

The Gremmie

by Louis A. Colantuono

I was sitting there on my surfboard watching Jerry helping our family doctor's son Joey surf. Doc had bought Joey this plastic fantastic twin-finned five-foot-six-inches-tall surfboard that was twenty-three inches wide.

“What do I yell next time, Jerry?” Joey asked. “Do I yell *outrageous* or *cowabunga?*”

“Don't yell anything at all,” Jerry said. “You're only a crawdad, but you don't want to sound like a gremmie or a kook if you're going to surf with me.”

“Tell me what they are again,” Joey begged.

“A crawdad is someone your age who can stand on his surf board. You're nine, so you're a crawdad, or a sand shark.”

“A sand shark is like your dad Louie there who is sitting on his surf board, right?” Jerry wasn't my son; he was my live-in lover-boy, though.

“Right, Joey,” Jerry said. “Now be quiet so I can tell you what you asked me. Okay, the gremmie is someone who is about twelve or thirteen who gets all wide goggle- eyes when he sees a two-foot wave and he runs up the beach yelling 'outrageous', 'cowabunga' or 'look at that outsider!' – breaking on the outside reef of the breakwater in Long Beach harbor. Then there's the kook. He is the one who is just slightly better off than the gremmie because he can dog-paddle.”

“Tell him what the highway surfers are again, Jerry,” I yelled. “Before he asks.”

“The highway surfer is the guy who drives his car with an unwaxed surf board on top to show everyone he's a surfer, but you'll never see him in the water. You know what they are when you see them driving in Palm Springs with their bleached-blond hair down to their shoulders in the surfer look.”

“You're a blond surfer, Jerry,” Joey said. “How come you have a crew cut?”

“Because I know I'm a surfer and I don't have to prove to other people what I know I am. Just like I'm telling you that you don't have to say 'far out!', 'cowabunga!', 'outrageous!' or anything like that to help you surf.

Come on, Dad, I like how you wipe out. Show Joey how you hang five.”

“How come you don't hang ten?” Joey asked.

“Because he's too fat,” Jerry said, “and he buries the front of the surfboard.”

Joey rolled over in the sand laughing.

“I wouldn't think that's so funny if I were you,” I warned. “Some day *you'll* be able to bury your surf boards, too.”

“Are you implying we're going to get fat?” Jerry laughed, “or do we just do it like this.” The boys started throwing dry sand over their boards.

They were in a great humor. I paddled out to show them how easy I wiped out so they could have another laugh before we ended Joey's surfing lessons for the day.

“*Cowabunga!*” I yelled when a wave caught my board. Then I stood up and walked forward on it until I got one foot's toes over the front edge, hit the sand, and the back of the board flipped up, knocking me down. “A wipe out!”

They laughed their balls sore. Then all of a sudden Jerry said to us, “Let's race our boards out to the boat and back.”

“Outrageous, cowabunga and far out!” Joey said. “Fanny-tastic,” I said, bumping my board into Jerry's bottom. “The loser buys burritos.”

“Ready... start!” Joey yelled, running his board into the surf to get his head start on me and Jerry. I began strong, then slacked off so the boys would win.

Joey was always out on the beach early riding his Honda ATV. The next morning Jerry heard him stop in front of our gate, so he sat up beside me and rubbed his eyes and stretched and pulled on his cut-offs to see what Joey wanted.

“Lou, there is somebody paddling their surf board out to your boat,” Joey said when Jerry brought him into my bedroom. “You got to get up or me and Jerry'll have to swim out to arrest him ourselves.”

I swung my legs over: the edge of the bed to find Jerry holding my swimmyies open for me.

“Get the raft down to the water,” Jerry told Joey, “while I help my dad.” He pushed the little boy towards the door so he wouldn't see my hardon when I stood to pull on the suit.

Joey was dark, very cute, Mexican and Polish – petite for being nine. Jerry had been living with me for over a year. He was very tall, blond, with blue-blue eyes, and he would soon be fourteen. Jerry was my only

live-in then.

