of Brown into their lives had provided another positive influence for their family. Both he and she had maintained a steady and supportive contact with them. The family therapist was positive that Sally's traumatic experience would have destroyed the family's progress without the caseworker's help. Kevin's transfer was more upsetting to the staff than it would be to the Korbs.

Freilick's next visit to the Korbs went well. Their attitude regarding the transfer of their son to Wright House was quite positive. They viewed this as a further sign of his possible return home. Other visits with them over the next few months saw only growth. Their experiences

seemed to have given them the lessons by which they could avoid future disasters. They seemed to be learning these lessons well. Not all of their problems had been solved. Sally continued to misbehave. The older children were not always praised by their teachers, but they were not particular problems for the school. Betty and Bob would occasionally still get on each other's nerves. The guilt resultant from years of neglect and separation had not dissipated completely. There were problems, but they were not severe enough to stifle efforts to continue on, to continue to grow closer together.

Kevin's visits with his family increased in frequency and duration as the months passed. It became increasingly clear that if ever there was a question as to whether or not Kevin would return to his family when ready to be discharged from Dunhill, that question no longer existed. The anger and rejection of the past had no place in the future.

Kevin's first independent visit to his parents was exciting for all of Dunhill. This was the first time he had taken the bus alone, and he handled it well. Jim Wolf prepared him for the trip by taking him on a few short bus rides to show him the mechanics of paying the fare and asking the driver where to get off. Kevin dropped the fare into the collection box as he boarded the bus.

Wolf noticed the youngster's hand shaking. He said, "Kev, sit wherever you want."

"Let's sit in the back. That's where the girls sit."

The child care worker smiled and slapped Kevin on the back. "You'll do fine, Kev."

Ann waited with a grin when Freilick wearily walked past her office on the way to his own. Mornings were not his best time of day.

"Good morning, Marty. Tell your feet to walk toward me. Don't worry, I'll tell you when to stop." She held out a message slip. "Mrs. Korb called."

He placed his briefcase on Ann's desk and asked, "Mrs. Korb? It's nine o'clock. She doesn't waste time. Did she

say what she wanted?" Kevin was visiting for a few days. Freilick hoped the phone call did not indicate problems.

Ann shrugged her shoulders. "She was upset. I told her you'd call before ten."

"Thanks, Ann. I'll call her right away. Tell Maureen that I'll be late for our nine-fifteen meeting."

Kevin's attitude about his family was still somewhat ambivalent, and visits were not yet problemless. He and his family continued to adjust to each other and their feelings.

Not bothering to take off his coat, Freilick dialed the Korbs' number. Betty answered after one ring. "Thanks for calling back, Mr. Freilick. We've got a problem down here. Kevin's mouth has caused a little disagreement."

"What do you mean?" Freilick settled back in his chair and lit his pipe.

"Well, we've been tryin' to get him to do things in the neighborhood with the other kids, and he's been givin' us some back talk. You'll just have to talk with him about it." Betty spoke deliberately. It was clear that her words were meant for Kevin as well as the social worker.

"Can you tell me what happened?"

Betty answered, "Last night we wanted Kevin to meet some friends with us at a little house party, and he just refused to go. I was really surprised at his attitude. I told him he'd have to go whether he liked it or not, and he just told me to leave him alone. I was really shocked, Mr. Freilick. I don't know what's gotten into him."

"Confused?"

"What?"

"You're confused?"

"Well, sure. I guess he's bashful, but he's just got to learn to meet people, and that back talk's no good. I won't hear it." Betty was calm but very emphatic. He could picture her looking at her son as she spoke on the phone.

"Mrs. Korb, do you think it might be scary for Kevin to meet your friends and to go to parties with you? That's all still new for him."

"Sure it is. I'd be a little scared, too, but that's just no

reason to talk back. Why, none of my kids can talk like that, and Kevin's no different than them."

"Except that he's not used to the same things your other children are," Freilick suggested.

"I know, but I wanted you to know before Kevin gets out of hand. I told him last night I'd tell you about his back talk."

"Sometimes you'd like a little help in getting to know him better. Is that right?"

"Well, it's been a long time, and he's a teenager, Mr. Freilick. We really enjoy his coming down here, and we want it to work out, but, well, yes, I guess we need a little help now and then."

"When Kevin is scared and he feels he's being pushed, he seems to tell you that by asking that you leave him alone. That doesn't mean he doesn't like being with you. It sounds like the two of you will have to talk about that."

There was a long silence, and then Betty said, "I understand. But we've been having a pretty good time overall. In fact, Kevin said when we got home last night that he had a good time at the party, but I told him I'd call. I thought I'd better."

"You wanted to make sure you followed through. That's good," Freilick said.

"Sure. He has to learn a few things, too."

Kevin's sense of independence was developing. The ties with Dunhill continued to weaken. His place within his family was becoming more important than his life in the institution. His maturity had improved. No one doubted his ability to handle himself outside Dunhill's womb.

Mohan laughed as she talked about Kevin's losing the last basketball game. Dunhill played in a small basketball league sponsored by the Salvation Army. She chuckled, "He was proud. He really was. I understand that last year the team lost every game and was given a trophy for being the best sportsmen. I think he was afraid they

would get nothing this year if they won a game."

Freilick laughed as he asked, "Did he throw the game?"

"No, not at all. They all played their best, and I think Kevin must have tried too hard. It all worked out, though. They'll get the trophy again." She shook her head and smiled. Mohan added more seriously, "I'm constantly amazed when I read that boy's record. Mr. and Mrs. Higgins were talking about him at lunch yesterday. He was some handful at one time. I look at him now, and, well, he's just not the same child he was when he came here."

Freilick said, "Neither are his parents the same people they were when he left them. They're not perfect, but they have hope now."

The social workers discussed what lay ahead for Kevin and his family. Mohan was in the process of helping Kevin to adjust to his eventual departure from Dunhill. His attitude toward this was positive. Arrangements had been made with Brown and the Millersville schools for his return home.

Kevin and two other boys were laughing and looking toward the girls' division as Mohan approached. Kevin saw her before the others. "Hey, Miss Mohan, come on over."

Harry was a thirteen year old. He smiled broadly and said to Mohan, "We're talkin' 'bout Kev's girlfriends."

They all laughed loudly.

Kevin blushed and pushed Harry playfully. "Come on, Harry. Miss Mohan, we're just talking about camp last summer."

"We sure were, Kev." Harry rolled his eyes and mimicked a flirtatious walk with his hands on his hips.

Mohan understood Kevin's embarrassment. Webb had told her about the boy's growing awareness of the opposite sex. Dunhill was in the process of implementing sex instructions for its children. Rumors of the program had generated excitement among the children and some hesi-

tation among the staff. Like family treatment, sex instructions meant another move forward for the institution and another adjustment for those who worked there. Mohan and Webb had joined with Freilick in his defense of the educational program the day before when the family therapist had objected to Mr. and Mrs. Higgins calling it unnecessary. The Higgins couple were resistant to change, but the discussion had ended with their begrudging acceptance of its value. "If the chaplain gives the children the information."

Mohan looked at the three laughing boys and asked, "Did you have a good time at camp last summer?"

Kevin smiled. "Man, did we ever. It was the first time I remember having girls at our camp. They were something else."

"They sure were," Harry joined in. "We used to look in their cabin windows at night." He held his hands in front of his chest. "There was this one girl. Remember, Kev?"

Kevin grinned. "Do I? Are you kidding?"

Mohan felt slightly embarrassed but made an effort not to let it show.

"Miss Mohan," Harry volunteered, "There was this one girl with great big, uh, uh, Kev, what do you call 'em?"

"Breasts, dummy. Don't you know anything?"

"Oh, I forgot. Yeh, she had these giant breasts. Man, it was really somethin'." He looked at the social worker. "Miss Mohan, you should've been there."

The three boys looked at each other. At that moment, they suddenly realized that the social worker was a woman. They blushed and excused themselves.

