

CHAPTER ONE

SUMMER VACATION

ELDORA, KANSAS
SATURDAY JUNE 4, 1949

The three adolescent girls chose their way carefully in the dense underbrush as they walked through the woods at the river near the high railroad track embankment across from South Emporia Street.

“Gosh, it really feels good to be out of school. I thought sixth grade would never end.” Barbara announced. “Just think, Patsy, we’ll be goin’ to Junior High in September, isn’t that exciting? No more Washington Elementary and all those little snot noses, isn’t that great?”

“I guess.” Patsy answered. “It’s sure gonna be different in that big building with all those Lincoln and Jefferson students around. It’s a longer walk, too.”

“It’s different but it’s better.” Louise joined in. “I didn’t like it last year when I started the Seventh, but I do now. You have a different teacher for each subject and they treat you more like a grown up. Oh, you get to have your own locker too. They got sports and there’s also an indoor gym with neat equipment, not just a dirt playground with swings and a merry go round. You can keep your clothes clean. And listen to this! After gym class every day you get to take a shower. Only thing is, everyone’s naked in this one big shower room.”

“Th’ boys too? My gosh, you mean we’re all showering naked together?” Barbara yelled.

“No stupid, no such luck.” Louise smirked. She stopped and put her arms out to her friends. “Wait for me, I need to find a place to pee.” She unfastened her jeans and stepped into the thick underbrush, where she pulled her clothes down to squat between two bushes. “Don’t leave me! You girls stay here and guard me.”

“All right, all right.” Patsy assented. She and Barbara stood guard while Louise held precariously to the branches and relieved herself. “You better hurry up, I think I hear someone coming.”

“Stop it Patsy, you’re just tryin’ to make me pee on myself!”

Barbara snapped her head around quickly. “There is! There’s someone coming, I hear them. Listen!” Barbara and Patsy stepped out into the narrow, overgrown pathway for an unobstructed view. The sound of running feet crashing through the forest became ominously louder. Suddenly, a completely naked, fast charging boy brandishing a huge knife burst out of the thick undergrowth and collided with the two girls.

“*Merda! Deus id damna!* (Shit! God damn it!)” the boy shouted in clearly articulated Latin, as all three children tumbled to the ground in a pile of arms and legs.

“*Eeeyeee! Eeeeah!* Get off me!” the girls screamed in panic. The perspiring, tousle haired twelve year old raised himself quickly, sheathed his knife in the scabbard belted to his bare waist, and stood with his hands over his crotch to stare at Louise, who was in midstream of relieving herself as she squatted under the bushes. A broad grin flashed across his dirty face. He remained motionless for a brief second before bolting off into the underbrush.

“Go away! Hide me, don’t let ’im see me!” Louise cried, fumbling frantically with her jeans and underwear. When the girls recovered from their sudden shock and regained at least some of their composure, Louise fretted, “Who WAS that? He ran away so fast I didn’t get a good look at his face. Well, whoever he was, he got an eye full.”

“Well we did too? It was Cimarron McNeill, he was stark naked except for that thong thing around his neck and th’ belt around his waist.” Patsy gushed. “It was him alright, he was cussin’ in Latin.” The girls talked excitedly for a few seconds to explain their individual encounters with the naked boy.

“That’s right, it was Cimarron.” Barbara agreed. “I heard he runs naked in the woods down here but I didn’t believe it. Gosh, he got his bloody sweat all over me when he fell on top of me. *Eeww!*”

“Well what about me?” Patsy remarked. “His thing was right in my face. It actually touched my cheek when he crawled off me. *Eeww*, that’s embarrassing!”

“Oh don’t sound so innocent.” said Louise, returning the teasing to Patsy. “Every kid in th’ neighborhood knows you had a hot time with ’im last summer.”

“Well I’m not the only one who’s pulled their panties down for ’im, just ask Barbara!”

“Me? Oh no! I never did”

“Oh yes you did, I saw you two go in the barn together last month.” Patsy insisted. “When you came out, you were buttonin’ your jeans and his shirt was off. I saw you.”