Whenever I returned from a truck trip the first thing I did was sleep. Then I'd surf board out or raft out to my trimaran to check its mooring lines. A couple of years back we hadn't been doing that and I'd found the boat up on the beach one morning.

I'd put the buoy out there myself, with the help of a couple of my lover-boys. I'd sunk it into the sand with a cement-covered anchor that I weighted down with five cement-filled fifty-five gallon drums. The boat was moored a good swim away, but close enough to the house to be easily watched – and reached when I had time to sail it.

Joey had the raft dragged down to the water's edge by the time I came out of the house. The surfer had just put his board up on my boat and was climbing onto the deck as we ran the raft into the surf.

“Just who does he think he is!” Joey said, shocked. “Everybody knows that is your boat.”

“Stay cool,” Jerry advised. “Daddy'll let me and you arrest him, right, Dad?”

“We'll see. First, let's find out what he's doing there in the first place.”

“Probably trying to steal something,” Jerry said confidently. “That's what everyone else is always doing when they come here.”

With Jerry and me on the paddles we got to the trimaran so quickly the surfer, who was trying to open the locked cabin door, didn't know we were there until Jerry vaulted onto the deck in one move and yelled at him, “What are you doing on my boat?! This is private property and this boat is on our private property!”

The surfer was only a young boy – and Jerry had him absolutely terrified. He backed up against the door he'd been trying to open. Jerry stood defiantly between him and his surf board. Before I could even board the boat or say anything, the boy jumped sideways into the sea and stared to swim ashore. But he wasn't a swimmer; Jerry was. Jerry took the boy's surf board and leapt into the water to rescue the young trespasser, who was now flailing violently around in panic like he was about to drown.

Jerry grabbed him by his hair cap, pulled him half onto the surf board, then swam him to shore. Joey and I caught up to them where the surfer boy was lying exhausted on the sand.

“I just wanted to see the inside of the boat,” he coughed, choking up water. “There's no law against that, is there?”

“There sure is,” I told him. “Are you alright now?”

“I am,” he said sullenly, because he knew he was wrong. “What are you going to do? Call the police?”

“No,” Jerry said, “I police this beach. You get your ass down there (pointing) before I set the dogs after you,”

“No, send him the other way, Jerry,” Joey said, “I don't want him walking on my beach either.”

“Then you go to the nuddie beach, you gremmie.”

Jerry pointed him in the right direction, giving a little shove, “Go. Now, while you have a chance,”

The boy went. He hurried away with his surf board under his arm, I watched him stop often to look back at us while Joey and Jerry pulled the rubber raft up to the pool fence and tipped it to drain the water out.

Jerry sent Joey home, then joined me in the shower, and afterwards he ran naked through the house to put his wet clothes on the service porch and came back laughing about it.

“What did I tell you about running bare-ass between the shower and the porch?” I mildly reproached him. “You know I don't mind, but mama does.”

“She's asleep,” Jerry told me. “Let's swim now.”

“Alright.”

We went out to swim. A little later Joey came back.

“Do you know that boy, Jerry?” I asked.

“Yes, I know that boy Jerry,” Joey teased.

“No, Dad, I never saw him before.”

“How about you, Joey?”

“No. But he really was trying to break into the cabin part.” Joey was standing on the flex board jumping up and down on his toes to make his front flop.

Joey was a tease. He knew about me and my love for boys. His father was my family doctor: Doc had told him all about it. Joey didn't mind that Jerry and I were lovers; he liked the freedom to come to my house and skinny-dip.

At home Joey and his father and his older brother Todd would sometimes run out late at night to skinny-dip in his pool, but Joey's Mexican mother kept him from doing this during the daytime the way I let my loves do. That's why Joey was there a lot.

My wife wouldn't go to sleep until the last movie went off the air. She'd watch the TV in the living room, which faced the ocean, pool and boat. A couple of nights later she saw the cabin lights on in the trimaran.

She came in to wake me.

“What is it, Dad?” Jerry asked. “What did Mom say?”

