

Bare Ben

By Gareth Walton and Rick Pollard

Chapter One

He threw his rucksack on his bed, leant back against the bedroom door, and took out his penis for the fourteenth time that day. The sight of it still hit him like a punch in the stomach. It was true that the unadulterated panic of those first few days had lessened, but he still couldn't fully own the knowledge that he was looking at a part of his own body. How could it be his? There was no foreskin on the penis that was lying across the palm of his hand.

He caught sight of himself reflected in mirror on his wardrobe door, a tall, dark-haired, good-looking young man. The white flesh of the long, thick manhood hanging out of the flies of his school trousers contrasted starkly with the black of the cloth. His penis had once been one to be proud of - it hadn't taken him long to realise that in the P.E. changing rooms when he had first gone to secondary school. Now, so completely and terrifyingly altered, it didn't even occur to him that it might be that again one day. It certainly didn't look good now. He was resigned to the marred thing he now had between his legs being something to keep hidden away for the rest of his life.

Even from across the room he could make out the bruising in the mirror; above it the red, raw line where the scalpel had done its terrible work of permanent severing. It was just impossible for him to accept that he was seeing a reflection of his own, mutilated body. The young man he was looking at was so clearly circumcised. He just couldn't think of himself as that. Not yet. Probably never.

Ben took in the reversed image of the row of eighteenth birthday cards along the top of his book shelves, rarely noticed now after being there for six days. Adulthood. That was something he had looked forward to. During the course of less than a week, that special status had been granted to him but something yet more precious taken away from him. Yes, he was a man now, but an incomplete. Compared to his circumcision, Ben's coming of age seemed now to be totally inconsequential.

On his desk was a pile of papers that had arrived that morning, containing more details of the BSc in Metal Sciences at Nottingham University than he could possibly take in. Of course, he thought, his college friends would assume he'd always been the way he was now. That first time at the gym, the pool, in the gents in the Student Union bar or wherever it was when his new mates first got to see each others' genitals - that special moment of male bonding that they wouldn't fully understand until long after it had happened - it would never occur to any of them that he had been as complete as them until so recently. They would never think that he was used to half an inch of loose overhang, not tightly stretched shaft skin. They would guess that the scar line, far straighter than anything nature could create, set so far back behind his vulnerable exposed mushroom head was something that still shocked him every time he saw it and that he would try at

all costs to hide from them all. He'd be healed by then of course, he knew that. Ben realised that bruising fades, and he hoped that in a month things might look a little less horrific than they did at that moment. Despite that small crumb of comfort, the thought of living the rest of his life with no covering on his glans did nothing but make him feel physically sick. He had no real idea of what a circumcised penis was supposed to look like, let alone how it was supposed to fulfil its manly functions, and he had and no-one to ask. His imaginings weren't ones on which he cared to dwell for too long.

He'd so nearly made it, that was the galling thing. At eighteen he could have said no. He would have done so too, and in no uncertain terms - Ben was sure of that. As a mere seventeen year old, however, it was different. It was just done to him. Five days before his birthday, so he had had no say at all. Not asked, not even given a hint about what was going to happen. Just five days - that was clever. That had taken some thinking about. It was admirable in a way, all the planning that had gone into it. Almost flattering that someone had thought it worth taking so much trouble. It wasn't admirable though, far from it. He would never be able to prove anything. Ben knew that, and it hurt.

Very carefully, Ben tucked his penis back inside the sort of underwear he hadn't worn in years, edged up the zip and hung his blazer up on the back of the door. He put on a CD and sat down cautiously at the desk in the window. He opened one of his school books but before he got to the end of the first paragraph his mind had wandered back to his penis. Instinctively, he knew that it would take a very long time for his emotions to come to terms with what had been done to him. By force of will, he had made himself think only analytically about it all, and he could barely cope with even that. If he could come to understand the "how" of no longer having a foreskin, perhaps he might one day be able to move on to get to grips with "why" it had been taken from him. Coming to terms with the reality of life without a foreskin was a very long way off yet, and he knew it.

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Chapter Two

"Opportunity, Means and Motive" – Ben had been taught to analyse plots that way for his AS-Level English. Although the last of the three was a long way off in his understanding, he had at least gained some little comfort in being able to sort out the first two in his head. Ben was naturally trusting, and it had been hard for him to accept that the whole thing had been set up so carefully. Part of him longed to be able to believe that it had all been the way it seemed on the surface, but he knew that he couldn't really buy that version of events.

"Opportunity". That had been planned so long in advance. That plane ticket for his mother's wedding anniversary present - "one of those silly-money fares you just have to grab when you see them." It had seemed a kind thought of his stepfather's, making such a fuss over giving the ticket to her that evening in the restaurant two months back.

"I know how little you get to see your sister." "It will be lovely in Spain that time of year." "You deserve a break." "I've made sure you'll be back in good time for Ben's eighteenth." How genuine it had all sounded. Ben had even managed to feel pleased for his mum that her drip of a second husband had managed a romantic gesture. It saddened him now to realise that Roger was just getting her out of the way.

