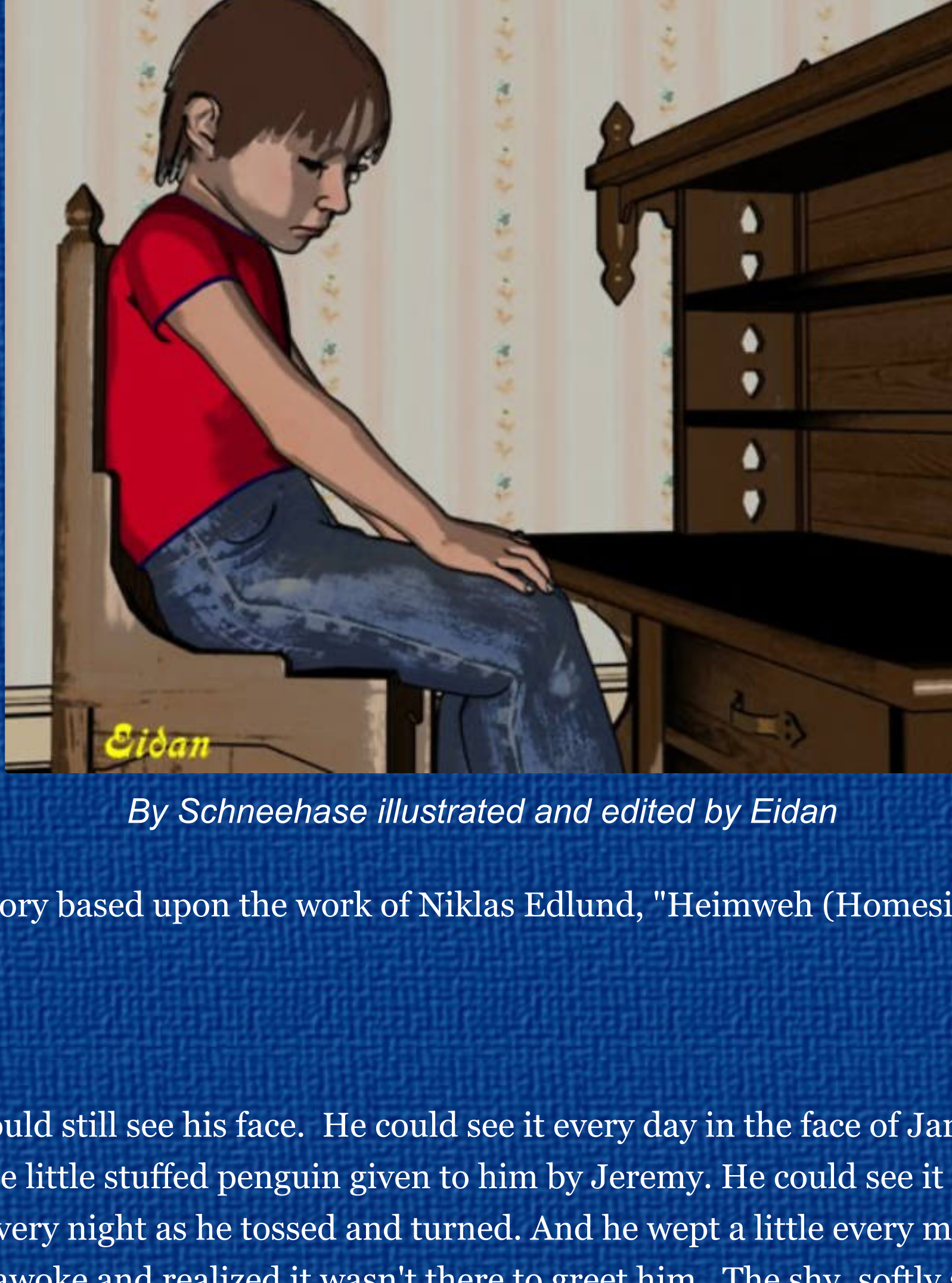


Together Again



By Schneehase illustrated and edited by Eidan

A story based upon the work of Niklas Edlund, "Heimweh (Homesick)".

Fabian could still see his face. He could see it every day in the face of Jarvis the Butler, the little stuffed penguin given to him by Jeremy. He could see it in his dreams every night as he tossed and turned. And he wept a little every morning when he awoke and realized it wasn't there to greet him. The shy, softly spoken little boy had snuggled up to him on their final night at camp, his warm body entwined around the stomach by Fabian's arms, as the two had sat and stargazed together away from the crowded, droning disco.