Mohan smiled at them with amusement over their instant recognition that she was more than just a social worker. She watched them walk toward Wright House.

The first six months at Wright House had been filled with long sessions between Mohan and Kevin preparing him for his reentry into society.

"She was like a bull. Bulls are men, but she was like one. Maybe more like a dragon. I was scared of her.

Sometimes I'd wonder if fire'd come out of her mouth. She was my foster mother, but I don't remember which one." The youngster looked at Mohan. "There were a lot of them, but I remember her pretty good. Don't know her name, though."

"How long were you there?"

The boy shrugged his shoulders. "Seems like a few years, but I think a few weeks." He fumbled with his hands and shifted in his chair. There was a moment of silence. Kevin furrowed his brow and then smiled as if remembering something important. "It was at night when I was brought there by some woman."

"Your caseworker?"

"Uh huh. She was really mad at me."

"Why?"

"The place I was in said I was dangerous. Man, I was shakin' all over. I guess I thought the caseworker was going to beat me. She didn't. Just told me to pick up my bag and follow her. The whole time in her car she yelled at me about how I'd better behave in the new home or I'd be in big trouble. When we got there, she asked me if I liked it, and I said, 'No.' She told me I'd better or else."

"What was it like for you, Kevin?"

"Just another move. I was like a package that kept getting mailed to the wrong address."

"No one wanted you?"

"Not until I came here. Those homes were bad for me, Miss Mohan. I think I kept dying in them." His hands began to tremble.

"We've had enough today, Kevin. How about continuing this with a milk shake," Mohan suggested.

Kevin took a deep breath and smiled. "Let's walk. Ok?"

"Sure. I think I can make it to the hot dog stand if you can."

Mohan and Kevin walked slowly down the road leading to the entrance to Dunhill. Kevin brushed off his jeans. "Can't keep these clean, Miss Mohan. It's too dusty around here."

"I thought we were just walking down the road for a

milk shake. You're not going out for dinner."

"Never know who might be there. I saw some pretty sharp looking girls last week when Mr. Wolf and me were there." He smiled. "You never know."

"Kev, you're too much." As they left the institution's grounds, Mohan asked, "How do you feel about our discussions lately?"

He brushed off his jeans again. "Yeh." He picked up a pebble and threw it toward a tree.

"Well?"

After a moment of silence, Kevin said, "I couldn't get to sleep last night. You know, like when there's an exam in school that you're worried about? But there wasn't any exam. I kept thinking about faces."

"Whose faces?"

"I don't know. Just people. They were real big and tall, and they smiled at me. They weren't nice, though. You know, like nasty or something. It was really weird. They'd hold out their hands and hold me real tight. It hurt. Then they'd drop me, and I'd be real scared, and another person would catch me. One nasty smile after another'd drop me."

"Ever land anywhere?"

"Huh? Yeh, I landed here, right on the front lawn."

"Anything else, Kev?"

"No, but I was real small, about the size of a baby. Oh yeh, I remember. Somebody came out and carried me into the building, and I was still real scared. I could hear those smiling people laughing real loud outside. The person who took me in said, 'Don't worry. You don't have to go outside.' He kept saying that over and over, and I felt real good. I think I fell asleep then."

"Sounds like you were dreaming."

"Maybe, but it didn't seem like it. Seemed like I was in a foster home again."

Mohan asked, "Why?"

"I don't know. It just did. Know what I mean?"

"I think so. You're helping me to understand. Let's get that milk shake and talk some more."

"Ok," replied Kevin. "It's kind of funny, Miss Mohan, but I'm starting to understand a lot more, too."

"We'll sort it out together, Kev."

Freilick's contacts with the Korbs had provided preparation for them to receive their son. Kevin finally began to visit each weekend by himself.

"Timmy, let your brother alone. Gosh, you kids'll kill him." Betty tried to sound stern, but she could not hide her smile.

"Wow, Mom! How do you handle 'em?" Kevin caught his breath and sat up on the floor. "Man!"

"I'll get Kev. Yaaah!" Tommy landed on his big brother with a crash.

The victim lost his breath for an instant and rolled over.

Betty shouted, "Are you ok? Tommy, you ox, what do you think you're doing? Good Lord!" She rushed to Kevin.

"Oh, man. Too much!" He sat up and took a deep breath. "Wow!"

"That's it. You kids, go to the living room. No more of this crap. Somebody'll get hurt. Enough! Come on, move it!" As Betty shouted the command, the excited children ran to watch television.

After a minute, Kevin joined his mother at the kitchen table. She ironed some of her laundry on the table.

"Milk, Kevin?"

"Man, I need it."

"It's in the refrig'. Help yourself. I'm no waitress." She chuckled. "You're just like everybody else around here."

The boy staggered to the refrigerator and poured himself a glass of milk. "Wow, they're something else." He shook his head.

"Well, I'll tell you, Kevin." Betty put aside the iron and sat at the table. "It does my heart good to see you part of the family again. These brothers and sisters of yours really like you. I never saw them so happy as when you come to visit."

"Man, I'm glad they like me, but do they have to like me so much?" He wiped perspiration from his forehead, and he shook his arms loosely. "They're gonna kill me with happiness."

His mother smiled. "Give us time, son. We'll all calm down."

"Miss Mohan told me we've all got to get used to each other, but we are, I think."

"That's right, Kevin. We sure are. Time changes us. It sure has me." She looked out a window.

The youngster stared quizzically at his mother. "How?"

Betty seemed to search for words. After a moment, she said, "I guess, well, when you left, your father and me, we had a pretty rough time of it. No, before you left, too. Things have gotten better over the years. I don't know. It's kind of hard to explain."

"Yeh. The same's true with me. I was pretty dumb once, but I've grown up a lot."

Betty felt a warmth and closeness to her son. "You're not so dumb, son."

They experienced a feeling of intimacy for each other for probably the first time in either's memory. The ensuing silence told them more than their words could express. Betty nodded and stood to unplug the iron. She leaned over and kissed Kevin on his forehead. He returned her smile. Kevin would soon be ready to return home.

Betty lay on the couch looking at the small, green vase and the artificial flowers which stood alone on the shelf. The wall would be bare without the shelf. Bob hung it after his wife had nagged him for months to put it there. She ached from the day's housework, but she smiled as she remembered the children proudly giving her the vase for Mother's Day. "You'd have thought it was gold."

Her thoughts wandered. Kevin would be coming home soon. No date had yet been set, but she knew it would be soon. That meant another mouth to feed, another child to clothe. She thought back on all those old, mixed feel-

ings and the help she had received from Brown and Freilick. Her problems did not seem so terrible any more. There might be more bills, but that seemed unimportant.

The ringing of the telephone broke the spell. She dragged herself to the table to answer it. "Hello."

"Mrs. Korb?"

"Yes."

"This is Jean Wilde from Seton County. It's been a while since we've talked."

The caseworker's voice sent a chill through Betty. She could not respond.

"Mrs. Korb, are you there?"

"Yes. Yes, I, I'm here."

"Mrs. Korb, I've heard that there are plans for Kevin to go home in the near future, and I'd like to talk with you about that." Her tone seemed confident and businesslike to Betty.

"Things are going just fine. What would you like to know?" Betty bit her lip. A subtle numbness invaded her body.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Korb. I suppose I didn't explain. I'd like to come to your home to discuss this. Would that be all right?"

"My home? When?"

"How about tomorrow at nine?"

"Bob, how does it look?"

"Fine. Everything's good. She'll like it. You should calm down, Betty."

The children sat watching television. They were all freshly scrubbed and carefully cautioned to behave themselves. "You kids'd better be good, or you'll get it," their mother had said over and over that morning.

Bob looked pleased as his children sat quietly in the living room. "Maybe we should have Wilde here more often," he laughed at his wife.

Betty smiled nervously. "That's all I'd need." She shouted to the other room, "Tommy, you look out the window, and tell me when someone is coming."

"Did you call Freilick?"