At first, Ben's mother Carol had been a bit concerned about being away during the run up to his exams. He had seen on her face how much she wanted to go though, and had reassured her that it would be fine. That tormented him now. Deep down, he hadn't really wanted her to be away while he was revising for his A levels, but it had seemed a bit immature to make a fuss. After all, he'd be away at university in a few months and he wouldn't have her to rely on then. Anyway, he realised now, even if she hadn't gone then Roger would probably have been smart enough to think of another way to get the job done. And smart he was too. Almost admirably smart. Almost.

"Means". It was that that really gave it away. Roger's plan had been clever though, Ben had to admit that. Looking back, Ben realised now that his stepfather had made sure he was around to overhear the call he had made to his mother after she had been in Spain for a couple of days. Even at the time, it had been a bit puke making - all that "I'm missing you so much" and "I don't know what to do with myself without you around" stuff. Roger started feeding her his line. He told her he was passing the lonely evenings by sorting through the boxes of old papers that he'd brought with him when he had moved in with them, stuff that he hadn't looked at for years. He told her that he'd come across the policy for a private health insurance plan that he'd got as a perk at work years back, and that he hadn't realised that his dependants were entitled to an annual health M.O.T. up to the age of 18. Of course, he said, he'd found this out too late for it to

be any good for his own two sons, but did Carol want him to fix one up for Ben while there was still time?

Looking back, it was hard for Ben to accept that he'd believed that a man like Roger, who had found the TV licence in 30 seconds flat when the detector van had called, had any unsorted papers anywhere. His every bank statement, warranty card and receipt was filed neatly and instantly recoverable. Roger "Read-the-Small-Print" Turnbull not having known what his entitlements were? With hindsight, that was a laughable ideal. Had it been Ben's father, well that would have been a different matter. He was the sort that could quite easily have forgotten that he had ever had private health insurance in the first place – how many times had he gone out to buy some tool for a job around the house then discovered later that he already had one in the shed? His dad would most likely only have discovered a policy like that a month or two after it had expired.

Ben had actually been OK about having a health check up. It didn't seem such a bad idea to get a once-over before heading off to university as it had been a while since he'd had a medical at school. Ben smiled now with the irony of remembering how pleased he'd been then that Roger seemed at last to be treating him like an adult. He had talked it all through with Ben, consulting him about the best time for the appointment before calling the clinic one morning as they sat sharing breakfast. Even after fixing it all with the receptionist, he took care to double check the details with Ben, his hand over the receiver as he made sure the timing wouldn't interrupt his revision.

What Ben never knew, however, was that as soon as he had gone upstairs to start revising Roger had made a second call to the clinic. Using his mobile this time, and sitting outside in his car to be sure that Ben couldn't overhear this rather different conversation, Roger Turnbull rang back, pressing the keypad with a slightly shaking finger.

Despite his nervousness, Roger knew exactly what he was going to say in this vital second call - he'd thought it through enough times after all. He asked if he could be put through to the consultant who was to see Ben the next day. Roger introduced himself to Dr Argent, apologised for troubling him and said he wanted a quiet word before his stepson's appointment.

Roger explained to Argent that Ben had asked him to telephone on his behalf, it being rather a delicate matter. He was happy to do so, he said, as the lad was very shy and found the whole matter acutely embarrassing. Ben, he told the doctor, had long had concerns about "a small matter of personal hygiene". The lad didn't want there to be any issues of a sort that might interfere with his - "how shall I put it" said Roger, adopting his most man-to-man voice, "well, lets just say, 'interfere with his social life' when he goes to university."

"Ben", he told Dr. Argent "has just had the bright idea of suggesting that perhaps it might be possible to book him in for a (Roger concentrated hard, as he knew he would have to say the word any second now).... for a circumcision straight after his health check."

Roger was pleased with himself. He had managed to say the word.

“It’s just struck Ben that it would save him having to make a second trip during his exams if you could do it tomorrow. He has asked about getting circumcised so many times that I know he’s really sure about it”.

Roger felt a little more confident now. His voice sounded like step-parental concern personified.

“He’s certainly got a really long foreskin, and I know it’s meant he’s had a terrible time all through school; kids can be so unkind, can’t they. I think he’s really had enough of the thing now, and he says he wants it sorted out once-and-for-all. I suspect that the fact he is just about to head off to university has a lot to do with it, if you get what I mean - we all know what lads are like!” said Roger, adopting his man-to-man tone again.

Roger tried to stop talking, but he found he couldn’t.

“He’s made his mind up that he needs it, and if he’s sure, then - well, I’ve always thought it was cleaner and healthier that way. Ben and I are really lucky”, Roger went on further still, knowing this was the part of the conversation where he was really going to have to start pushing his luck.

“We’re close enough for him to be able to talk to me about this sort of thing but, like I said, he’s painfully shy with strangers. He hates the thought of having to talk about any of this to you, so he asked me to tell you that he’d just like you to get on and do it when you see him tomorrow.”