Patrick had made a deep impression, and when they'd gone their separate ways as Fabian got home, it cut into him just as deeply as the feeling he'd had when his mother and Jeremy's dad had finished, and Jeremy had gone to live with his dad. He'd loved Jeremy, and treated him like the little brother he never had. As an only child, losing Patrick was almost like losing Jeremy; it broke him. It felt like part of him had gone. Again.

Of course he'd done the usual things most kids do when the time comes for them to leave camp - he'd swapped addresses with Patrick, they'd exchanged things like keyrings, t-shirts and bought each other presents - but that wasn't good enough for Fabian. The best present would be for him to be back at camp with Patrick - it was what he wanted right now, more than anything in the world.

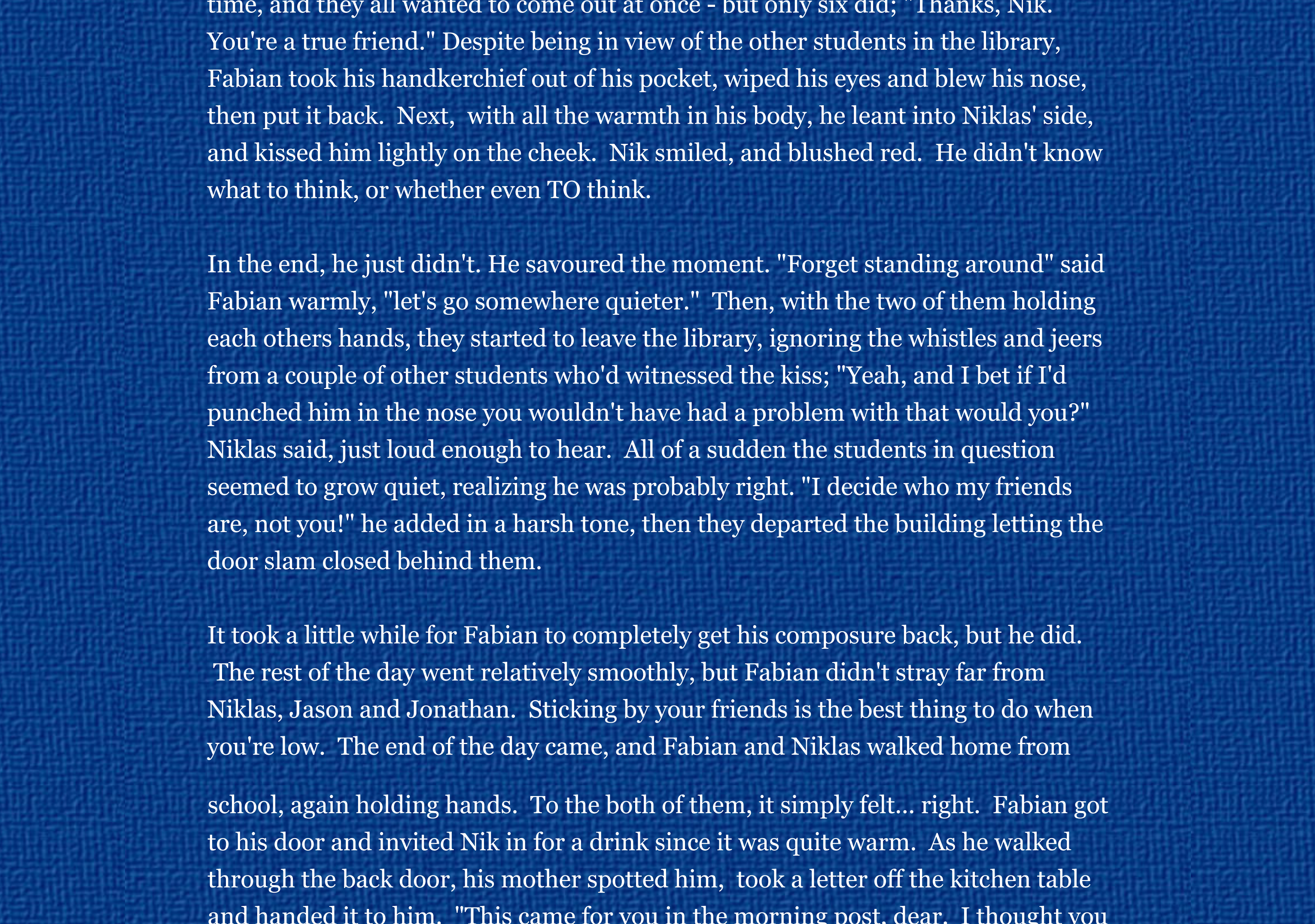
As the weeks passed, Patrick still sat at the back of Fabian's mind. As he sat in the library at school one day, Fabian's friends Niklas and Jason came and sat with him. Both shared a cheery "Hello" with him - but you wouldn't have thought so.