"I left a message for him after Wilde called yesterday, and I called Brown, but she was out, too." She lit a cigarette and put the match in the sink in order not to dirty an ash tray. "I'm scared of that woman. It's the first time since Kevin was taken away that anybody from that county has come here, and I'm scared."

"Me, too, Betty. But it'll work out. Brown's helping us, and Freilick's got the say over Kevin. She can't do anything. She's just going to talk about Kevin coming home. Isn't that what she said?"

Betty nodded her head. "That's what she said."

"Mommy, here comes some lady."

Betty jumped at Tommy's announcement. "Ok. You kids, be quiet now."

"I'll let her in, Betty." Bob opened the door before the caseworker had the opportunity to knock. "Come in, Mrs. Wilde." He avoided looking at the woman.

Wilde smiled broadly. "Thank you, Mr. Korb." Seeing Betty standing in the living room she said, "Hello, Mrs. Korb. It's been a long time. Nearly a year, hasn't it?"

Betty nervously played with her hands. "Since we saw you with Mr. Freilick at your place. Yes, Mrs. Wilde. I guess it's been a year." She felt foolish and thought that she must have sounded like a little girl talking to her teacher.

Bob noticed his wife's awkward reaction and invited the caseworker to sit in the living room. He offered her his chair. "It was a surprise that you were coming today. We called Mr. Freilick, but he wasn't in."

The woman smiled. "Mr. Freilick? Why, there's no need to bother him." She took a paper from her purse as she looked at the Korb children. "They're nice looking children, Mr. and Mrs. Korb. Shouldn't they be in school today?"

Betty answered, "We kept them home this morning so you could meet them. Thought you'd want to."

"No need to do that. We wouldn't want to have them truanting. Would we?" Wilde's smile was gone. An authoritarian smirk had taken its place. She thought to

herself, "They want their oldest home, and they can't even get their own kids to school." She sighed and looked at the parents. She said, "Perhaps I should clarify why I'm here. Kevin, as you know, is under Seton County's legal custody. We have a responsibility to safeguard his welfare. Dunhill Home for Children is caring for him, but that is at our request. They send us reports about the care they are giving him, but we ultimately make the decisions as to what will become of the child ..."

"Our child," Bob corrected.

"Yes, yes, of course. Our agency, however, has custody of the boy."

Bob felt his anger building. "Look, what are you getting at?"

"To get straight to the point, we feel that Kevin would be better off spending some time in a foster home after he leaves Dunhill." Wilde sat back in her chair and awaited the parents' reaction.

Both parents stared at each other in disbelief. They were shocked.

Betty spoke first. "What are you talking about? Kevin's our son, and he's coming home, not to some foster home."

Bob stood and looked directly at the caseworker. "Look here, there's no reason he can't come home. Ask Mr. Freilick or Miss Brown. They've been helping us. They'll tell you we have a good home. Look at these kids. They get good care. Kevin's been visiting, and there haven't been any terrible problems."

Wilde took a deep breath and waved Bob to his seat. He obeyed. "Mr. and Mrs. Korb, we have had several calls from people who have concerns about the care your children are receiving here."

Wilde continued to talk, but neither parent heard her words. They knew the complaints had come from Betty's father, but they had been taken completely off guard. All of the trauma caused by her father began to crystalize into an horrific, insurmountable obstacle. They felt powerless. Defeated.

The caseworker stood. "We will notify your Mr. Freilick of our decision, of course. I think that you'll understand the wisdom of our decision after you have had a chance to think about it. Good-bye, children. Make sure you go to school today." She walked to the door.

Betty weakly said, "Would you like to see the rest of the house?"

Wilde smiled. "No, not today. Some other time, perhaps. Good-bye, now." She let herself out.

The Korbs stood at the window, watching her drive away.

Freilick listened as Betty Korb shouted on the phone. He was surprised by the news of Wilde's visit and shocked by her reported comments. The family therapist tried to reassure the mother, but her trust had been badly shaken.

"She told us, Mr. Freilick. The county's got the custody, and they decide where Kevin goes when he leaves you. She told us." Betty spoke quickly and with desperation.

"I believe you, Mrs. Korb. She's right. The county has that power, but they've agreed to allow us to make that decision for them." He paused and took a pencil from his shirt pocket. As he spoke, he jotted down Betty's comments. "I'll call Mrs. Wilde today. We'll straighten this out. Ok?"

"The decision's been made. She told us." Betty hesitated. She then added, "Maybe it'd be better. Maybe my father'd leave us alone. Maybe he'd leave Kevin alone, too, if Kevin went to a foster home."

"Is that what you want?"

"Does it matter, Mr. Freilick? Has it ever mattered? I'm afraid to even hope for things now. You and Miss Brown have been great, but that Wilde woman has the final say, and my father'll keep interfering. So what does it matter what I want?"

"Because, if you want Kevin to return home, we'll help you."

"You know I do."

"That's all I wanted to hear. Kevin wants to go home, and I don't know why he shouldn't. I'll work it out with the county and Wilde, and I'll call you back this week. Don't you worry any more about this."

Betty thanked him, but she sounded less than confident. She added, "I'm glad I called. Please help, Mr. Freilick."

"I will."

When Freilick called Seton County, he was informed that the caseworker was in a conference. He asked for Mr. Garfield, her supervisor.

"Mr. Freilick, this is Mr. Garfield. May I help you?"

"I'd like to talk with you about the Gorski situation for a few minutes."

"That would be Mrs. Wilde's case if I recall. She'll be free in about an hour. If you'd like, I'd suggest you call her then..."

"I'd appreciate a call from her, but I'd like to talk with you now." The family therapist did not mask his bluntness. He could feel himself tensing.

"I make it a practice to let my caseworkers handle their own cases without interference from me. Jean knows what she's doing. I'll have her call you. Good-bye, Mr. Freilick."

"The bastard hung up on me!" Freilick slammed down the receiver. "What the hell is going on with them?" He pushed the phone away from him. He shouted, "They're all nuts." Freilick sat back in his chair and stared in disbelief at the phone.

Wilde never returned the call from Dunhill. Freilick called several times, leaving messages. Finally, he wrote her a letter outlining his concerns and asking her to call him. Her contact with the Korbs was a mystery, a mystery which was as upsetting to Dunhill as it was to the Korbs.

After a week, Freilick received a letter signed both by Wilde and Garfield:

Dear Mr. Freilick:

Please forgive my delay in contacting you regarding Kevin Gorski and his family. I have been quite busy lately and have been unable to return your calls.

We have been receiving your reports on the progress of this case, and we have been most impressed with the services provided by you and Maureen Mohan. Kevin's progress and the dedicated work being done with him are most gratifying. Your recent reports that plans are being made to discharge him to his parents' home were most surprising. Quite frankly, we did not feel this possible.

You are aware that Mrs. Korb's father has been a source of information to us even before Kevin's removal from his home many years ago. He has continued to contact us. He has told us that he has not been able to work with you. Mr. Gorski is a most concerned and reliable relative in this case. I am sure that he has misunderstood your services.

Since your reports have been most positive and Mr. Gorski's calls to us have been most negative, we felt it best to look into the Korbs' home situation ourselves. We were not pleased with what we found. Mr. and Mrs. Korb do not seem to be stable enough to accept Kevin back into their home. We, therefore, do not feel that the plan to return Kevin to his parents should be pursued at this time. If the child is ready for discharge, we will be ready to provide foster care in Seton County.

Also, I have spoken with Kevin on the phone recently, and he does not seem prepared to return home. He told me that he would like to go to a foster home."

The rest of the letter asked that Freilick contact Wilde regarding Dunhill's plans for Kevin. Freilick, however, was unable to concentrate on the rest of the letter. Wilde's comments shocked him. "He told me that he would like to go to a foster home." The words echoed through his mind. No one had even hold him about Kevin having spoken with his caseworker, let alone the boy telling her about his preferring to go to a foster home rather than returning to his family. The family therapist slouched in his chair and put his feet up on his desk. He

sighed deeply. "God damn, I don't believe this." He placed his pipe in an ash tray, pushed his chair from the desk, jumped to his feet, and headed down the hall to Maureen Mohan's office.