Roger's fingers were crossed tight while he was force fed on-hold Vivaldi. He knew there would be other options if this one failed, and he was ready to make an excuse and cancel the whole check up if Dr Argent seemed dubious, but this would be such a tidy way to get the job done. The relief washed over him when Argent came back on the line and said that he had checked his diary and there would be no problem scheduling Ben for a longer appointment to perform what he termed “the procedure”.

Roger was amazed how easy it was. He had made it plain along the way that he was aware that there would be an extra fee to pay and that seemed to mean he wasn't having to convince Dr. Argent of anything very much.

“We've discussed the options and done a little research” said Roger, going into the last piece of the script he'd rehearsed so many times in his head. “Ben would like to have what I believe is called a high and tight circumcision with his banjo string taken out too.”

Roger knew the word "frenulum" of course, but he had calculated that it might be wise not to show too much expertise on the subject. Saying "high and tight" was dodgy enough, but he had to make sure the lad was properly and thoroughly flayed so it was a

risk he'd have to take. Roger still found it hard to actually say those words out-loud. He was half surprised to hear them come out of his mouth so calmly and without his voice cracking. The only sign of a lack of calm, had anyone been there to notice it, was the tenting of his trousers as his penis hardened inside.

"I am circumcised, and so are his stepbrothers, so Ben has had a chance to see what's what over the years. It's definitely a high and tight that he wants, like ours."

Roger knew he was sailing very close to the wind now, but still couldn't stop himself.

"Actually, I think he likes the idea that he will finally match the rest of the men in the family down there – I don't think he likes feeling the odd one out at the moment. You know what kids can be like, not wanting to be different."

As Dr. Argent put down the phone, he wondered idly if this man had any idea just how low the incidence of circumcision was in provincial England.

As Roger Turnbull put down the phone, he dug a shaking hand into his trouser pocket. Putting a thumb and finger round his glans, he massaged it with his rapidly moistening foreskin.

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Chapter Three

Roger was sitting outside the finance office of the Burden Park Clinic some time before it opened. The wait while the girl hung up her coat and filled the kettle unsettled his nerves, and he realised he would have to make an effort to seem calm and relaxed when she was finally ready to deal with him. Ben's appointment wasn't until that afternoon but Roger knew that he had to get everything settled now while there was still time to think of a plan B or, if things got really tricky, to get a message to Ben to stop him coming and abort the whole thing.

There was, of course, no medical insurance policy. Roger couldn't think of how anyone could find that out now though. His company would keep details of employees' contracts confidential and, in five days time on Ben's birthday, he could quite convincingly, Roger being Roger, say he had shredded the then redundant, non-existent policy document. He had signed up for a credit card that he knew he would only use once. Registered at his work address, it only had to get him through today and by tomorrow, it would be cut in half. He had been setting aside cash to pay the bill at a bank where he wouldn't be known on his next business trip up to Scotland. Once it was settled, that paperwork would also be shredded so that there would be no record of the transaction ever having happened. Roger didn't begrudge one penny of the £400 that the circumcision would cost, but the wasted £300 for the needless check up irrationally annoyed him, even though he knew that the whole plan hinged on it.

When the clinic's receptionist finally called him over, she swallowed the story that Roger fed her without question. Seeing the way that his cleverness took her in gave him the familiar buzz he experienced when he saw that one of his little scams had taken. He told her that he might not be able to get away from work in time to bring Ben in for his check up and, because of this, he wanted to do all the admin now in order to save any hassle for the lad later.

In reality, Roger could imagine nothing that would stop him collecting Ben and making sure that he kept his appointment. Seeing him walk through the doctor's door on the way to having his beautiful penis spoilt was a prize for which it would be worth keeping even the most important client waiting. Being there to see him emerge later, knowing that he no longer had any scrap of foreskin on his permanently scarred penis, would even be worth losing a contract for.

There was just one worrying moment with the paperwork. When Roger produced the document giving him power of attorney over Ben, the receptionist wasn't at all sure if this was enough for him to give consent for surgery on a minor. It had lain unused in a drawer since his marriage to Ben's mother as, with Ben's dad Richard based on the other side of the world and away on tour so much, Carol had thought it a good idea to draw it up should anything unthinkable ever happen. Roger waited while the girl went off to

consult the Registrar about it, only daring to uncross his fingers when she came back smiling.

Roger managed to casually ask her to check the details of Ben's appointment. He was surprised to find himself taken aback at the way she just said "I've got him down for a full Medical M.O.T. plus a circumcision". She sounded as blasé, as if the lad was getting a wart removed. Had she any idea what circumcision would mean to a young man, just how life changing it would be? How could she treat it so flippantly? It irritated him that someone like her could even use the C word without blushing, or at least somehow acknowledging the significance of what Ben was to go through.

Roger had wondered if he should check with her that the paperwork specified the removal of every bit of Ben's penis that it was possible to remove. In the event, he didn't trust himself to be able to ask in a calm voice or in a way that would raise no suspicions. In any case, he realised, perhaps the less there was on paper about the whole business the better. He would just have to hope that Dr Argent had remembered his request for a high and tight with the frenulum removed but, whatever happened, a circumcision was a circumcision.