As far as it appeared to all around, Fabian didn't even realise they were there. Another "Hello", this time with a hand waved in front of his face, finally pulled his attention back from wherever he'd been. "Oh! Hi, guys." Niklas looked into Fabian's eyes, moving his hand like a hypnotist trying to put his victim into a trance. "Where were you, Fabi? Away with the pixies???"

Jason cut in. "I know where he was, Niklas. He was back at camp with Pa..." - he got a slap round the back of the head from Niklas, to educate him not to open his mouth and take the piss. He turned to look back at Fabian, but was met with the sight of his friend's face buried in his hands, and the soft sound of crying. Niklas put his arm soothingly round Fabian's shoulder, and was most surprised when the normally strong boy wrapped both his arms around him, and began to cry deeply and bitterly into Niklas' chest. "I miss him, Nik. I miss Patrick. I just want him back, I want him here, so we can all be together as friends."

Niklas and Jason hadn't realised just *quite* how strongly Fabian had felt about Patrick, but this had really bought it home to them. He'd been talking about the boy for long enough, and now it had reached a head. Something had to be done. Fabian had lost a friend, and lost the will to have fun in the process. This had to be fixed.

Niklas turned his gaze to Jason and mouthed to him "Come back later". Jason gave him a querying look, but did as he was bid and left the two of them alone. Once they were alone, Niklas took Fabian in a proper embrace and slowly, gently rubbed his back while Fabian continued to sob into his shoulder. Niklas put his lips close to Fabian's ear and whispered softly into it;- "Sshhh... Everything will be alright. I understand that you're crying deep inside. Fabi, Patrick must be very special to you for you to miss him this much. I want you to know that I will support you. My ears are open 24 hours a day, and my arms will always be here for you, when you want me to cuddle you. Alright?"



Fabian lifted his tear stained face away from Niklas' shoulder briefly, and looked directly at his eyes. There was so much he wanted to say to that beautiful speech - so much he wanted to do. There were a thousand words all in his head at the same time, and they all wanted to come out at once - but only six did; "Thanks, Nik. You're a true friend." Despite being in view of the other students in the library, Fabian took his handkerchief out of his pocket, wiped his eyes and blew his nose, then put it back. Next, with all the warmth in his body, he leant into Niklas' side, and kissed him lightly on the cheek. Nik smiled, and blushed red. He didn't know what to think, or whether even TO think.

In the end, he just didn't. He savoured the moment. "Forget standing around" said Fabian warmly, "let's go somewhere quieter." Then, with the two of them holding each others hands, they started to leave the library, ignoring the whistles and jeers from a couple of other students who'd witnessed the kiss; "Yeah, and I bet if I'd punched him in the nose you wouldn't have had a problem with that would you?" Niklas said, just loud enough to hear. All of a sudden the students in question seemed to grow quiet, realizing he was probably right. "I decide who my friends are, not you!" he added in a harsh tone, then they departed the building letting the door slam closed behind them.

It took a little while for Fabian to completely get his composure back, but he did. The rest of the day went relatively smoothly, but Fabian didn't stray far from Niklas, Jason and Jonathan. Sticking by your friends is the best thing to do when you're low. The end of the day came, and Fabian and Niklas walked home from

school, again holding hands. To the both of them, it simply felt... right. Fabian got to his door and invited Nik in for a drink since it was quite warm. As he walked through the back door, his mother spotted him, took a letter off the kitchen table and handed it to him. "This came for you in the morning post, dear. I thought you might want to read it, it's come a long way." Fabian sat down at the dinner table with Nik at his side, took the butter knife off the dish and slit along the long edge of the envelope which bore a fair few stamps. He put the knife back and hastily withdrew the envelope's contents. He recognized the postmark, and Niklas could clearly see the excitement building in his face when he opened the letter...