The young woman turned quickly from the mirror she held as Freilick stormed into her office. "That's ok, Marty, don't knock. Come right in."

"A mirror won't help."

"Nasty. Nasty." She smiled until she noticed the look on her colleague's face. "I hope I don't look like that when I get to be an old social worker."

"Balding."

"What?"

"Balding. Not old. Freilicks get bald while they're still young." He shook his head and smiled. "I don't get it. The whole world is falling apart. I come storming into your office and insult you looking for more to feed into my masochism, and we trade banter. I want to be furious. No, I am furious. But I'm witty. Maureen, I'm getting schizy."

Mohan said, "You've come to the right place. How long have you felt this way?"

"A few minutes." He handed her the letter from Seton County. "Here, join me. Psychosis can be lonely. We can form a group."

Mohan read the letter, and then she looked at Freilick with disbelief. She stammered, "What, what are they talking about? I, I don't...Kev talked with her? He told her what?"

Freilick held up his hand. "That's why I'm here. You tell me. You're in charge of his treatment. Better still, you should have told me before."

"Hold on, Marty. I don't know anything about the boy talking with her. I would have ok'd it with you first. You know that." She took the telephone and dialed Wright House on the intercom. "We'll get to the bottom of this right now." Mohan drummed her fingers on the desk and stopped abruptly as a child care worker answered. She asked the worker about the alleged conversation between

Wilde and Kevin, and she slammed down the phone without replying to what she was told. "Last week," she said staring at the phone, "he had a call from her last week, and a child care worker just put it through."

"Wilde's a caseworker from an agency. Those calls go to me." Freilick's anger was returning.

Mohan nodded with a look of consternation. "I know. It was a slip-up. The worker was new. It was his first afternoon on duty, and he thought it was all right."

"All right? Shit, what made him think it was all right? Damn, Wilde said something. Kevin said something. And now it's all right?" He stood and shoved his chair aside.

"Ok, Marty. Hold on. It's not all right, but it was an honest mistake."

"Will you see Kevin, and let me know more about this mistake?"

"Sure, of course. I'll see him today." She handed back the letter and said, "Marty, we'll straighten this out."

"My God, I hope so, Maureen." Freilick took the letter and turned to leave. He stopped and took a deep breath. "Look, I'm sorry, but I'm pissed about this."

"I don't blame you, Marty. I understand. I really do. I'll call you after I've seen Kevin, and we can talk."

"Ok. Thanks, Maureen." He nodded and looked at the floor. "I feel like Sisyphus, Maureen. It's probably like that for Wilde, too. I think there's a difference, though. The rock she keeps pushing up the hill is a case to her, almost an inanimate inconvenience. Our rock breathes and cries. I had a friend of mine that quit an agency like Seton County because the bastards that ran it were more concerned about maintaining the status quo than reaching out to help people. The person that ran the place called it 'loyalty to the agency.' She was as sick as the Seton County crowd. My friend said that she wore snake skin combat boots. I don't know what that means, but it fits. Our Sisyphian situation is different. Our rock breathes and cries."

"And hopes," said Mohan.

"But that hope is so damn fragile." Freilick sighed and added, "I really believe that Kevin can continue to grow at home, but a foster home, no matter how good it is, scares the hell out of him."

"It would me, too, if I were Kevin. Think of what foster care has come to mean to him. His experience was absolutely horrendous, but even if it hadn't been, the way he sees it, it could mean starting over again."

Freilick nodded. "His parents are his parents. They're no danger any more. He's not about to let anybody replace them, no matter what happens. Damn, I wish his caseworker could see that."

"Marty, look what's really going on here. She only sees the institutional issues. That 'loyalty to the agency' crap your friend complained about was really 'the agency comes before the client.' Coffee breaks and staff parties are more important than a kid's future. It looks like to her it's Dunhill vs. Seton County. You've seen this happen before. I haven't, but I've heard about it. We studied this madness in grad school."

"Sure. I've seen it. I've been in the ring plenty of times. The problem is that nobody ever wins the match, and the clients get bloodied more than the contenders."

Kevin sat quietly listening to Mohan. He took in every word. He heard her tell him of the concern she shared with Freilick over the letter from his caseworker and her supervisor. Kevin looked at his shoes, the bookcase, the plant on his social worker's desk—every place he could to avoid looking at the woman who seemed to be getting closer and closer to asking him what he had told Wilde.

"Kev, you seem upset. I can see why. For the last year, you've been going through a lot, and all that has been geared toward your getting to know your family again." She felt the tension between the youngster and herself.

Kevin nervously played with his hands. "I guess so."

"Could you tell me what you and Mrs. Wilde talked about?"

"She, uh, she apologized for not seeing me for such a

long time, and she, uh, asked me how things were going." He sighed and looked at the book on the desk. "What's psychosynnis?"

"The book's about psychosynthesis. Has nothing to do with Kevin and what he and I are talking about." She smiled and touched his arm. "You're uneasy, Kev. It's ok. I'm not angry with you. I'd only like to help you, and I have to know what happened if I'm going to help. That's all. If you'd rather not tell me, you don't have to. But it would make things easier."

"No, that's ok." He looked at her shyly. "I told her that everything's ok and that I'm staying out of trouble. Then we talked about my family, and I told her that I liked seeing them. She, uh, wanted to know if there was enough food and stuff when I visited, and I told her there was. Then she talked for a long time about my grandfather and Sally and the problems my family was having and how, maybe, I shouldn't go home because there were so many problems." He spoke quickly in a nervous manner. Finally, he stopped and excused himself as he blew his nose.

"Do you think you should go home?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Would you like to? I thought things were going well at home."

"I guess they're not. Mrs. Wilde said they weren't." He looked directly at his social worker. "If I'm gonna make trouble for them, I don't want to go home. That lady on the phone..."

"Mrs. Wilde?"

"Yeh, that lady said I could visit when I'm in a foster home, and that there wouldn't be any problems for anybody if I went there instead of my own home."

"If you went to a foster home?"

"Uh huh. She said it would be ok with you and Mr. Freilick and my folks. She said it'd be better for everybody."

"Do you agree?"

"No."

"What do you want?"

"I want to go home, not to some dumb foster home."

Mohan tried to discuss all of the alternatives open to the boy. Then she described foster care, ending with, "Foster care would mean living with a family, a family who wants you."

He sat up in his chair and clenched his fists. "Oh, sure. I don't want that again."

The information about the child's terrible experiences in foster care raced through Mohan's mind. "You wouldn't go with people like you had before."

"How do you know? I was in those rotten places before, and Mrs. Wilde told me that she makes the decisions about where I go. You don't."

Mohan felt a twinge of anger toward Wilde for coming between her and Kevin. She, also, felt surprise over the boy's attitude. "We all work together, Kev. It's not only Seton County and Dunhill. You and your parents are important, too. In fact, you're most important. You are really the person who makes the decision regarding your future."

"Sure. Just like I made the decision that I'd come here in the first place. I don't count, and you know it. You don't either. Neither do Mr. Freilick or my folks. That lady decides." His hands trembled, and he tried to hide them in his lap. "Can I, can I go back to Wright House now? They're going into town to the store."

"All right, Kev. Go ahead." She leaned toward him. "You're upset now, but remember this. We'll straighten everything out for you. Don't worry too much. Ok?"

"Ok." He left the office.

Mohan walked down the hall to see Freilick. She found him reading through Kevin's record.

"Looks like familiar reading. This is becoming an obsession around here."

"She's doing us in, Maureen. While you were with Kevin, Bob Korb called. His wife told him to call us and tell us to let Seton County find a foster home for Kevin. I heard her shouting in the background. Neither of them

will call Margaret Brown. The situation was delicately balanced from the start, and now it could fall apart." He held out the record. "I read this thing, again. What do you think? Were we wrong? Did we open Pandora's Box? Maybe I should have left it alone."