Roger couldn't help wondering if he would ever get to see the details of the surgeon's handy work on Ben. Even if he didn't, and he knew that a fleeting glance one day in a pub toilet would be about the best he could hope for, the main thing was that Roger would know it had actually been done. He almost felt sorry for Ben. He liked the lad, but it had to happen nevertheless. What was that saying? "The sins of the father...?"

Ten minutes later, and Roger was back in the car. He took the receipt the receptionist had given him out of his jacket pocket and savoured being able to read it properly now. After all the months of planning there was so much satisfaction in just seeing the name Benjamin Cook and the word "circumcision" together on one piece of paper. How much sweeter still would it have been if the name printed in the "patient" box was Richard Cook instead of his son Ben's, but that was something that even Roger couldn't have organised. Nevertheless, the power of retribution at second hand was heady stuff. Making sure that the cars around him were empty, Roger couldn't help opening the fly of his suit trousers and reaching inside.

Another saying came to him as he looked at the skin that just about half covered the glans of his short, stubby erection: "In the land of the blind, the one eyed man is king". For once, it didn't trouble him that his hood barely covered his helmet. Compared to what Ben would soon have, his own short foreskin seemed positively luxuriant.

Roger thought again about how Ben's penis was so like his father's – big and sculpted, with a long tube of skin carrying on ridiculously far past the end of the head. The uncanny similarity had given him a jolt that first time he had taken Ben and his own two sons swimming. Seeing Ben naked for the first time had also made him uncomfortably aware that nature had been far from generous when endowing either of his own offspring. He resented Ben's luck there, seeing him so confident in his nakedness

next to his own sons in the shower. Even through paternal rose-tinted spectacles, Roger could not pretend either of his two sons had much to brag about.

At the time of that visit to the pool, Ben was about the same age as his father had been when he had first become friends with Roger. Even as a teenager, Richard had never been shy about vaunting his rather generous manhood. Not only that, he always seemed so proud of his overhang. This “absurd”, as Roger viewed it, bit of extra flesh had so clearly been passed on to Ben along with, to use a phrase of Richard’s which Roger remembered now with distaste: “a large portion”. That stupid, vain and down-right tacky pride of Richard’s had always irked Roger, even before the fateful day when their friendship had come to such an abrupt end. He was going to get the last laugh now though. It seemed to be a day for homilies: “All things come to those that wait.”

Roger remembered again the time in their teens when a horrified Richard had reported what had happened over the tea table the day before. Richard’s mother and father had sat him down and told him, completely out of the blue, that he thought it would be a good idea for him to be circumcised. Even telling Roger the next day, Richard was clearly mortified. He had said how barbaric he thought circumcision was and how, as far as he was concerned, that they might as well cut the whole thing off him if they were going to spoil it by cutting the end away. Roger had never given the matter of circumcision much attention one way or the other, and he had been amazed at his friend’s strong reaction.

Richard’s parents had actually been rather taken aback too. They had thought that their son would be relieved at the thought of getting rid of all that extra skin, but in the end they had quietly dropped the idea when Richard seemed really upset by their suggestion. Nevertheless, that event was a subject to which Richard had often returned with Roger, and Roger could tell something about the incident had really freaked him. Roger just wished he could somehow see the look on Richard’s face when he found out saw that his son had been spoiled by circumcision. For weeks, Roger had been enjoying imagining his newly-cut stepson coping with his new status, thinking of his discomfort when he next went to the gym with his friends. Roger would so have loved to tell Richard that his son’s suffering was all Richard’s fault, that he had brought it on Ben because of the wrong he had done to Roger all those years ago. Roger imagined the horror that would have been on Richard’s face if, when they were both teenagers, he had looked down and found that not only had his skin extension gone but that every scrap of his generous over-supply of covering had vanished. Having the head totally exposed and vulnerable instead of languishing in its covering would have shut him up and stopped his bragging and flaunting. That was beyond Roger’s power now, but he was going to get the next best thing by inflicting it on Richard’s only son.

Sitting in the car, Roger pulled his foreskin right back onto his shaft, so far back that it started to hurt. He tried with difficulty to imagine how awful it would be to be left like that the whole time, how weird it would feel for the head always to be exposed and rubbing mercilessly on your trousers. How shameful must it be to have to let others see your most personal part completely on show, with no way of ever keeping modestly

veiled like normal men who can chose to reveal it only in the most intimate of moments. He, Roger, was going to take that choice from Ben. That special power elated him.

Suddenly, he surprised himself by feeling slightly ashamed. It passed as he grabbed for the best justification he could muster: “What it must be like to have as much skin as that” he thought. Surely it must be a problem for the lad having to pee through a nozzle all the time? He almost managed to convince himself he was doing Ben a favour in sorting that out for him. Almost.

Roger heard a car door slamming and hurriedly re-stowed his penis. Turning the key, he put the car in gear, guiltily hoping that the Burden Park Clinic didn't have CCTV in its car park.