"Freiburg, 14. July.

Dear Fabian,

Hi! Nice to have the chance to get in contact with you again. I know it's only been a couple of months, but I have so much to tell you, and I am going to have the opportunity to tell you in person! We're coming to your area in the next few weeks, and Mum says that we can meet up. She says she really wants to meet you, and say thank you to you for the way you looked after me and helped me while we were away at camp.

Mum always knew I was shy, and she sent me to the camp to help me try and make friends. I honestly never thought I'd make such a good friend, but I did. It will be great to see you when we come down. I will write to you again closer to the time. Sorry this note is so short, but Mum's just called me downstairs. We're going out to a fancy dinner tonight with my Aunt Maria. I'm sitting here in my miniature penguin suit, looking like I'm going to a wedding, and Dad says I have to put a tie on. Blaargh... :)

Take care, and see you very soon,

Your friend,

Patrick."

Fabian's eyes opened wide. Then wider. He looked like they were going to pop out of his head as Niklas looked on, quizzically, wondering what on earth had just happened. "He's coming, Nik! HE'S COMING! HE'S COMING!!!". Fabian began shouting at nearly the top of his voice before Nik calmed him down enough to talk to him. "Who's coming, Fabi?" "Patrick. He's coming, Nik. He's coming here, and I can meet him again!" Without even thinking, he jumped and threw both his arms around Niklas' shoulders at the same time, bringing him to the floor with excitement, and kissed him on the cheek. After their time together earlier in the day, Niklas was pleased to see the warm smile and the glow return to Fabian's face. It was nice to see the return of the friend he knew and remembered.

The real Fabian.

Chapter 2

Early in the evening, the day after getting Patrick's letter, the bouncy feeling he had inside keeping him in high spirits, Fabi sat down. Fountain pen in his hand, paper on his desk, this is what followed:

"Hagen, 19. July.

Dear Patrick,

You can't even begin to guess how happy I am to have got your letter, no matter how long it is; I've been telling my friends Niklas, Jason and Jonathan, all about you and the time we spent together. They're really looking forward to meeting you when you come down. But, I'm looking forward to meeting you even more than they are. I flattened Niklas when I read your letter, I was so excited Come to think of it, I think my other friend Martin would like to meet you too - he's a little younger than you, but he's still a regular bucket of fun!

I'm really pleased too that your Mum is coming down, I have been wanting to meet her and talk for a while. Is your Dad coming too? I know he has to work, but it would be great if you could all come down together. I just don't know what to say; there aren't enough words in English!

It's been painful for me waiting to hear from you; I've missed you like crazy - but it's such a pleasure to know you're coming here. Let me know if there's anything you'd like to do while you're down here, and I will be happy to get something sorted. And you absolutely MUST come have a sleepover with me. I won't take no for an answer!!!

Don't wait too long before you write back, please! You know my address, but if you can't find my house, I've put a map in for you to get here.

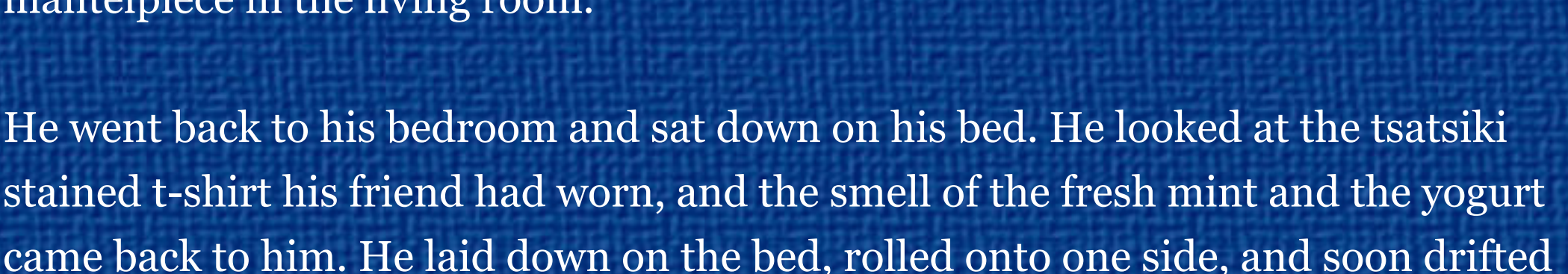
I still have Jarvis too, so if you want, bring Snoozie with you for the sleepover. No need to lose out on comfort because you're on holiday, bud!

