

# *Keeper of Secrets*

May, 1997

Avery

I pulled my lips from those of Carrie Michaels and smiled. She was cute, and hopefully adventurous. We'd only been dating for a short time, but she was already letting me kiss her, so I was hopeful. I looked up and caught Ryan Wayne gazing at me. I glared at him and he looked away. I wondered if the rumors I'd heard about him were true.

Carrie left for class. I shouldered past Ryan, then paused just long enough to taunt him in a low voice, "take a picture, faggot – it'll last longer." Ryan swallowed hard. I grinned and continued down the hall.

I bet the rumors about Ryan were true. He didn't do anything when I called him a fag, except look scared. He was quiet and the only sport he did was track, as if you could call that a sport. I hated his soft voice. He reminded me of a girl. Boys like that gave me the creeps – especially when they were looking at me as if they were undressing me with their eyes.

I caught up with Joey Burnett, my best friend, at lunch. The first thing he did was ask about Carrie.

"So, how are you makin' out with the new girl?"

"Oh, we're makin' out," I said casually.

"All right! C'mon, man – details! Joey lived for sexual details, no matter how small. I guess he was kinda sex-crazed. Or in other words, a normal guy.

"Well, let's just say she really knows how to use her tongue," I said, grinning. "It won't be long now. I've been giving her a few '*You're so special*' and '*You really mean a lot to me*' comments. She eats it up. I should be getting some by this weekend."

Usually, when I said something like that to Joey, I was exaggerating for effect, but this time it was true. I had a feeling I'd be rid of my virginity before another week had passed. Of course, Joey thought I'd gotten laid a long time ago, but what he didn't know wouldn't hurt me. And it'd definitely help my reputation, besides.

"Cool," said Joey, and gave me a high five.

"Oh, and that little queer Ryan was looking at me," I added.

"Ewwww, I hate fairies," said Joey.

"Maybe we should pull his wings off and watch him squirm." I laughed.

I wasn't laughing at the end of the day. Carrie stalked up to me while I was putting books in my locker and let me have it.

"*She knows how to use her tongue, huh?*" she shrieked, poking me in the chest with her finger.

“Uh.”

“*I should be getting some by this weekend?* Is this what you’re all about, Avery?”

I wasn’t quite sure what to say.

“I thought you liked me,” she said, choking back a sob.

“Oh, I do. That stuff I said... it was just *guy* talk.”

“No, it wasn’t! You meant it and you know it!” She poked my chest harder. It hurt.

“Come on, Carrie, you know how I feel about you.”

“I do now! I’ve got news for you, Avery: you’re not ‘gettin’ some’ this weekend, or *ever* – not from me, and probably never from anybody else, either!”

I glanced over her shoulder. People were watching and I was embarrassed, but there wasn’t much I could do about it. Carrie just kept going off on me. I couldn’t remember seeing a girl so pissed-off before.

“You think you’re so hot, don’t you?” she said, pushing my back up against the lockers. “I can just imagine what it’d be like with you. I can just see you pawing me, not able to wait for it... and then it’d be over before it started. You’d probably go off in your shorts as soon as I took my top off. Even if you could control yourself long enough to do it, I bet I probably couldn’t even *feel* it.”

She held out her left pinky and waved it in my face. “I’ve heard something about you, Avery: I’ve heard it’s very, very small,” she said, looking at my crotch. “I bet my eight year-old brother has more than you.”

Before I could fire off a retort, she stalked away. The dozen students who’d been watching us laughed and clapped, like we were giving some kind of fucking performance. I was angry and so flustered, my entire face turned red. I was so shocked I didn’t know what to do or say. The fact that a lot of my classmates had witnessed what had just happened didn’t help matters either. My embarrassment only served to make me angrier, but I was also extremely disappointed. For weeks, I’d been dreaming about getting it on with Carrie, fantasizing about it. Now, nothing was ever gonna happen with her.

I slammed my locker and walked away, ignoring the smirks of those around me. I wanted to start punching their ugly little faces, but I could hardly start in on everybody at once. I trudged out the back exit and made my way home. I couldn’t believe what Carrie had said about me. That crack about me being small was totally uncalled for. It was bullshit too. I *wasn’t* small! And even if I were, she’d have no way of knowing. It still sucked that everyone heard her say it. It didn’t matter if some things were true or not – people would believe it just the same. Fuck. Something like this could follow me all the way through high school.