“Oh that. Well, we were just showin’ each other our scars. He wanted to see my appendectomy scar and I wanted to see his horsebite.”

“So you two had your pants down, didn’t you?” Patsy guessed. “EVERYBODY knows where HIS scars are, they’re on his mouth and his butt. You can’t fool me, I know what”

“Hey you girls, that’s enough!” Louise interrupted. “Now which way did he go? Come on, let’s try and find ’im.”

“Yeah! Let’s find his clothes and make’im beg for’em.” Patsy agreed. “Where there’s a naked boy, there’s got to be a pile of clothes around somewhere. Maybe we can teach’im to stop runnin’ around scarin’ people.”

“I wasn’t scared.” Barbara bragged. “His bottom was pointin’ right at me when he got up off Patsy. I could see his fuzzy marbles and everything.” Barbara winked her eyes. “My gosh, did you see that cute rear? I didn’t know boys could look so nice. I betcha he could pass for a girl if he wore a dress and a padded bra.”

Louise laughed. “Are you kiddin’? He’s too slim. Maybe his butt’s fancy but the rest of him is all boy. His tummy muscles had ridges, did you see that? And those wonderful legs. Wow, he-ee’s built!”

The girls walked a quarter mile in the direction the boy had run. The woods narrowed at a passage between the railroad track embankment and a wide, sweeping bend in the river, but Sim was nowhere to be seen.

“Look for his clothes, maybe they’re around here somewhere.” Patsy insisted.

Having no luck in finding the boy or his clothes, the girls walked back to the large rock outcropping where Sim’s father Henry had dunked him many times over the years. The three friends sat on the flat rock and talked more about the new school year beginning in September.

“Don’t worry, you’ll like seventh grade.” Louise advised the two younger children. “You’ll see lots of new boys and there’s lots of older guys too. The eighth graders always go for the new seventh grade girls.”

“I heard the boys and the girls have to use the same gymnasium. Isn’t that kind of embarrassing?” Barbara asked.

“No, dummy.” Louise answered. “There’s separate dressing rooms and showers, girls on one end and boys on the other. The girls can’t go over to the boys’ end and the boys can’t come to the girls’ end. They’re very strict about that rule.”

In the top of a tall cottonwood tree a few yards from where the girls sat, Cimarron McNeill clasped his clothes under his arm and hid behind the main trunk. He listened for some minutes as his two classmates talked and laughed with Louise, until a muscle cramp in his leg forced him to rearrange his stance.

“*Furca futuens!* (Fucking fork!)” Sim growled to himself. When he lost his hold and had to hurriedly find another, he dropped his clutch of clothing.

The girls sat up quickly when they heard the bundle hit the leaves on the forest floor with a *crunch*. “It’s him, he’s up in that tree!” shouted Louise. All three girls ran to the base of the tree. “We know you’re up there Cimarron, we can see your heinie shinin’ through the leaves. Come on down and get your clothes or we’ll throw them in the river.” After an expectant one minute

wait, Louise yelled again, “Come on down Cinnamon, don’t be so bashful. I know you saw ME takin’ a pee so now it’s my turn. Turn about’s fair play isn’t it?”

“*Abite puellae!* (go away girls!)” Sim shouted from above. “*Et nolite spoliare!* (And do not swipe my clothes!) You better not take my clothes, *si feceritis dolebitis!* (if you do you’ll be sorry!)”

“We can wait as long as you can, Sim. You got to come down sooner or later.” Barbara shouted back with a wry grin.

“Somethin’s comin’ down alright, I’d say right on your stupid heads.” Sim yelled. “You wanna see ME pee? Just look up, Louise, I dare ya!”

The girls looked at each other in alarm when yellow drops began raining down on them. “Hey, he’s peein’ on us! Stop that Sim, you animal!” Patsy yelled. The girls ran to the rock to wait for the boy to climb down. While they occupied themselves with more talk about summer plans and school, Sim quickly and quietly descended to the lowest limb and dropped to the ground behind the tree trunk.

“Hey, he’s already down on the ground!” Louise shouted. “Quick, grab his pants and underwear before he gets’em.”