"No, Marty. It was right. I know it was. Kevin has a right to his family. The case was going well until Wilde interfered, but if you're not sure of what you're doing, it'll never work."

"I don't know. Maybe I'm not sure. Maybe he can't return home. Impossible dreams and all that crap. The unpleasant fact is that Seton County controls the purse strings. They really do control the damn case. Maybe Wilde's right. If the Korbs are falling apart now, they might never have been able to cope with Kevin." He felt drained of all emotion. "You didn't hear them, Maureen. They were scared to death."

"They're frightened that they'll lose the other kids, too. You know that. Mention Seton County and you bring back old nightmares."

"I know that, and Betty's probably afraid that her father's done her in, again." He shook his head. "That poor woman. That poor, scared, weak woman." He lit his pipe and looked at Mohan. "Well? How did it go with Kevin?"

"The trust he's had in us is pretty shaken. The boy isn't sure what's going to happen, and he's not sure we're able to help anymore."

"He can join the club. I'm not either."

The next few days were spent furiously attempting to rebuild a shattered situation. Mohan worked closely with Freilick in coordinating what was happening at Dunhill, Millersville, and Seton County. She involved Brian Webb in treatment sessions with Kevin in an effort to restore the faith the boy had lost in Dunhill's ability to help him. Kevin had gained an independence from the staff while he moved closer to his family and imminent discharge from the institution. The severing of ties, how-

ever, had left him without the available emotional support he now needed to survive the present upheaval. He knew that the staff felt powerless, and he began to feel isolated and depressed.

"I'm worried, Brian. When Kevin came to Wright House, he was excited and vibrant. Not anymore. Not since Wilde interfered. In a week, he's become stubborn and angry. Jim Wolf came in yesterday, and he told me that Kevin wouldn't even talk to him. I have him in here every day, and he just sits. Frankly, I don't know what to do. This feeling of helplessness is terrible. I know what he's reacting to. I only hope it'll pass."

Webb looked red-eyed and tired. "I felt like calling Wilde and screaming when Marty told me. I saw Jim this morning. He's worried. Jim knows Kevin better than anybody here, and he said that he's never seen the kid like this."

"Marty's going to see Wilde tomorrow. He told me that when the mountain won't come to Muhammad, you go to the mountain and blow it up yourself." She smiled. "I wonder what kind of explosive he'll use?"

"I'll provide the match," Webb quipped.

There was a chill in the air as Freilick drove up to the Seton County Department of Child Welfare. He parked his car and looked at the building which had taken on an ominous air since his last visit. The family therapist reflected on the excitement of his previous trip to Seton County. The sun and the colored leaves which had provided a feeling of hope had changed. Today's chill and sharp breeze held premonitions of more than the forecasted rain. His mission this time was more than exploratory. More was at stake.

As he entered the crowded waiting room, he spotted the same woman he remembered from his first visit sitting behind the reception desk. He spoke quickly. "Hello, my name is Martin Freilick, and I have an appointment with Jean Wilde."

"Mrs. Wilde? She's expecting you?" The receptionist

was as cold as the breeze he had left outside.

"That's right. I have an appointment."

"Sit down, and I'll let her know you're here."

Freilick curiously felt more in common this time with the clients who filled the room. He looked at the disheveled young mother who desperately tried unsuccessfully to control her active, restless three year old son who insisted on talking with everyone who would give him attention. Glancing at the elderly couple who huddled together in the corner, he thought, "They look embarrassed." The three teenagers who sprawled on the floor next to the door and joked among themselves seemed to strike an interesting balance for the family therapist.

Jean Wilde anxiously read over Kevin's case record in anticipation of the meeting she was about to have. She mumbled, "I can't figure out why they're making such a big deal out of this case. Garfield's losing his perspective. It'd be much cheaper to place this case in foster care. Institutions cost too much, and this one boy's not worth the cost. We could use the money we spend for him for four other children in foster care. He'll probably just turn out like his parents. I suppose it's sad, but some people are born losers. The record's pretty clear. He's certainly one of those. Another thing, he's taking up too much time, much too much time." A call on the phone told her of Freilick's arrival.

She walked into the reception room. "It's good to see you again, Mr. Freilick."

He was startled by the interruption. "Oh, Mrs. Wilde. I'm sorry. I guess I was daydreaming."

"I understand. It's still early. It's kind of a dreary day, too. Let's go to the conference room. Mr. Garfield will be pleased to see you."

The same posters. The same busy staff. Nothing had changed. The wheels of Welfare continued to grind. "To grind down," he thought. Despite the chill, Freilick could feel himself conspiring.

Entering the conference room, Wilde asked Freilick to

be seated. "I'll be with you in a minute." She left the room.

He looked around at the plastic furniture. "It almost looks like wood."

Wilde returned. "You remember Mr. Garfield."

"Of course. How are you?"

Garfield shook Freilick's hand. "Fine. I'm glad you could come."

An overweight, elderly man followed the caseworker and her supervisor into the room. Wilde said, "Mr. Freilick, I'd like you to meet Mr. Stan Gorski, Kevin's grandfather."

The family therapist froze at the surprise introduction. He had been caught off guard. "Uh, Mr. Gorski, we've spoken on the phone. I'm pleased to meet you."

"I bet you are," spat Betty's father.

Garfield sensed the tension and offered everyone coffee. No one accepted. "Well, I understand that there are some misunderstandings on Kevin Gorski's case."

Freilick replied immediately. He outlined the concerns of Dunhill with what had happened during Wilde's visit, her phone call to Kevin, and the letter she had written suggesting foster care.

The grandfather interrupted. "It's all crazy stuff. It's crazy to send that kid to Betty's. You don't know what's going on down there in Millersville if you want to do that."

Freilick bit his lip and clenched his hands in his lap. "What is going on down there, Mr. Gorski? What exactly are you worried about?"

"Nothing. I'm not worried about anything. You're the one who should be worried if you care anything about Kevin." He leaned forward on the table. "It's this way. Those kids don't have enough food. They're left alone all the time. They're not happy. Those so-called parents don't care about anybody but themselves. I never wanted that daughter of mine in the first place. She's been nothing but trouble, and now she's trouble for her own kids."

He pointed at Wilde. "She knows what I'm talking about. She's been there."

"I've been there many times, Mr. Gorski, and I've never seen anything like you describe," said Freilick.

The man waved his hand. "Then you're blind. That's all. You're either blind or stupid."

Garfield interrupted quickly. "Mr. Freilick and the others at Dunhill Home for Children have been very helpful, Mr. Gorski. You might not agree with what he's been doing, but he only has Kevin's best welfare in mind, I'm sure."

"I suppose he does, but he don't know what's going on."

Freilick asked, "What don't I know? You've made some extremely serious charges, Mr. Gorski. Back them up. When have you seen these things? Where? If you didn't see them, who did? How do we get in touch with these witnesses? Be a little more specific if you can."

"I don't have to. Everyone who knows me knows I've always told the truth. In fact, everyone who knows Betty and that husband of her's knows what's going on."

Freilick shook his head. "I'm sorry, but I can't accept that." He looked at Wilde and Garfield. "I've given you my concerns and the concerns of the staff at Dunhill. In short, our strong recommendation is that Kevin be discharged to his own home."

"You're nuts," grunted Gorski.

"Mr. Garfield, I didn't come here to be insulted, and I'm not here to argue with Mr. Gorski or anyone else. I thought we were going to share impressions in order to make some decisions. I didn't know he was going to be here, and I'm surprised the Korbs weren't invited to balance the scales."

Wilde looked at him with seeming amusement. "You sound like the outraged advocate of citizens' rights again." When she noticed anger building on Freilick's face, she added, "I'm sorry, Mr. Freilick. Perhaps you're correct. We may have been wrong to invite Mr. Gorski to take part in this conference without telling you; how-

ever; I'm sure you can understand his interest. After all, when he told me that you asked him not to get involved with his own daughter and grandchildren, I felt you were a little unfair yourself." She pushed her hair from her forehead and continued, "Mr. Freilick, we all want the same thing. We all want what's best for Kevin."