I kicked rocks with my scuffed shoes as I walked around, fuming. I didn’t handle disappointment well. Damn! I was so close. Just a few more days and I would’ve closed the deal. Now I was back to square one. Worse than that, word would get around and landing a girl would be twice as hard as it was before. Fuck.

I walked into the park, ignoring the neatly-tended flower beds and the ancient trees. I saw some guys from school, but ignored them. If they said one fucking thing to me about Carrie, I’d knock their teeth out.

I grinned when I spotted a familiar face ahead of me: Ryan! It was time for some fun to alleviate my disappointment over Carrie, and the humiliation I suffered at her hands. Maybe having some fun with Ryan was just the medicine I needed.

I closed the distance between us. My first instinct was to smack him in the back of the head, but I felt like playing with him before pounding him senseless.

“What’s up, Ryan?” I said, as cheerfully as I could.

“Uh... nothing.” *Good*, I thought. There was a flicker of fear in his eyes.

“Hey, I’m sorry about before,” I said, casually leaning against a nearby tree. “I was just kinda mad about stuff.”

“Uh-huh.” He looked like he didn’t believe me, or trust me. *Shit*. Maybe he was smarter than I thought.

I lowered my voice conspiratorially. “Actually, I was thinkin’ I’d like to get to know you better... if you know what I mean,” I said. I licked my lips slightly as I looked at him. Ryan still looked scared, and now confused, too.

I went on, playing with the leaves on a limb. “My girlfriend just dumped me, so that kind of leaves me... *unsatisfied*, if you catch my drift.”

Ryan swallowed, hard. He was definitely eating up every word I said, and looked as if he were getting aroused. I bet there was a lot going on inside his little, horny, perverted mind. I just knew he was seething with lust inside. Fuckin’ faggot. He disgusted me.

“I’ve heard some rumors about you, Ryan.”

A wave of fear passed over Ryan’s face, and he glanced nervously in both directions to see if anybody else was listening.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

I took a step closer. “Sure you do. It’s okay, dude! I won’t tell anyone. I’ve just heard that guys like you sometimes do favors for guys like me. We both get somethin’ out of it, you know?”

Beads of sweat were on his forehead now. “I’ve never really...”

“Hey, you don’t have to pretend. Even if you haven’t done it, you want to. Don’tcha?”

Damn, I was a good actor. I thought that maybe I should consider a career in the movies. With my good looks, who knows?

“Come on,” I said.

I took him by the wrist and pulled him down a path toward an isolated part of the park. Ryan didn’t resist. He just let me lead him along, like a faithful dog. He probably knew it was stupid, and dangerous, but he still couldn’t pass up a chance at getting his hands on me. I released his wrist when we were completely alone, then stood there gazing at him. One quick glance at his crotch told me all I needed to know: the little queer was totally turned-on. How disgusting.

I leaned in like I was gonna kiss him, bringing my lips closer and closer to his. Ryan pulled back.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“I... I don’t even know you,” he stammered.

“So what? I know you want it. You’re checkin’ me out all the time. I’ve seen you looking at this,” I said, hefting my package. “C’mon, dude! This is your big chance, Ryan. You want it and my girl just dumped me, so I need some relief.”

His eyes roved up and down my body, lingering on my crotch. He was a sick little perv.

“Come on!” I snapped. “Touch me! You know you want it.”

Ryan reached out fearfully and put his hand on my chest. He was so fucking timid I wanted to smack him. I took his hand and guided it down over my abs, then lower still. His hand was trembling.

“Go on – *feel* it,” I whispered. I put his hand right on my bulge. I could read the lust in his

little faggot eyes. He began to grope me. That was all I needed.

I slugged him hard in the face and pounced on him. The little fairy didn't even try to defend himself. He just whimpered and tried to shield his face from my fists. I knocked him to the ground, sat on this chest and pummeled him.

"Faggot!" I screamed. "Cocksucker! You probably even get off on me beatin' you, don't you?"

Ryan didn't even try to hit me back. He just started crying. I bitch-slapped him twice, then punched him in the face, hard. I made sure he'd have two black eyes for everyone to see the next day. Again and again, I smashed him in the stomach and chest. My fist making contact with his body felt so satisfying. I channeled all my aggression into beating the fuck out of that little queer.

I took a pen out of my pocket and wrote "**FAG**" in bold letters, right on his forehead. I laughed when I imagined him trying to explain it to his parents or anyone else who saw it. He'd probably get his ass kicked again on the way home for it. Ryan just lay there and let me write on his face. He was such a pathetic loser.