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Chapter Four

Roger's desire to spoil Ben's penis had been coming on for a long time. Looking back, he could actually identify the exact moment when things escalated and he knew he would no longer be able to stop himself making it happen. It was when Roger's younger son Matthew was invited to Gemma Thompson's eighteenth birthday party. She was one of Matthew and Ben's classmates, and Roger could see how delighted his boy was about the invite. Ben had certainly noticed Gemma's rather obvious charms from time to time, but Matthew had long been hopelessly in love with her but too timid to make a move. For Matthew, getting to go to her party was a very big deal in his life, and the first time that any girl had even seemed to notice him. Matthew's pride and pleasure had, however, received a big dent when Gemma rang on the morning of the party to invite Ben too.

That evening, Roger had turned up as planned to collect both the boys from the Thompson's at 12.30. Turning into their driveway, his headlights caught two intertwined figures in the alleyway alongside the house, rapidly disconnecting their tongues as they heard the car approach. Roger could see that one of them was Gemma. For an instant he was delighted that things had clearly gone well for Matthew. A second later, and Roger felt as if he had been kicked in the stomach. He saw the boy wasn't Matthew. It was Ben.

Roger chose to pretend he hadn't noticed them and rang the door bell. He eventually found Matthew sitting in the back garden, very drunk and feeling very sorry for himself. Roger didn't say a word, but he was boiling inside. History was repeating itself. It awakened so much hurt in Roger, making him think back to when his then best friend Richard had betrayed him in such a similar way. They were in their second year at university when Carol, Ben's mum to be, arrived as a first year. Both Richard and Roger had instantly fallen for her in a big way. At first, it had been a real bond between the two of them as both admired her from afar, but she had shown not the slightest interest in either of them. After a while though, Roger had thought he was making progress with her and a light hearted rivalry had started up. Then came their end of term party, and that changed it all. Roger had gone out just before 11 to get some more wine before the off-licence closed. When he came back he found Richard and Carol in a writhing clench on the settee.

The hurt of that betrayal went deep, and Roger had been nurturing the injustice ever since. He had been delighted when he heard on the grapevine that Richard and Carol's marriage had fallen apart eleven years later. By pure fluke, Roger, divorced himself and looking after two sons, saw Carol on "Friend's Reunited" a couple of years after that. He had risked sending her a chatty email, one thing had led to another and, to his great satisfaction, she had said yes when he finally asked her to marry him. He had feelings for her, he was sure of that, but he knew that part of him got a lot of satisfaction from knowing that he had finally triumphed over Richard. Not only could much of the

burden of looking after his boys be dumped on to someone else, but he had got the girl, and his way, after all – something Roger was very fond of getting indeed. Finding Matthew in such a similar situation with Ben and Gemma brought the raw injustice of it all flooding back. Taking Carol from him wasn't all Richard had done to Roger all those years ago though; there was another score to be settled there too. That was something he decided to do something about as well, even if Ben would have to pay the price for it in his place.

As it happened, Matthew bounced back very quickly from his snub at Gemma's party and the coolness between him and Ben only lasted a few days. Gemma had dumped Ben pretty thoroughly by the end of the week and Matthew had struck up with a girl he saw at the bus stop, who had more than obviously shown she wouldn't mind Matthew as a boyfriend. In fact, being able to share complaining about Gemma's behaviour towards them both had brought the boys closer together than they ever had been before. Roger chose not to notice this though - the damage was done in his mind and both the empathy he felt for his son and the hurt of all those years ago made him determined to act.

At first, Roger had been stumped as to how to set his plan in motion. As he left the clinic on the morning of Ben's appointment and turned on to the ring road, he couldn't help thinking how clever he had been to find a way to make things happen. Perhaps it was more than just luck though. Things had gone so well that fate seemed to have agreed that he was justified in what he was doing and had given him a helping hand. He remembered the conversation he had engineered with Carol that he knew would be vital to making the whole plan happen, and how things had so unexpectedly turned his way and made things so much easier.

On one of the occasional Saturday afternoon swimming trips with Ben and his own two boys, a plan had dawned on Roger. He knew he would have to play his cards right, but that was one thing at which Roger was expert. Later that evening, he gingerly started a well-thought-through conversation with Ben's mum. He'd told her he had noticed something about Ben that was worrying him. Preparing himself to lie to her, he said he'd seen over the last couple of trips to the pool that Ben's foreskin was looking as if it was getting rather tight.

"All three of them are growing into strapping lads" he went on, "and sometimes one bit of a strapping lad grows a bit out of sync with the rest of him. I think Ben should really get his foreskin checked out just to be on the safe side."

Ben might have been turning into a fine young man, but there was nothing whatsoever wrong with his foreskin, and Roger knew it. Ben's mum had looked a bit taken aback, and Roger knew it wasn't actually the sort of conversation you usually had over a Saturday night glass of wine and DVD. He kept talking, carrying on before she could reply, and banking on his assumption that this was a topic on which she would hardly be an expert. Coming from a big family of girls he knew she was always a bit of a loss when it came to "men's stuff". It struck him again how ironic it was that her one child was a boy, and that she had inherited two as stepsons as well. He explained that

teenagers' skins can sometimes get tight as they grow up and cause problems. It was no fun, he said, if it was hard for them to pull it back and sometimes, if the skin gets really tight, it can even get stuck back which can cause really serious complications. In a moment of sudden inspiration, he had added that if you can't retract properly to clean underneath then hygiene was a real issue too. He knew he was on to one of her pet subjects when it came to cleanliness, and realised he'd been clever to sow this seed early on and push this particular one of her buttons.