“Just stay here and sleep, son,” I said, sliding into my swimmies. “You know how Mom always thinks she sees or hears something. These late movies do it.”

Jerry started to lie back down, then he got up and followed me out when he saw me take my board from the rack.

“Are you going surfing *now*?” he almost yelled.

“Be quiet, hon. You know how voices carryover water.”

He got his own board and then we carefully ran them both into the ocean, trying to keep the splashing down, and hand-paddled out to the trimaran. Jerry quietly boarded first. I handed up his board, then my board, and he set them gently on the rubberized non-slip deck. Jerry helped me up the side and into the boat's cockpit.

We could hear, in the cabin, doors and drawers being opened, things taken out, then slammed closed again. We worked over to the open doorway to look into the cabin. It was the surfer boy, the gremmie, again. He'd broken the door's locks to get inside and was sitting on his knees, surrounded by my knives and food, trying to pry open my desk. Jerry was all for going in and surprising him, but I held him back in case the boy decided to try to come at us with one of my razor-sharp knives.

I motioned for my lover-boy to be quiet, then said, suddenly and loudly, “Here, Jerry, cover him with this gun. Shoot him if he moves.” Then I walked into the cabin, up to the desk and took away from the gremmie the knife he'd just ruined trying to get into my desk.

“A key works better,” I said. I pulled the boat keys out of my swimmies, opened the drawer, took out the gun I had locked up there and handed it to Jerry to cover the boy while I picked up the radio telephone.

“Please don't call the cops,” the boy cried. “I need this stuff. I need this food.”

“Then why are you breaking into the desk?” Jerry asked, very threateningly. “You already got the food and kitchen stuff.”

“Because it was locked and I thought there might be money in there,” the boy said.

“Or this gun to steal?” Jerry said. “Maybe you would of even shot us if you found it before we found you.”

“Take it easy, Jerry.” I warned him again. “I don't want anyone getting hurt here.”

I knew the gun was empty. I didn't want him to scare the boy into trying to run for it with a knife. I moved the boy away from the

hardware on the floor and made him sit in a chair.

The radio, the CB, the short-wave set – everything – was disconnected. I rehooked the radio telephone.

I could tell by the look on Jerry's face that he already knew I was going to pass my own sentence on the gremmie. With boys I always did this, to keep my own name off the police complaint files. I didn't want the attention of the police drawn to my own imprisonment a few years earlier as a sex offender.

"I think you better start putting things back where you found them," I said, after Jerry had us locked in the cabin. "Then I will figure out what is already missing, like my clock radio, and how much damage you have done to my boat. You will pay for it. Every cent, too."

"Add fifteen dollars to that for making me get wet," Jerry said. "He owes me something because I had to get out of my bed to play Secret Agent Jerry like I did."

"What is the phone number for your parents?" I asked the gremmie.

"I don't have any parents. I ran away from home."

"That don't matter," Jerry said. "You had some parents and we want their phone number."

The gremmie gave me the wrong number once, but only once, because that made Jerry mad and the gremmie found out it didn't work trying to lie with Jerry around.

When I finally got his parents they said to give him to the police because they were tired of him – and his running away, his stealing. They hung up on me. I guess they felt their responsibility ended when they found he'd left home taking only his wet suit and surfboard with him.

So far no one had given me the boy's name. I didn't want to ask him in case Jerry thought the gremmie was lying again and would try to keel-haul him.

I had to go back to the house to get tools and a new lock to install on the door. Jerry made me take all three boards with me. He figured the gremmie couldn't swim worth a damn, so he wouldn't try to run again, certainly not at night. He set the gremmie cleaning up the inside of the boat while they waited for me to bring a raft.

When I got home I phoned the port authority to find out if there'd been any recent food thefts. There were. I got the new lock, hand tools and brought the raft over. The hardest thing to handle alone is a raft.

"Hey, Dad," Jerry said when he saw me, "you'll never guess what."

"You tell me what, hon."