I got up off him and gave him a couple quick kicks in the stomach. He doubled up and moaned in pain. It was such a satisfying sound, I had to smile. I was already feeling a lot better.

I leaned over and held his head up by the hair. "Don't ever *look* at me like that again," I growled. A little trickle of blood was flowing from the corner of his mouth. "I'm sick of you queers leering at me. We're *all* sick of it! Stick to your own kind, fag, and leave us normal guys alone. Keep your fuckin' eyes to yourself."

I slammed him back on the ground and started to walk away, then gave him a good kick in the ribs that made him cry even harder. I chuckled as I trudged back up the path, not even bothering to look behind me. I bet his faggot ass would think twice before he looked at another guy.

## Sean

"Nick, what's wrong?" I asked.

We were having lunch in *Ofarim's*, a great burger place, talking and laughing, when Nick suddenly stopped speaking. I'd learned in the short time we'd been dating that he got quiet when something bothered him, or he was hurt. I couldn't think of anything I'd said or done that could have brought on his mood.

I looked over my shoulder. Nick was staring at a family that had just walked in and sat at a nearby booth. There was a mom and dad and a kid about our age, all happy and smiling.

"I'll tell you later, 'kay?" said Nick.

"Sure." I knew he probably didn't want to talk around others. A lot of things we discussed were best kept away from the ears of most people.

I was worried about Nick. I didn't like it when he got quiet like that. He had a lot of problems opening up about what was bothering him. Nick was usually pretty happy, but he could be real moody sometimes – going from laughing to depressed in an instant, sometimes for no reason at all.

But I loved him anyway. He was my boyfriend. He made me happy, and he taught me something about life. Nick made me realize that no matter how good things looked on the outside, everyone had problems.

I watched him as he ate in silence. Nick had beautiful brown hair, so light it was nearly blond. His eyes were blue and his body was slim and appealing. I'd always looked at hot guys like him,

thinking they had it made. I knew I wasn't handsome. I had plain dark brown hair and eyes, and I could only dream of having abs or a muscular chest. I didn't even have the slim, sinewy body that a lot of boys had. I was a little pudgy, sadly, I was kind of fat – not exactly anybody's idea of a dream boy.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not down on myself. Well, not too much anyway. I think I look okay overall, and I'm working to improve myself. It's just that I always thought the beautiful boys had it made. After I met Nick, though, I learned that wasn't always true. He made me realize that sometimes, looks came with too high a price. Those beautiful boys might look like they had it made, but maybe they didn't have it so good after all. Still, there was a part of me that dreamed about being beautiful and built. I knew that I'd never be cute. Nothing could change my face. I did have a shot at being built, if I worked hard enough for it. Even that wasn't going so well, though. It was a lot easier deciding to be muscular than actually making it happen.

Even though I knew Nick was depressed, I couldn't help but feel at least a little happy. At least I had a boyfriend, and it was a wonderful feeling that made me feel all warm inside. I loved being with him, no matter what we were doing. Nick made everything special.

I glanced around at the diner, with its small booths and quaint atmosphere. It felt right out of the 1950s, complete with art deco trim and red-checked tablecloths on the tables. A ceiling fan whooshed overhead, and I could hear the clang of dishes in the back room. I guess it wasn't much, but it was our place, mine and Nick's. There was nothing better than going there and having a burger with him.

I took another bite and looked up. Nick stared at his plate, quietly chewing, and he looked like he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. I felt so helpless. I desperately wished that I could magically make all his problems go away, but I knew it didn't work that way. I'd sure do whatever I could to help him out, though, even if I didn't have any special magic. That's what friends – and especially *boyfriends* – were for.

After we'd finished our burgers and devoured the last fry, Nick and I walked across the street to the park and sat on a secluded bench. He hadn't spoken a word since he'd grown quiet in the burger place. He scared me when he was like that.

"I took a deep breath. "What's wrong, Nick?" I asked quietly.

He didn't answer me. I was afraid of that. Sometimes, he just wouldn't speak at all. It was like he just couldn't even express what was buried inside him, or couldn't figure out how.

"I was thinking about my parents again," he said, barely above a whisper.