Gorski remained silent excepting for very loud glares in Freilick's direction. Wilde and Freilick debated and argued for the next hour.

Garfield listened carefully to both his caseworker and the family therapist as he doodled and took occasional notes. Finally, he interrupted with, "I think we can all agree that we disagree." He smiled, and Wilde chuckled. "Well," he cleared his throat, "I think what we'll do is to permit Dunhill to do what they think best. We won't interfere, Mr. Freilick. Just keep us informed. Perhaps we'll meet again in the near future."

"Mr. Garfield, we should talk about this some more." Wilde was surprised at what seemed the betrayal of her supervisor.

"We will. We'll talk about it later," said Garfield. "Mr. Freilick, you go right ahead and contact the Korbs. I think that what I've heard today has made a good case for what it is you are aiming for, and we'll refrain from contacting the family. Why would we want to?"

The children sat upstairs in a bedroom looking out the windows. They seemed drowsy and rather listless. Shouts and yelling could be heard from the downstairs.

"I don't care what Freilick or Brown or any of them say. Wilde said it all with her rotten grin and her bastard comments. She's the authority, and the rest of them kiss her ass." Betty threw her cigarette against the wall. "There, the whole bunch of them at Seton County can look at the cigarette butt on my floor. They can take pictures of it to prove I'm no good as a mother. Who the hell cares?" She shook wildly, and an empty look in her eyes was quickly followed by uncontrollable sobbing.

Bob took her in his arms and walked her to the couch

in the living room. "Here, Betty, lie down for awhile. Lie here and rest. Do you want some water?"

She shook her head and held her hands over her eyes. "Bob, I'm so ashamed. I don't know why I'm doing this. I don't know why."

He stroked his wife's hair and stayed with her until she finally fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. Bob looked toward the stairs leading to the bedrooms. He quietly left his wife and went to see the children.

The tired father marshalled all his remaining strength and gathered the children in one bedroom. He looked at the timid, frightened faces and began to speak. "Your mother isn't feeling well. I know it's hard on all of you. It's been a bad couple of weeks, but I don't want you to worry. She'll be better real soon."

Sally sat on the floor with her legs crossed. She whispered, "Why is she sick, Daddy?"

"She's worried." He smiled. "Things are going to be better, though."

"I hope so," Tommy said.

"We all do," Bob said with a smile of reassurance.

Bob ushered the children outside to play. He then called Brown. She agreed to come to the Korbs' home immediately.

Freilick and Brown worked closely with the Korbs during the weeks that followed. Betty began taking tranquilizers, and she willingly engaged in therapy with the two social workers. Bob was supportive and gained additional insight into his and his wife's problems. The situation in Millersville slowly, steadily improved.

Betty's father continued in his efforts to undermine the improvements. His tone was gruff on the phone. "Listen, Bob, I can talk to my own daughter if I want to. Now put her on to talk to me."

Bob shook his head and tightly gripped the phone. "Sorry, Mr. Gorski, I won't, and you know why. We've had enough from you, and it's over now. You've lied and torn us both apart for the last time. We don't want you

ever to call again." He gently hung up the phone. "Say, I'm pretty good. Didn't even lose my temper." He reached over to pat himself on his own back.

Betty spoke from the doorway. "Let me do that for you." She grinned.

"Sneak."

"Yep, I'm glad I am. I'm glad I heard that."

Betty had spoken with Margaret Brown about her own needs. The mother found that as her family came closer together, Bob and the children presented less demands. She felt better about herself. The children's behavior had improved until there were no crisis situations. Bob, also, worked closely with her and Brown. She seemed to find less to keep her occupied at home. For the first time she began to look outside her home for activities. The children went alone to their church youth meetings less than before. She and Bob went with them.

Betty looked nervously in the mirror. The bedroom furniture reflected around her own image. She looked at the neatness of the room and the rather drab appearance of the furniture. She thought, "I wonder if a little paint would cheer up this room?" She noticed the floor reflecting in the mirror and her eyes slowly wandered over her own appearance. She critically examined her clothes and carefully brushed her hair. "I think I look ok." She shook her head and brushed her hair again. "It's got to look perfect." As she brushed her hair, she thought of Brown smiling during a recent visit.

"Why don't you get out and help some people who need you?" Brown accepted the coffee Betty offered.

"I've got a few people here who really need me."

"I know that, but you're ready to help some other people now."

"What are you getting at?"

"Your church. You and Bob are there a lot with your kids. Why don't you volunteer during the day once in a while, too. They need people to visit the elderly and to help out with some of their other projects. Not too much

at first, but who knows what might happen? I think it would be good for you and the church."

Betty was surprised. "Me? They don't want me. Those ladies have it all together. They're not like me."

"You're getting it all together."

Betty and Bob talked about Brown's suggestion. Their minister was delighted with Betty's offer.

"I look as good as I'll ever look," Betty said while she placed the brush on her dresser. She put on her coat and left for the church.

Kevin's progress was not as promising. It was decided not to arrange for him to visit his family until the situation at home had stabilized for some time and his understanding and attitude had appreciably improved.

There were several tentative arrangements for weekend visits for Kevin with his family, but they each were cancelled because of the youngster's inability to face them when the times to leave approached. Finally, Mohan went to Freilick with good news.

Freilick and Webb were talking in the family therapist's office.

Mohan poked her head past the open door. "Am I breaking up something important?"

Webb answered, "Hi, Maureen, we were just about finished." He stood as if to leave.

"No, don't leave on account of me, Brian."

"Can you tolerate both of us?" Freilick quipped.

"I don't know, but you'll both be pleased to hear that Kevin is ready to go home for a visit."

"You're kidding? That's great." Freilick sat back in his chair and smiled.

She added, "I just left him. He's coming out of his shell. It took a little time, but now I'm sure he's beginning to trust us again. I didn't make any offer this time. He's the one who asked to go home for a visit. In fact, he's eager."

"What brought on the change?" asked Webb.

"Time, thought and his basic need to have his own

family. That never changed. It's taken so much for him to come to grips with this, and the confusion is far from over. Kevin's had so many people for fathers and mothers. There were social workers, teachers and, now, the real thing. They're all mixed up in his head. Who should he be loyal to? The ream of paper called his record was written by a long list of Kevin's parents. It's incredible when you think of it. No wonder it's been so difficult for him." She looked satisfied. "There's really been a lot of growth."

Arrangements were made for the visit. The staff helped the boy with his anxiety by helping him to concentrate on things other than his pending trip to Millersville. Kevin worked, played and studied harder than ever before. Not everyone, however, was optimistic.

Mrs. Higgins was reminiscing on her decades of service to Dunhill. As usual, she ended with, "It's not the same." She put down her coffee cup and looked directly at Jim Wolf who sat with her in the dining room. "Jim, the old days were better. You weren't here then, but they were better."

Wolf sighed and stared at his coffee. "I suppose."

She continued, "Now, you take that little Gorski boy."

"He's not so little anymore."

"Sure he is. In the old days, he'd be here for five or six more years. And he'd be happy here. He sure would."

"He's happy here, Mrs. Higgins."

"Ha! You mean he used to be, until Freilick got his hands on him. Why Baum and Freilick waste their time on those no good parents of these children is beyond me."

Wolf shook his head. "Sometimes I've got to agree with you." He pushed the cup aside and stood. "Kevin's had some ups and downs, and I wonder if he'll ever recover from that last down." Wolf returned to Maxwell and Mrs. Higgins to her laundry.

Allen Brokaw played curiously with a sheet of paper.

Kevin looked at the boy and said, "Looks like your homework."

"It is. My composition for English."

Kevin laughed. "That was a tough assignment. 'Where I've Been and Where I'll Be.' Weird title."