"Mmm", she said, "Actually, Richard always had to be really careful about keeping clean down there". Roger always flinched inside when she mentioned her ex-husband and his ex-best friend. This time though, he was completely taken aback by the rest of her sentence: "I suppose that's why it's so much easier for you, being circumcised", she said.

It took a second for Roger to register just what she meant. He was a quick thinker and he knew instantly that this was important, but it took a moment or two for him to realise exactly the significance of what Carol had just said. She had obviously made a huge assumption long ago, and assumed wrong. She thought Roger was cut! That was so good!

Ever the good Catholic girl, Carol had only slept with two men in her life – her two husbands, Richard and Roger. Richard had a lot of overhang; Roger had rather less than none. Richard's overhang, she had assumed, was what all intact men had. Roger, she had assumed too, must have been circumcised to have no overhang at all.

Had he not been a consummate straight faced con artist, Roger would have laughed out loud at the way things had turned so unexpectedly in his favour. He hadn't even had to lie this time- she had deceived herself without, for once, any help at all from Roger. He blessed Carol's naivety at that moment, realising that she had just seen so few penises in her life, let alone any who had undergone the brutality of circumcision. He thought of his boys when they were small, the last time he had supervised their bath time. Then they both had a little trunk of extra skin, and Ben would surely have had that too - all boys of that age did. That bit of overhang, she must have assumed, grew with uncircumcised lads as they moved into manhood so that they all end up looking like Richard with his elephant's trunk.

Thinking over it all later that night, Roger wondered how anyone could be stupid enough to think that anything as gross as Richard's foreskin was normal. Seconds later, the corollary of her error dawned on him, and this was a far less welcome thought. It annoyed him to realise that his new wife must always have thought of him as less than a complete man, a man that was less than perfect and marred by having had part of his penis taken away. Despite that, it amused him to think of her shock if she had ever been with a man who really had undergone the cruel act. What would she have made of seeing a penis so completely denuded of skin that every millimetre of the head was permanently uncovered and on show, the mark of the surgeon's knife showing on the shaft where it had scarred that special flesh for the rest of its owners' life? Did she not realise that

circumcision was surgery, and surgery that left very obvious scars too? Did she really think it was such a benign procedure that he could have undergone it and still looked the way he did? Circumcision wasn't some minor tidying up that left a man with the amount of modesty and protection that Roger had, it was the total removal of an intimate and sensitive part of the body that leaves him changed for ever. None of that really mattered though. Her stupidity had played straight into his hands and things had suddenly got a whole lot easier for him. That was what really counted, and he couldn't believe his luck.

After Carol's mistaken assumption came to light, it was all going to be so much more straightforward. As Roger had hoped, she was reluctant to discuss Ben's "problem" with him herself as that would have been just too embarrassing for both of them. She was more than happy when Roger made his kind offer to talk to the lad. "This sort of thing" he had told her "is always easier man to man."

Roger had, of course, not the slightest intention of discussing anything with Ben. The medical plan idea was firming up his mind. He would say just enough to the boy to cover his tracks, get him a complete, total and ruthless circumcision and leave him to deal with the consequences. It was a simple as that.

Bare Ben

Chapter Five

If Roger seemed quiet on the drive back to the clinic with Ben it was because he was thinking hard. He had to be sure that he had said just enough to the lad to cover his tracks in case things turned nasty. Knowing him as he did, Roger was pretty sure that Ben was too trusting to ask tricky questions. Even if the lad had suspicions, Roger was sure that Ben would just be too embarrassed by the nature of what was going to happen to want to make things worse by creating a fuss. Even so, Roger knew he just couldn't take any chances. He had thought very carefully before talking to the boy the night before, but Roger carefully re-ran the conversation with Ben in his head to double check that it would do.

“Oh, by the way”, Roger had started, adopting his most casual voice as he scrubbed the potatoes for their evening meal. “It struck me that if anything shows up in your medical and Doctor Argent wants to do more tests and stuff - like an allergy test for your hay fever or something – then it might make sense if he just got on with it and did it all tomorrow. Then it can all go on the same bill and the insurance will cover it. Is that ok with you?”

Put that way, it sounded so reasonable that he wasn't surprised that Ben raised no objection.

“OK said Roger. I'll sort it then. I didn't think you'd want to be to-ing and fro-ing to the doctors during your exams, and if we can go private while the policy lasts then all the better. It can all be done and dusted before the holiday starts. No point in hanging around for an appointment on the NHS if we can avoid it.”

Roger had sense to shut up then. He knew that, uncharacteristically, he was in danger of starting to burble. Nevertheless, he admired his own cleverness once again. If he had been any more specific it might scare the boy and he didn't want that, let alone to raise any suspicions in his mind.