That was it. I remembered the family in the diner. Seeing them must have triggered his mood. I didn't know anything about Nick's biological family. He'd been adopted not too long ago by a gay couple. I knew them well because I worked on their farm, and they'd helped me deal with my own feelings about my sexual orientation. Ethan and Nathan were like fathers to me, or maybe more like big brothers. I thought Nick was very lucky to have them as his parents, but he obviously wasn't talking about them. He was talking about his biological mother and father.

"You've never told me about them," I said.

"They didn't want me," he said, tears welling up in his eyes.

"I'm so sorry, Nick."

"Everything was fine with them, but then... they found out I was gay. They didn't want me after that. My dad and I used to be so close. We'd play basketball together and play catch and all kinds of stuff. He took me to amusement parks and we hung out together all the time."

His voice caught in his throat, then he continued. "But as soon as he found out I was gay, all that changed. It's like all of a sudden, Mom and Dad were totally different. I was different. You don't know what it's like to have a

mom and dad for fifteen years, then have them decide you aren't their son anymore. They used to be so proud of everything I did. They were always taking pictures of me. I bet they've torn 'em all up now.

"When I ran away, they didn't even care. They didn't even try to find me. When Ethan and Nathan wanted to adopt me, my parents didn't resist. They just signed away all their rights, like they were getting rid of an old car. They didn't even say 'goodbye'. It was like they were glad to be rid of their faggot son," he said sarcastically.

I didn't know what to say. My parents weren't anything like that at all.

"How'd they find out?" I asked. I hoped I wasn't being too nosy.

"Dad found some pictures on the computer. Pictures of guys. You know... I thought I'd deleted them, but, well... I guess I missed some. I remember when he found them. He yelled my name and I knew I was in for it. When I walked into the room, there was a photo of two young guys on my screen, doin' it. Dad was furious. He asked if I knew anything about the pictures. I lied and told him I didn't. He slapped my face."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Nick."

"Then he asked me if I was a faggot. He told me not to lie to him or he'd hurt me. I told him I was gay and he said 'No, you're a *faggot*.' I hated the way he said it. He called my mom in and showed her the picture. He told her I was a faggot. He never said gay, it was always *faggot*. I tried to leave, but he grabbed my wrist and made me stay. He started asking me questions. He asked me if I'd been with other guys. I told him 'no', which was the truth, but he acted like he didn't believe me. He got real personal and specific with his questions, real vulgar. I couldn't believe it. I was totally humiliated. I told Dad the truth, that I hadn't done any of that stuff. He called me a liar."

Nick was crying now. I knew the memories must have been very painful for him. I think he needed to talk about it though. Nick knew he was safe with me. He knew I loved him and that he could tell me anything.

I put my arm around his shoulders. "You're safe now, Nick," I said reassuringly. "That's all over with. You've got good parents now."

His voice grew hoarser, and he choked out the words between sobs. "I thought my mom would stand up for me, but she didn't. It was like she just didn't care about me. The day they found out about me was the day their love for me was gone, like it had never been there at all. I wasn't their little boy anymore.

"Things got pretty bad after that at home. It was like I didn't exist. When Dad did acknowledge my existence, it was just to make fun of me and call me names. He made a lot of 'cute' little remarks about me being gay, saying stuff like how gay boys were all real small in the penis department, so it probably only took two fingers to hold mine. He embarrassed me in front of Mom all the time. When I'd come in, he'd say stuff like 'The little pillow-biter is home' or 'The little fairy has just flown in'. He said a lot of other stuff to me when we were alone, but it was so bad I don't even want to say it out loud."

Nick was almost hysterical. He was sobbing so hard that he was having trouble speaking. My heart went out to him.

"But all the things he said wasn't the worst of it though. The worst was knowing that my parents didn't want me anymore, that they didn't love me. And then..."

Nick broke down crying. He couldn't speak at all for awhile.

"I don't wanna talk about this anymore," he said. The memories had become too painful for him to bear. I held him and tried to comfort him.

"You don't have to say anything more, Nick," I whispered. "It's okay. Ethan and Nathan are your parents now and they love you. They adopted you because they wanted you to be their son. They picked you out of all the hundreds of kids they could have adopted. *They* love you, Nick, and *I* love you."

We embraced, and our bodies shook together as his sobs echoed through the trees. After a few minutes, his tears finally ceased. I think he felt better. I hoped so. I didn't like to see the boy I loved in pain.