Allen said, "I wrote mine about being a truck driver. You?"

"Doesn't matter."

"Come on, Kev. What's yours about?"

"Just some junk Miss Mohan and me have been talking about."

"Just some junk," mimicked Allen.

"Cut it out, Allen."

"Huh. I'd never write about that stuff."

"How come?"

"'Cause, I never talk with Miss Mohan about much. It drives her nuts. She jabbers away, and I just listen."

They sat back and looked out the window. Allen broke the silence. "Dull, man, dull. Nothin' to do."

Kevin seemed oblivious to the comment. He said, "I wrote about me. Want to hear?"

"No. Read it."

Kevin sorted through his folder and removed a sheet of paper. "Ta da! What I wrote is great."

"I'm sick of it already. Are you gonna read it or not?"

"Ok. Here goes. 'My name is Kevin Gorski. I have been to many places. I am here now. I have lived with foster parents. They sent me to live with other foster parents. Nobody wanted me because I was dumb. I am not dumb anymore. I will live now with my real parents and my brothers and sisters.'"

Allen said, "Mohan asked if I'd like to live with foster parents."

"Don't do it."

"Why not?" asked Allen.

"Bad news. I know, too. They didn't give a shit about me."

"Bad words! Shame! Shame! Kevin's using bad words," Allen taunted.

"I mean it. They're ok when other people are around, but watch out when you're alone with them. There was this one woman. When I wouldn't eat oatmeal, she'd hold my hand in it until I'd cry. She really did. Man, I wanted to kill her."

"Ya should've. Nobody'd do that to me and get away with it."

"They moved me."

"Who?"

"The caseworkers."

"Why?"

"Because I was bad, I guess." Kevin placed his paper back in the folder. Almost as an afterthought he said, "They won't do it again, though. I'll go where I want to. It's my life."

Ann was busy typing as Freilick sorted through his mail. "If you get any more mail, Marty, we'll make you get your own post office box in town."

"This is a sign of a hard worker. Look at the red eyes, the worry lines on my forehead, lots of mail. It's all part of the pattern."

"Uh huh, and all this garbled dictation. Where did you get all these words? What is 'encopresis'?"

Freilick smiled. "Look it up. It applies to Dunhill's secretaries." Turning to leave he added, "I've an appointment in an hour. I'll be with Hirsch."

Paging through the dictionary Ann said, "Ok, I'll ring you in his office." She found the word she was looking for. "Hey, Marty, what's the big idea?"

He left laughing for his meeting with Baum.

"Marty, we've gone over the problems with this boy and his family God knows how many times, and, it's funny, now I'm beginning to worry. I should be optimistic, but I'm not. There's something wrong here, and I've been giving it a lot of thought."

"Have you come up with the solution?" Freilick smiled. He thought, "Baum could be such a pessimist at times."

"Yes, and I hope I'm wrong. I don't think Seton County is finished with us yet. I really don't think they'll allow him to go home."

"Hell, I hope you're wrong, Hirsch. We've got a visit in the works now, and we're hopeful things will move along again. The family is in good shape. Kevin's getting there."

Freilick put his feet on the windowsill in his office. It had been a long, grueling day. He smiled at his own involvement with his cases. He had told a social work student who was training at Dunhill that a loss of objectivity would create havoc with a client. "The social worker will confuse his own feelings with those of his clients, and then you wonder who is helping whom." He laughed to himself as he felt a twinge of his returning ulcer.

The ringing of the intercom broke the spell. Ann's voice said, "I have two calls. One is your wife. The other is your friend, Jean Wilde."

"Oh great. Let my wife know I'll call her back." He pushed the button on his phone. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Wilde." His hand moved to his stomach.

"Mr. Freilick, how are you?" She sounded happy.

"Just fine. How are things in Seton County?" He knew the pleasantries were important, but he could feel his blood pressure rising at the sound of her voice.

"Busy, always busy. But I wanted to update you on how things are going."

Freilick was puzzled. "How things are going?"

"Yes, with our Korb family."

"The Korbs? I saw them a week ago." Freilick winced.

"A week ago?" She laughed. "Well, I guess we have the jump on you. I've got the latest info."

"Mrs. Wilde, this sounds like competition." He bit his lip.

"No, no. Cooperation is the name of the game."

"That's what we agreed." He was impatient.

"Well, I had the opportunity. It was completely

unplanned, mind you. I thought it would be nice to stop in Millersville this morning."

Freilick went cold. "Oh, no."

"Pardon?"

"Nothing. Go on, please." He listened in disbelief.

"I was in Millersville to see an old friend, and since I was driving by the Korbs' house, I thought I'd just say hello." She coughed and cleared her throat. "I think I'm getting a cold."

Freilick said, "I hope it's not serious."

"No, not at all. Just the sniffles. But let me tell you. I'm glad I stopped. Kevin's parents told me that he plans on visiting this weekend. They were so upset about it that they asked me to call you to cancel it."

"What the hell went on when you were there?"

"You sound upset, Mr. Freilick. I thought you'd be glad to cancel the visit if the Korbs weren't ready."

"Damn it, Wilde. They were ready. Kevin's been really up for this visit. Have you screwed it up again? What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Who do you think you're talking to?"

"For God's sake, you agreed to leave these people alone. We were working with them. You and Garfield agreed to that. You know what contact with Seton County does to them."

"Oh, come now, Mr. Freilick. That couple is completely unable to care for Kevin. Why when Mr. Gorski called me yesterday..."

"Gorski? And you give me that crap about visiting an old friend and just deciding to stop by on the spur of the moment? You expect me to believe that? Why the hell are you doing this? What's going on?" Freilick was standing and shouting into the phone.

Wilde lowered her voice until it was nearly inaudible. "Mr. Freilick, you're all upset. Please keep in mind that this is my case. You and Dunhill are being paid to care for Kevin. Now, you've given him fine care up to this point. It sounds like it must be time to place him in foster care."

The family therapist was shaken. His thoughts were racing, and he could not reply. There was a long silence while he tried to think logically. Finally, he said, "I, I'd like to call you back. Can I call in a few minutes?"

"Oh, it's late. We close at five, and it's that now. Call me tomorrow. We'll talk then if you'd like."

His hand shook as he hung up the phone without replying to the caseworker. "Good Lord, what do we do now?" he stammered.

Baum came into Freilick's office. "Marty, you're as white as a ghost. I heard you shouting. What's going on?"

Freilick fell into his chair and stared at the phone. He falteringly told his supervisor about the phone call. He and Baum spoke for several minutes. Baum helped him to deal with the strong emotions the call had evoked until they were able to discuss the new crisis rationally. Nothing was resolved, but Freilick felt that the shock was softened by the discussion.

Freilick called Mohan and gave her the news. Her reaction was expected, but she shouldered her responsibility and tried to help Kevin to deal with this latest disappointment. She met with Kevin the next day. The child began to withdraw from her during the interview. She could feel the pain of a nearly tangible regression.

Each word hit like a hammer blow. "Your caseworker feels that your parents need more time before you go home." Mohan looked so caring, so concerned as she spoke. Kevin wondered how she could care about him and still say such hurting things. "I know how much you want to go home, but it'll have to wait, Kev." She paused and looked into his angry glare.

"Wait? Why not? It'll only be another eleven or twelve years." He slumped in the chair and stared at the floor sullenly.

"You feel like it's the same thing that happened so many years ago?" Mohan hoped for a reply, but she knew that Kevin had closed the door and would sulk for some time. Further attempts to reach him would be useless. She gave him permission to return to his activities and

added, "It's difficult. I know that, Kev, but I care. I really do."

The door slammed. Kevin pushed past the cleaning person in the hall. She looked annoyed, but she said nothing. She merely shook her head and continued sweeping. Kevin ran past the offices and conference rooms and waiting rooms. He charged toward Maxwell, his old division. Entering the hall, he slowed his pace and called, "Mr. Wolf, are you here?" An echo replied. The division was empty.