“This asshole even had the radar and the computer disconnected. He's one real low life hang five pseudo-surfer. He don't even know his board won't float him and that forty-channel side-band without wiping out the radio.” Jerry muttered something under his breath and tore into the gremmie again: “Why didn't you just steal this whole boat while you were at it?” Then he punched the gremmie in the stomach before I could stop him. The gremmie didn't try to hit back this time. He just folded into a heap on the deck.

“Jerry!” I shouted, holding him around his arms. “He's smaller than you are. You don't hurt smaller boys!”

“I'm sorry, Daddy. Can I go now?”

“Yes, hon. Go to bed and I will be there soon.”

“How soon?”

“Very soon. Do you want to raft in, hon?”

“Nuh uh. I'll swim in.” I stood on the deck to watch him make it to shore. Then I went back to the cabin to see about the gremmie. He was still lying on the decking crying where Jerry had left him.

“Get up,” I told him. “You're not hurt.” I locked Jerry's pistol back into the desk drawer.

“Oh, no,” he cried. “That boy hit me in the stomach so hard and I'm so hungry I hurt.”

“Sit on that chair.” I was tired of hearing his complaints. “If you're that hungry you won't try to run away from me.”

While I fixed the door so it would lock again, the gremmie told me he'd taken two loads of stuff to the beach. He would bring me to where he'd hidden it if I let him go. I wouldn't make any deals with him. When we finally got to his pile of our stuff I found my 23-channel portable CB set was wiped out. So was the pocket radio. The stolen clothes were all wet, too.

“What I want to know is, how come, if you're so friggin' hungry, you don't have one bit of food here?”

I made him load all of the stuff onto the raft, then made him carry his side down to my house.

Jerry was sound asleep when I got in. I took the gremmie to the kitchen to give him breakfast. This boy was too tired to run. He'd proved that back on the beach when he didn't even try to out-run me to make his get-away. I felt safe with him sitting dead center in the middle of the horse-shoe-shaped breakfast nook. I was trying to figure out how far I could trust him. Jerry had felt the boy was dangerous; so had his parents.

After he ate I made him strip off his wet-suit. God, the smell of his skin under the wet-suit was over-powering. He smelled like he'd been in a cast for two years. By now it was morning. I rushed him out of the house into the patio before he even got the top part of his suit unfastened. He even had what once had been white swimmies under the wet-suit that he'd worn so long they'd actually gone moldy.

"Take them off, too," I said, keeping up-wind from him. "Then stay over in that corner where I can hose you off."

With all the commotion Jerry had woken up and was standing in the sliding glass door from my bedroom. "That is some lousy smell," he said. "Is it him?"

"Yes. It's my guess he's not been out of that wet-suit for weeks."

"Months, you mean. Phew!"

"Here, Jerry, you hose him down." I handed him the hose. "Hose him down good."

"Where *you* going?"

"To phone Doc. Anyone who smells this bad can't possibly be healthy."

Joey came over with his father. They stopped and stared from the beach, standing next to the ATVs. Jerry was making the gremmie turn slowly so he could hose the 'crusty' spots off of him.

"That's enough washing for now," Doc said, getting off the ATV. He walked up to the fence and just stood there, looking at the gremmie. "My God," he said at last, "he's lucky he didn't get gangrene. How long you been in that thing?"

"Gangrene," the gremmie said. "You're trying to put me on." His attitude, after he'd eaten, was not very good. Completely unacceptable to me.

"You don't talk to Doc that way," I said. "Now, tell him how long you've worn that fuckin' suit!"

"About two months."

"You better get a polite mouth in your face, gremmie," Jerry warned him, "or I'll wipe you out real good next time."

The gremmie was afraid of Jerry.

"If you have a pair of handcuffs, Lou," Doc said, "you can cuff him right to that fence all day. To see if the air will help any. I'll send some salve over, but, God, I don't know if it will do any good. I'll have a close look at him when I return home for lunch."

Doc and Joey got back on the ATVs. Doc rode Joey home. Joey returned later with the stuff Doc sent. I let the boy apply it to himself

except for the center of his back which he couldn't reach. I took two deep breaths, then did that for him.