“There’s no underwear, just get the tee shirt!” Barbara yelled. “I got’is jeans.”

Sim covered his crotch with his hand and, growling savagely, ran straight at the girls on the rock, making them scatter in different directions. He swept up the white tee shirt dropped by Patsy but could not reach the jeans before Barbara got away. Sim quickly caught up with Barbara and encircled her from behind, lifting her off the ground and jerking his worn denims from her hands. He threw her down and turned away to pull his jeans on.

“Oww, that hurt! You didn’t have to be so mean Sim, we were just playin’.” Barbara sobbed as she watched him slip his jeans over his pale buttocks and fasten the buttons. “You meanie, you’re too rough, you hurt me. I hate you!”

Sim walked back to Barbara and crouched in front of her on his toes. He took both her arms and lifted her up with him as he stood, then put her hands on his bare shoulders. He placed his right hand around the back of the girl’s neck and held her tightly. Her hair ballooned out with static electricity. With his tufted head next to hers as if praying together, he dangled his left arm, alternately flexing his fingers into a white knuckled fist and relaxing them, as if he wanted to hit the girl.

“Please don’t hurt me Sim, don’t hurt me!” Barbara cried. Sim looked away to collect his thoughts and hide his anger. When he calmed his choler, the shirtless boy raised his curling locks to face the girl. He surprised her by gently wiping tears from her cheeks with the tee shirt in his free hand.

Barbara jerked and inhaled sharply with the first touch, then watched with wonder at the tenderness in the boy's large, engaged eyes, something she had never seen in him before.

"Just playin', hah?" Sim scowled again, oblivious to his own mop of hair stranding out with crackling voltage. He flashed his long lashes at her, looking deep into her eyes. "Think I look like a girl do ya? Well take another look Babs, I'm a boy!" He popped his buttons open and spread his pants fly to reveal his cramped genitals. "My name's Cimarron, got that you *stulta asina*? (dumb ass?) Cimarron McNeill! Means wild and rough and that's just what I am. I'm not a sissy twat like you three girls."

"Alright! Okay Cimarron, I take it back." Barbara sniffled while she stared at Sim's open fly. "You're a boy, oh yes, oh my God! . . . I can see you're a real boy. I . . . I didn't mean it in a bad way, I was just sayin' how nice your, . . . your bottom looks."

"I'm sorry if I hurt you Barbara." Sim cajoled, softening his words and buttoning his pants again with a helpful wiggle. His hair collapsed in sandy spirals. "I didn't mean to. What did you expect me to do? You girls had me up a tree with no clothes on, dammit. I wasn't goin' to prance around naked while the three of you made fun of me."

"You leave her alone, Cimarron McNeill!" Louise demanded as she and Patsy walked up. Sim's hair harrowed out again, then recaptured its curls.

"Shut up Louise, *tu cunnus stultus*! (you dumb cunt!)" Sim's flashing eyes fixed on her with a burning stare. "These are my woods. You girls shouldn't even be down here."

"Yeah? Who says?" Louise shouted. "They'll hafta be bigger'n you are, you banty rooster little shit! And stop callin' me them Latin names."

"You're crazy Sim, you know that?" Patsy exclaimed as she moved her eyes over the boy's abraded, alabaster chest streaked with a mixture of sweat and blood. "Runnin' through the woods naked and gettin' all scratched up. Just look at you, you look like you been rasslin' a wildcat in a pig pen."

Sim looked down at his lacerated, dirt smudged chest. "So what? Wha's wrong with that? I look this way all the time in th' summer."

"Oh yes, that's right you stupid!" Barbara tried to hurt the boy's feelings, to make him aware of what he was saying. "You always look like Nature Boy and sometimes you even smell like a wild animal! God Sim, why don't you clean up and cut your hair once in a while? You'd be a great guy if you didn't always look like a tramp." She cocked her head in amazement. "Just think, you could'a been the nicest lookin' boy in Washington Elementary all these years. You're really cute, all you had to do was take a bath and get a haircut. You'd have lots of friends if you didn't keep everybody away. Just give us a chance, you'll see."