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I walked Nick home. Even before we got close, I could detect the scent of plowed earth and farm animals. I loved the farm. It was a place of peace and beauty. Nick seemed to be in better spirits by the time we got there. I would've gone inside with him for awhile, but I sensed he wanted to be alone with his thoughts. It was beginning to get dark too, so I needed to head back. We stood in front of the farmhouse porch for a few moments, listening to the crickets and frogs perform their nightly symphony.

I pulled Nick to me and hugged him close. I pressed my lips to his and kissed him passionately. I felt his tongue slip into my mouth. We kissed each other for a few moments, then drew apart.

"You really need to stay the night at my house sometime soon," I said.

"Why?" he said, mischievously.

"*You* know why."

"Hey, I'm not that kinda guy," said Nick indignantly.

"You're *my* kinda guy," I corrected him.

"Um, kiss me again."

I kissed Nick once more and he rubbed up against me. I could tell he was aroused. So was I. My heart was beating like a jackhammer.

"We'd better stop," I said, panting, "but I don't wanna stop."

"Me neither."

I came real close to asking him if he wanted to go out to the barn. His parents were in the house, and there was no chance of us getting caught. I didn't press him, however, I knew he needed to be alone with his thoughts.

I sighed. "I'll see you tomorrow," I said at last.

"Night, Sean."

Nick gave me one last peck on the lips, then turned and walked into the house. I stood and watched him until he was gone.

I headed for home, my thoughts filled with Nick – or more precisely, Nick's body. Simply being near him got me so excited that I could barely stand it. I was stiff as a rock when we'd kissed and I knew Nick could feel it. He was turned-on, too. I guess we just had that effect on each other.

I laughed quietly when I thought about how we'd decided to take things slow in the beginning. That idea had been a lost cause right from the start. The very moment I told him that I was gay and that I loved him, we'd kissed passionately. Before I knew it, we were skinny dipping and making out naked in a small pond. Then I'd sank to my knees in front of Nick and...

I couldn't let myself think about the details; it would only torment me. It was after that first day that we decided to take things more slowly. We wanted our relationship to be like Ethan and Nathan's – about companionship and love, not just sex.

That was the original idea, anyway. We managed to hold out for two whole days before we lost control and ripped each other's clothes off in the hayloft. Since that time, we'd gotten it on at every opportunity. We couldn't help ourselves. We were normal, teenaged guys.

I loved Nick with all my heart. We hadn't managed to take it slow like we'd planned, but it didn't matter. We loved each other. Even though we went at it like two wild animals, our relationship was a lot deeper than that.

I looked up and saw Graymoor Mansion looming before me. It was kinda cool living in Verona's most notorious haunted house. I didn't think so in the beginning, but I'd come to love the old place. I guess the addition of electricity and satellite TV had something to do with that, but recent events had an even greater effect. I'd experienced things since moving into Graymoor... things that I'd never have thought possible before.

The porch light was on, but the rest of the house was pitch-black. Good. My parents were almost never home. My dad was an archaeologist. Half the time he was out lecturing and raising funds for his excavations. The other half of the time he was gone on some dig, always in some far away place like Egypt or Sicily or somewhere. Mom had a more ordinary job; she ran her own antique store, but she was never around either. If she wasn't at the shop, she was out looking for old stuff to sell.

I smiled. The almost total lack of parental supervision made it easy for Nick and me to have a lot of fun. If my parents even guessed at some of what went on when they were gone, they'd probably lock me in my room.

I opened the heavy wooden front door and flipped on the light. The vast, front parlor was instantly bathed in a pale amber glow. How different it was from my first weeks in Graymoor when we had to get by with candle and lamp light. The house I'd lived in before could've fit into the parlor with room to spare, and I'm not exaggerating one bit. I climbed the stairs to my room, which was three floors up. My legs were getting a lot stronger, just from the many trips I made to my room each day. Just going to the kitchen and back was quite a hike.

I walked down the hall to my room, passing the painting of an old man who somewhat resembled a pirate. As always, his eyes followed me. I spent over an hour one day looking at the painting from all different angles, and discovered that the eyes were always staring straight at me. It freaked me out at first, but I got used to it, like so many of the strange occurrences at Graymoor.

At last I reached my room. I clicked on the light, closed the door, and flopped down on the bed, exhausted from all the walking. It felt good to rest my legs. I thought about Nick spending the night with me again, and I felt a hunger deep inside me. I couldn't wait. The last time... Just remembering got me all hot and bothered. I unfastened my belt and pushed off my jeans, then my boxers. Until I could get with Nick again, I'd have to relieve the tension in the old-fashioned way.