Jerry brought out one of my watchdogs to watch the gremmie. He told the boy if he moved from that spot the dog would eat him alive. "How old are you?" Jerry asked. "No lies, or I'll tell this dog to take your leg off you."

"Twelve. I'm nearly twelve."

This boy was not a good-looking boy. He was not a bad-looking or average-looking boy either. He was very hard to describe, but once you'd seen him he was hard to forget easily.

Doc, true to his word, phoned Joey to come home so he could ride him over on the Honda. Those two had a lot of fun for being a father and son. When Doc came into the yard Joey held the dog for Jerry while Doc examined the gremmie.

"He will be alright if he doesn't get any infections," Doc said. "Wash him with germicidal soap. Then dress him in a poncho made out of a boiled sheet."

"You're sure costing me a lot, gremmie," I said, when Doc and Joey had left. "Jerry thinks I'd be better off turning you over to the police. Do you think you're worth my help?"

"No," he answered. "Not after all of what I did to your boat. I know I ain't worth your help."

"Good." I smiled inwardly. "Now that we both feel the same way about you, maybe you can try to get along."

I shoveled up his wet-suit and his moldy swimmies and dumped them in the dumpster, then I escorted him to the pool shower and let him soap himself down with the germicidal soap. Again we made an application of the hydro-cortisone cream at ten dollars an ounce, rubbed all over his body from his upper thighs to his hair that Doc had recommended I cut all off for him.

Jerry finally returned with the sheet he'd been boiling in the spaghetti pot. He'd cut a head hole in the middle. We put it over the gremmie's head and trimmed off the corners so it wouldn't drag on the ground.

"Are you going to let him sleep in a bed that way?" Jerry asked. He acted like the gremmie would contaminate the whole house just by being there. "Maybe you should put him in the apartment over the shop."

"Would you trust him alone there, Jerry? Where he would have full access to my office, my books, my tools, my..."

"Forget it, Daddy," Jerry cut in. "I was just thinking he's so yuckie we don't want him in the house with us."

I could understand how Jerry felt. I mean, some places on this boy's body looked like he had ringworm or something like that. These spots I remembered from my own part of the slum I'd been raised in. They were highly contagious, too. I took care with how I handled the gremmie.

We ended up putting him in what used to be called Tommie's room, now known as Jerry's room, because there was still a fitted rubber sheet for the bed from Tommy's year of staying with me. If we used it the gremmie's oozing sores wouldn't ruin the mattress. Jerry slept with me like always.

Bright and early the next morning Joey came over with Todd, who wanted to go to the boat with Jerry and his little brother and see if he could put the electronics the gremmie had messed with back together again. When they got there they kept Joey out of the way by letting him fish. They figured that the gremmie owed a thousand dollars, counting the door and Jerry having to get wet. Then they presented the gremmie with an itemized bill for the damages.

"How about the dry dock charges," I asked as I looked over the bill. "I'm going to have to haul the boat to fix the door, molding and cupboards he broke."

"Great. Then we can do the hull," Joey said. "How much are you going to pay this year to wax the hull?"

"The same as last year," Jerry said.

"I want in on that, too," Todd said. "Last year you gave us two hundred dollars to share."

"If you let the gremmie help you that's fifty dollars for each of you," I told them. "Then I can get him some clothes of his own."

"Just go to his parents' house and get his clothes," Jerry said. "They don't care for him. Why should they care if you take his clothes?"

"That would be fine if they didn't live all of the way down in San Diego," I told them. "I won't drive that far just to get clothes for him."

"Then let him go naked," Joey laughed into his hands.

"Get one of your drivers going that way to get them," Jerry said. "Then we can add pick-up and delivery charges to his bill."

The next day I came back from being uptown for a while and found the gremmie was wearing a new black eye.

"I told you not to hit this boy, Jerry," I said.

"Jerry didn't hit him," Joey said. "Toddy did it."

"Toddy?" I asked, surprised.

"Yes, Toddy," Joey said. "That gremmie is got a foul mouth when you're not here. He told Toddy to suck."