Be well, I honestly can't wait to see you again.

With best wishes,

Fabian"

Fabian turned the letter over onto a sheet of blotting paper to dry the ink, then folded it carefully. He put it into an envelope from his desk drawer and added the map, as well as a photo of himself with Niklas, Jason, Jonathan, Martin, Keith, Davy and Sniv. He marked it in pen, so he could show Patrick who all his friends were.



He closed the envelope flap, and after licking the disgusting gum that tasted of week-old cucumber on the strip, he sealed it. On the front, he wrote Patrick's address, and took it downstairs to give to his Mum. She would be going into town the next morning, and could drop it off at the post office. Fabian gave her some of his pocket money for the stamps, and left the letter standing up on the mantelpiece in the living room.

He went back to his bedroom and sat down on his bed. He looked at the tsatsiki stained t-shirt his friend had worn, and the smell of the fresh mint and the yogurt came back to him. He laid down on the bed, rolled onto one side, and soon drifted off to sleep. His dreams took him away back to camp, but they led him to something new.

He remembered being caught with Patrick in his birthday suit as they got changed after swimming. Instead of just standing there though, he saw his friend's distress, his insecurity, and fell to help him. Standing in front of Patrick, in an effort to hide him away, he bent down and immediately cuddled the soft warm body of his young friend, comforting as it was, as he tried to cover as much as possible, while Patrick's head dropped onto his shoulder. The nakedness didn't matter to him, what was important was the act of protecting him, of concealing him from the eyes of others.

When Fabian looked again, Patrick's face wasn't there. It'd been replaced by Jeremy's. He hugged even harder, ignoring the differences, and at this point, he awoke slowly; his pillow soaked with tears, and his mum by his bedside. She wasn't always that great at showing sympathy, but this time she seemed genuinely concerned - not a first for her, but rare for sure.

As Fabian sat up, his mum wrapped her arms around him and just sat and held him. Not a word passed her lips, but Fabi knew why she was there.

"It's not just Patrick I'm missing Mum, it's Jeremy. There are some things you can't replace, aren't there?" And for the first time since he was 5, Fabian turned on the puppy eyes - the ones that say "Please don't ignore me." His mum knew what he wanted, and she couldn't turn away from it.

"You really want to see Jeremy again, don't you, honey?"

Fabian nodded. He wiped his tear stained face on his sleeve, inadvertently spreading a streak of snot up it from where his nose had been running. His mum looked at his sleeve, then turned her eyes back to Fabian. A genuinely warm smile spread across her lips, and she reached around Fabian again, and hugged him.

"If that's what you really want, I'm not going to get in your way, darling. I'll call his dad in the morning, and see what we can do."

Fabian's eyes almost glowed at this news, and the tears which had been so freely flowing from his eyes when he woke, stopped. "I'll leave you alone for a little while, I've got to get dinner started. Fish fingers and fries ok for you tonight?" Fabian nodded. His mum smiled at him again, and then left his room.

He swung his legs round to the edge of his bed and looked over to his bedside table; in particular, he looked at the two photographs on it. One was of Patrick, standing in front of their cabin at the camp, dressed in his baggy green t-shirt. The other was of Jeremy, wearing shorts and a soccer top, playing in the park with him, Niklas and Jonathan.

Fabian picked up the one with Jeremy in it and hugged it close to his chest. There was so much he remembered doing with him. The thought that even for one day, he was going to get the chance to see him and maybe even play with him again filled him with excitement.

Putting that one back on his table, he then picked up the one with Patrick in. He looked again into the deep brown eyes.

All he could remember were the fun times, the friendship and above all, the effort he'd put into making sure Patrick had a good time at camp.

It wasn't effort though, was it? It'd been hard getting through the barriers that Paddy had built around himself, that was a certainty. But it was more of a pleasure to see the hesitant little guy come out of his shell, and that pleasure certainly wasn't in any part, effort.

Putting that picture down, Fabian looked at them both in one place. It would be so good if he could have all of his friends like that; all in one place - especially Patrick, Jeremy and Martin. He could see that being a match made in heaven or, at the very least, on a playground...

After what seemed like ages staring at those pictures, Fabian's mum called him down for dinner. He touched both the pictures and headed for the table.