When Freilick was told that Garfield was calling, he grabbed the phone eagerly.

"Mr. Freilick, this is Mr. Garfield. I wanted to call you just as soon as possible. I spoke with Mrs. Wilde this morning, and she told me you were extremely upset yesterday. I want to let you know that I can understand why. She had no right interfering with what you are trying to do. I thought she understood, but I was wrong. I wanted to assure you that this will not happen again. By the way, I tried to get in touch with the Korbs to let them know, but no one answered."

Freilick sighed with relief. "Thank you, Mr. Garfield. Thank you very much. I was pretty upset, and I apologize for that."

"Understandable. You people go ahead with whatever plans you have. Good luck to you."

Freilick was excited. "I've got to call the Korbs." He began to dial their number, but he changed his mind. "No, in a minute. First, I've got to see Maureen." He smiled and slapped his leg. "She'll go through the ceiling."

Kevin shouted toward the stairs, "Mr. Wolf, are you up there?" There was no reply. He wiped the tears from his flushed and swollen eyes, and he walked through the recreation room toward the windows facing the baseball diamonds. He wiped away more tears with his sleeve and saw Jim Wolf playing ball with the other boys. Kevin sat

on the pool table and saw the other boys laughing and shouting and cheering as the child care worker swung the heavy bat through the air missing the recklessly thrown ball. "I bet he did that on purpose. Just like everything else," Kevin whispered through clenched teeth. The boy stood slowly and walked to the stairs which led to the dormitory. He could feel the foundation of his self rapidly crumbling.

"You mean, her supervisor actually told you that?" Mohan was jubilant.

"That's right. We go ahead as planned. Seton County will back us. He even tried to call the Korbs to apologize."

"Marty, Kevin's got to hear this. He'll really be happy. I just saw him a few minutes ago to tell him the bad news. It really hurt him, Marty. I've got to go. I'll see you later." She left her office looking for Kevin. Mohan was excited as she walked quickly down the hall.

The boy shuffled through the dormitory and fixed an icy glare on the door at the end of the room. All the dreams and fantasies had come so close to coming true. Hours and hours of drowsy sleep had been spent building stories about parents and brothers and sisters. He had found them. He was going to them. But not now. Maureen Mohan had just told him. He knew it would not happen now. He would probably go to a foster home like the one the staff had found for him several years before or like the others which haunted him. Slaps. Hot oatmeal. Shouts. He shook. Nobody could help him anymore. He stood staring at the red exit sign above the door which glowed in the shadows of the room. Kevin was only fifteen, but he was tired. His joints ached. His thoughts slowed. He couldn't think anymore. There were no tears to cry, no rage, no shouts of anger—only fatigue. It crept through his body. He could feel its weight. Kevin's head began to throb. He moved deliberately but slowly as he took a sheet from a nearby bed. Gripping both ends of the

sheet, he swung it into the air. As he propelled it faster, he could feel the breeze on his face. It wound about itself becoming tighter and stiffer.

Mohan saw several children congregated at the foot of the stairs leading down from the staff offices. "Has anyone seen Kev?"

They chorused, "No, Miss Mohan."

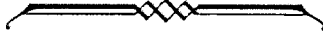
She headed for the field where she saw other boys playing with the child care staff.

Kevin dragged the sheet behind him as he moved toward the door. Standing on the fire escape, he looked across the spacious landscape. His chest pounded. His temples throbbed. His hair blew in the wind.

Jim Wolf looked across the field toward the main building. "What's Kev doing up there?" The child care worker shouted to a group of kite-flying boys near the building, "One of you run over and tell Kev to get off that fire escape." Mohan heard Wolf and looked toward the building. She froze in terror.

Kevin slowly and laboriously climbed the rusty, iron railing. The sheet hung heavily about his shoulders. The other end was carefully tied to the railing. He looked into the sun. A sharp pain rippled down his back, but it was only momentary. There was a gasp for breath, and Kevin's pain had ended.

EPILOGUE



FEDELE FINISHED MEETING WITH BAUM and began returning the endless list of phone calls. Dunhill's Board of Directors was demanding an explanation. The news media were outraged. A State investigator was arriving that afternoon to review the suicide of Kevin Gorski. It had been less than twenty-four hours since the boy had died. The Korbs had made arrangements to take the boy home. Wilde did not object to their doing this, and Betty Korb asked that she and her husband pay for the funeral. Seton County agreed.

Freilick walked through quiet halls on his way to his office. He was still in shock. The screams of Mohan echoed in his mind. He still could see her chalk-like face and feel her shaking body as she trembled in his arms while the police lowered the body. Jim Wolf wept as he moved the boys to the other side of the building. The children were out of control, and the night was spent by the entire staff remaining on duty trying to help the children to cope with the horror they had witnessed.

Baum met Freilick on the landing. "Going to your office, Marty?"

"Huh? Yes, to call Seton County again."

"You look pretty rough, Marty. Why don't you wait? Jerry called them earlier. Want some coffee?"

Freilick looked at his supervisor. He felt like a volcano was about to erupt inside his head. His hands trembled

and he had all he could do to nod. Baum put his arm around Freilick's shoulders and led him into the coffee room.

"We should've known, Hirsch. I can't understand. I can't, can't believe it."

There was a long silence between them.

Baum cleared his throat and quietly said, "It's a terrible thing for everyone, Marty. Don't blame yourself. No one's at fault."

Freilick shook his head. "No. That's not so, Hirsch. Someone's got to be at fault. A boy like Kevin doesn't just happen to hang himself on a fire escape on an autumn afternoon. My God, Hirsch." His eyes welled up with tears. "I feel so God damned angry. I want revenge for this, but I don't know who to hurt." The tears streamed down his cheeks, and fatigue from the shock and the long, sleepless night made him stammer. "Do, do I hit myself or Maureen or Brian or Jim or you? What the hell, Hirsch. Should I stagger into Seton County and spit on Wilde and Garfield?" He began to empty his pipe and ended up throwing it on the table. "Kev's gone. Isn't he?"

Baum nodded.

"I loved him, you know. His parents loved him. They really did. Once they didn't know how to, but they learned. He wanted them, Hirsch. They wanted him. But somehow it got all screwed up. Somehow I missed something, and it killed him."

"I was talking with Jerry most of the night, Marty. He doesn't blame you. That never crossed his mind. He blames the system. That's what he thinks killed Kevin. I agree with him."

"So, what do I do with that? Just blame the damned system? Come on, Hirsch."

"Wait a minute, Marty. Listen for a minute. It looks like Kevin was terrified that he'd leave here to return to the hell he had left. Maybe he was ready to return home. Maybe not. It doesn't matter. What's clear is that he couldn't face foster homes again. There are some great

foster homes, but all he remembered was the hell he went through before coming here."

Freilick tentatively tasted the hot coffee. "Funny. It wasn't Kev, you know, Hirsch."

"What do you mean?"

"It wasn't Kevin at all that was at stake here. My God, he was only an excuse for the whole thing." Freilick began to laugh through his tears. "Hirsch, look at it. Look at the agencies, the bureaucracies, the jobs. The whole mess can only exist if there are cases. Kevin was a case. There are millions of others to take his place. The industry'll keep going."

"Cut it out, Marty," Baum snapped. "Was he a case to you or a human being?"

"He was a child, Hirsch, a child who looked sad when all the other kids returned from visiting their parents." The tears trickled down his cheeks again. "My friend, I feel like I died yesterday."

Baum and Freilick held each other. The family therapist sobbed. He had forgotten that it was his first anniversary at Dunhill.

The situation at Dunhill Home for Children slowly returned to normal. The Seton County Department of Child Welfare held a party when Jean Wilde was promoted to replace the retiring Charles Garfield two years after she had closed Kevin's case. The Korb family painfully survived with the help of Freilick and Brown. They eventually moved from the state.

Martin Freilick would stop in Millersville when he would visit another family in the community. He would leave a flower on Kevin's grave each month. He no longer felt uncomfortable crusading to change the system.