“Suck what?” I asked, wondering if Joey would tell me.

“I don't know what he was telling Toddy to suck because Toddy hit him then.” Joey smiled at the power of his older brother. “He hit him right down on the kitchen floor with one punch.”

It wasn't long before one of my trucks came in with the gremmie's clothes and a letter from the gremmie's mother. The next day the Grenmie tried to run away.

I was on my way home from my cabinet shop when I saw him hitch-hiking. I turned the car around, then went to pick him up. He didn't know it was me until he ducked down to get in. He stopped cold in his tracks.

“Whatever is in the way of my car, I drive,” I told him. “I'm sure glad to see you're so much better and you're out for some exercise. I really do not think you should overdo it yet.”

He looked at me like I was pretty dumb. I made a U-turn, then took him back to the house. He wanted exercise, he would get exercise. There were always trucks and trailers to wash, and sawdust to sweep out of the shop. That was what we put him to work doing.

With the truck in that had brought his clothes, I made cleaning it up the gremmie's first job. Jerry made five dollars per hour when he cleaned trucks for me. Jerry told the gremmie he could have two-fifty per hour for his work and he, Jerry, would collect the other two-fifty because he had to watch him work.

“And if you try to run away again,” Jerry told him, “I will call the police on you and charge you with theft, destruction of my own personal property and even with your trespassing onto the beach and boat.” Jerry came into the office where I'd been sitting watching this tirade. He sat on my lap. “I hate that boy. Every time I tell him something he gives me this dorky look like he did to Todd to make Todd punch his eye.”

“What kind of look is that?”

“This real dorky look, like this, see?” Jerry's face-making was not even close to the faces the gremmie made at us. Then Jerry pushed his tongue down into his lower gums and talked without moving his tongue.

“I see,” I said, reaching my fingers into his mouth to make him release his tongue from his gums. “I told you before that will give you buck teeth and I see you also had a muscle spasm with your tongue again. Keep doing that and you'll need braces. Then I can call you metal mouth.” I kissed Jerry's cheek .

“Will you get rid of that gremmie as soon as he pays for the things he's ruined, Dad?”

“We will wait and see.”

“Oh, guess what, Dad,” Jerry said, getting excited about something he'd found out. “The gremmie has a girl's name. His name is Francis du Boy.” He reached into his back pocket, giving me a friendly squeeze as he did, then pulled out a school I.D. card. “See?”

We laughed together for a long time at the black-haired youth in the picture as we sat looking out of the window at the bleached-blond in the sunshine washing the truck. I'd known what the boy's name was from the letter his mother had sent with my driver. His name was Francis du Boise.

“If you really want to get Francis to listen to you, Daddy, you should cut his hair and then die his hair back to black so he can't play surfer anymore.”

Jerry was serious. He was right about a crew-cut not going to hurt anything. Me and Jerry both had wash-and-wear hair so we figured that Francis could have wash-and-wear hair, too.

“Are you alright from your seizure, now?”

“Yes,” Jerry smiled. “It was just my tongue.”

“You want to run down to the house to get my clippers?”

“The ones for the crew-cuts, right?” He smiled at me. “Will you cut my hair short again?”

“No. I only cut your hair when I cut mine.”

Jerry brought the clippers, then he got T.C., my mechanic, to bring the gremmie in and they held the boy in my chair while I de-surferized him. Afterwards I washed his hair in the big commercial sink with blond formula to leave him a little of his dignity.

“Daddy said you won't even get to see your surf board until you payoff your bill,” Jerry teased. “By then, maybe your hair will all grow back black.”

I caught the kick meant for Jerry on the inside of my lower thigh. Damn, that hurt. I slapped his leg smartly. “You kick me again, you little fart, and I'll drag you for shark bait,” I said. Then I took his shoes away until he promised to keep his feet on the ground.

“Wow!” Jerry said, his eyes all aglow. “We haven't played pirates in a long time. You know what, Francis? Even kooks are better off than you are, because they at least know how to dog-paddle to survive. The way you fight everyone and everything, you'll be lucky to make thirteen.”