Roger had started setting Ben up weeks before, the evening after one of their swimming trips. He had waited to catch Ben alone and, adopting his special parental voice, said he had something he wanted to ask. Ben winced inside, hating these excruciating moments with his step father. Roger kicked off with his usual “As your father isn't here to do it....”. This pre-cursor always got up Ben's nose because of its unspoken but very clearly implied subtext of “as he has abandoned you and selfishly bugged off to the other side of the world.” Ben never knew what was going to follow on from this grating intro, but it was seldom welcome. This time it worse than any of Roger's other heavy-handed and double-edged bursts of man-to-man paternal stuff:

“Listen,” Roger said, “this is a bit awkward, so I'll just be blunt. I couldn't help noticing earlier at the pool that you've got rather a lot of foreskin.”

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Roger was working hard at the measured tone of his voice, the vital nature of this trumped-up conversation being something which was stretching even his often-used skills of cunning.

“Its just that, well, lots of lads of your age develop problems down there as they grow and, well, I just didn’t want you to be suffering in silence.”

Ben was cringing inside and wanted to tell Roger to push off and mind his own business. That just didn’t work with Roger though; Ben knew that well from experience. He gritted his teeth, managed to throw back a smile of sorts and just said it was all fine.

“Are you sure?” came back Roger. “You really do seem to have more than is usual and I would have expected that you ...”

Ben was saved. His blessed his step brothers for once as they appeared through the kitchen door bang on cue. Roger was actually rather relieved too. He never broached the subject again. He knew that he didn’t have to. He had covered his tracks enough, should things ever get tricky.

Ben was actually rather impressed by the Burden Park Clinic - it was all so smart compared to his family doctors. He had been collected from reception by cheery young, black nurse with a cockney accent who seemed refreshingly at odds with the place’s staid ethos. He introduced himself as Mike, and he struck Ben at once as being genuinely friendly. As they chatted, they got on to the subject of Ben’s college plans. Discovering that Ben was going to Nottingham, Mike told him that was where his girlfriend lived and that he was going to enjoy life there as it was a great city with lots of night life.

Ben was pleased to have someone kindly looking after him but, even so, he wasn’t too keen on medical gown that Mike asked to change into. He hadn’t expected that, remembering his last medical where the school nurse had just opened his shirt to run a cursory stethoscope over his chest. He knew this check up was likely to be more involved than that, but he felt more than a bit vulnerable waiting in Dr Argent’s consulting room in a gown which was only just long enough to allow him, feeling a little vulnerable without his Calvin Klein’s, to keep himself covered up.

When he finally appeared, Dr Argent’s seemed pleasant enough, but his slightly forbidding bedside manner didn’t lead Ben to expect that the appointment would be exactly a barrel of laughs. He was pleased in a way, knowing that there probably wouldn’t be too much in the way of small talk to worry about.

Ben was surprised just how thorough the check up was, Dr Argent asking him a whole string of questions between the various tests as he worked his way down several pages on a clipboard. Ben had been there about 40 minutes and was thinking that he must be almost through by now when Argent asked him something that took him totally unawares: “Are you sexually active Ben?”

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Ben felt himself flush. He hadn't been expecting that. The memory of those two amazing minutes in Gemma Thompson's front garden flashed into his mind, his tongue down her throat and her hand down his trousers. Did that count? He just didn't know.

Dr Argent had, however, half expected Ben's discomfort at his question, remembering his step father's words about how shy and embarrassed the lad was. He moved quickly on after Ben's mumbled an inconclusive reply. He said he expected that they had covered sexual health in PHSE lessons at school, and that as he moved into adulthood and became sexually active he hoped he would remember all the advice about safe sex and how important it was to protect himself and his partners.

Ben enjoyed the practical part of this section of the examination even less than the preliminary questions. The doctor had asked him to open the gown. The school nurse hadn't done anything like this and he was amazed that even a thorough check up would venture into such personal territory. To Ben's mortification, Argent had thoroughly examined his testicles, saying how important it was to check regularly for any changes as testicular cancer was a big killer amongst young men. "Make an appointment with yourself to do a check every month – so many young men don't notice anything until it is hard to treat, and I don't want to see you back here as another avoidable statistic."

That wasn't all Ben had to go through before he could cover up again. Dr Argent seemed surprisingly interested in his foreskin. He didn't ask him anything about it, but he spent quite some time manipulating it, pulling it forward then right back onto Ben's shaft and even feeling his frenulum. This was so embarrassing, so embarrassing in fact that Ben didn't have any worries about getting the erection he would have sprung within seconds if he had been doing these things to himself.

During these unwelcome manipulations, Ben thought back to the one time ever his father had spoken to him about his foreskin. It was just a few weeks before he had gone to secondary school, and Richard had asked Ben if he had worked out how to pull it back. Ben, embarrassed to the core, had told him he had. He hoped that this was the right answer and that it wasn't going to get him into any trouble.