When my truck came in, my personal truck, the one I usually drove, I had to send it out with another driver again, because I couldn't leave the

gremmie alone with Jerry and T.C. They would have had him tied and gagged at night and a chain around his waist during the day with just enough reach in it to wash the trucks.

I had to tow my eighteen-foot combination speed/open sport-fishing boat out of the garage on its trailer to the harbor to launch it. We had all of the dry-dock arrangements for the trimaran made. Now I needed to use the smaller boat as a tug to push the big trimaran around corners in the harbor.

“If you think we are going to run into anything, you have to hold us off with this pole here,” I said to the gremmie. I showed the boy how to use the pole. “The speedboat will push us around, Francis, but we have to make sure we don't get pushed around too far.”

“You mean I get to ride into the harbor on that sailboat?” Francis said excitedly.

“Sure. I would've taken you out sailing, but you messed up the boat so badly that if we hit rough weather it would take on water. Do you think I enjoy sitting here at home?”

“Not in the summer we don't,” Jerry told him. “You ruined our truck trips, our sail boating trips and our fishing trips with the speed boat.”

Jerry went into the house while I hooked up the boat trailer. He called Joey and Todd to come over and help me. He didn't want to leave me and Francis alone to handle the almost-thirty-foot-wide sail boat.

We speed-boated out to the sailboat, and then I ran the trimaran into the harbor's mouth under my own power and helm. Here the rug-covered tire was put on the front of the speedboat to push us around. It took over a half-hour to get to the dry-dock's crane.

Francis was excited. He ran back and forth on the cat walks, reaching his push-off pole out when he thought we were too close to some boat, then running around to the other side when he was not sure how that side was. Joey and I sat at the helm letting T.C. and Jerry do all of the pushing to keep the boat straight in the channel.

“I think Francis likes this,” Joey told me and Todd. “He really thinks he's doing something. But he's not, really.”

“Shush,” I whispered. “Don't tell *him* that.”

With the sailboat in drydock, the speedboat out on the buoy, dinner eaten, TV watched, it was bedtime. Jerry and I were lying there listening to Francis pace the floor of his room.

“I'm going to chew your nose off,” Jerry said. He was face-to-face on top of me grinding his hips down on my hips. He nipped his lips on my

nose.

“Then I will just have to bite your nose off, too.”

“Then I will bite your dimples.”

“I will bite your dimples back. All four of them.”

I patted the dimples on his bottom to tell him what other two dimples I would bite.

“If you do that, then I will bite you right here.”

Jerry bridged up, grabbed my cock, then squeezed lightly. “Hold it a minute, Daddy. I think we're being watched.”

“I didn't see anything,” Francis said. “I just came in to talk to you.”

“Come on in and talk,” Jerry told him, sliding off me and pulling up the covers. “When you want to come from that room into this room you're supposed to knock.”

“No one's told Francis about that, Jerry.” I said. “He's never wanted to come into this room before. Sit here, Francis, and tell us what's on your mind.”

“I have been here a little over two weeks.”

“It sure seems longer than that,” I said.

“No, just sixteen days,” Jerry confirmed, “even if he has been sixteen weeks worth of trouble.”

“You can add that to my bill, Jerry,” Francis said. “If I really help. If I work hard. Oh, hell...” He jumped off the bed and ran out of the room.

“Wait, gremmie,” Jerry yelled. “Come back in here.”

He came back.

“No matter how stupid you think you sound, Francis, you tell me what's on your mind,” I said. “The only answers you can get are yeses and nos, right?”

“He wants to stay here with us,” Jerry said. “All day today, while you fixed the cabin door and the window, he was asking me questions. Now he's seen part of an answer, too.”

Francis laid down on the covers next to me. He did not want to say anything, nor did he look like he wanted to leave. Then he just fell sort of half asleep and Jerry and I finally put him under the covers with us. When we moved him he mumbled, “I hope I owe you a year's worth of work.”