Just a couple of months before, Ben had made the awe-inspiring discovery that there was something inside the end of his willy. He had found that out by pure chance when he had idly tried holding the sides of his skin apart a little as he peed. It fascinated him. Bit by bit, getting a little more daring every day, he had risked opening the skin a little wider, eventually working a finger inside the long tube to feel what was in there. After a week he had discovered the slit where his wee came out and, by running a finger tip round inside it, that the trunk of skin didn't seem to be attached to whatever it was covering up, apart from one little place at the bottom where there seemed to be something in the way. Growing bolder, he had tried folding the skin back a bit more until he discovered that the whole thing would go back as a unit, revealing a purple coloured part of him that he hadn't known existed. He just couldn't resist doing this more and more, helped on by the fact it became easier to do it every time he tried. Although he couldn't

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stop himself, Ben was a bit scared that he was doing harm, in fact, he wasn't at all sure that he should be able to do this at all and as genuinely concerned that something was wrong with him. After a week or so Ben had taken to pulling back every time he could, enjoying the fascinating sight of the thing that always reminded him of a triceratops' head emerging from its fleshy covering. He had been a bit disappointed that the stringy bit underneath didn't seem to let him pull the skin covering all the way back to the base of his penis, but it amused him to hold it back as far as it would go and see how different he looked. Letting go again, he enjoyed seeing things return to normal as the skin rolled gradually forward under its own steam then, with an ever-fascinating acceleration, snapping back over the end of his glans to form its familiar elephant's trunk toy. In some ways it was like having a new toy, but Ben instinctively knew that there was something rather different about this new, secret plaything, something that meant it was best enjoyed in private and not talked about with anything else.

At first, Ben had wondered about asking his dad about his new discovery. Apart from anything else, he really needed to know if it was supposed to happen. He decided in the end that he just couldn't, afraid that he'd either be scolded, told to stop or, worse, rushed off to the doctor. Huge relief had come one afternoon in the school library. He was intently looking for a book on space travel when he had become aware of giggling on the other side of the book stack. Intrigued, he'd peered through a gap between the encyclopaedias and seen Ewan Lamb and Hayley Jennings on the other side. Ben was amazed to see that Ewan had his penis, much smaller than his own as Ben couldn't help noticing, hanging out of the fly of his shorts. Ewan was demonstrating to a fascinated Hayley how he could cover and uncover the end of his willy. Relief washed over Ben he wasn't a freak after all. In the conversation with his dad shortly after that, Richard told him that now he was growing up he would need to take special care and wash under his skin every day. Ben always had after that, pleased for the paternal confirmation that he was allowed, even encouraged, to uncover his newly-discovered glans.

Early in the appointment, Dr Argent had taken a blood sample from Ben. Roger had warned him that this might happen, knowing the kid wasn't too keen on needles, but Ben still hadn't been too happy to see a hypodermic in the man's hands. His heart sank when the doctor, finally abandoning Ben's genitals, came back with another. Ben wasn't too sure what this was all about, the doctor just saying that he'd give him his shot for "the procedure" now so that it could take effect while he finished off the physical. Ben wasn't exactly sure what a "procedure" was, but over his school career he had stoically endured tetanus and other boosters and guessed that the shot must be one of those. Whilst Ben held a piece of cotton wool over the sore puncture mark, Dr Argent gave him a sight test, pronounced that his glasses were still fine for him and then asked Ben to go and relax on the trolley in a small, rather more spartan annex just off the consulting room.

Ben had had enough by now and had been hoping that the sight test was the last thing on the afternoon's menu. It was a hot afternoon and he was suddenly feeling rather tired, so the prospect of lying down wasn't too disagreeable. Even so, his surroundings in the side room suggested that this next test, whatever it was, might just be something rather unpleasant.

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Ben was slightly surprised when Argent buzzed through to call in Mike, who greeted him anew with a big smile and a wink. Ben would have welcomed a bit more of his reassuring friendly chat at this stage, but found he just had to shut his eyes for a moment as his drowsiness increased. He could hear Mike nosily getting things out of drawers behind him and would have liked to turn round to see what was going on, had he not felt more than groggy. He could see Dr Argent rather ominously scrubbing his hands at a sink in the corner and, rather concerned, Ben wanted to ask what was going to happen. This test, whatever it was going to turn out to be, was beginning to alarm him. Despite that, the effort of trying to speak seemed just too much. Dr Argent and Mick came back to the couch as Ben's eyes closed again. Ben could feel Argent examining his foreskin again and Ben felt annoyed that he just couldn't seem to leave it alone. He felt him rolling back the skin again, stretching it as far back as it would go and then pulling it much further forward than Ben found comfortable. Just before he finally succumbed to sleep, Ben heard Mike and Dr Argent talking.

"There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with it to me" said Mike. "Seems a shame to take a nice one like that off."

"It's elective" replied the doctor, "He's is old enough to know what he wants."

Ben was still trying to make sense of that as he fell into a troubled dream about his dad showing Gemma Thompson his willy in the school library."

Roger was at the counter of the Burden Park coffee bar whilst Dr Argent was stretching Ben's foreskin out to an extent that would have really freaked its owner, had he been awake to see it. The distance it reached amazed Mike, who thought he had seen every shape and size of hood on the dozens of lads he had seen out cold on that same table. He was wondering how the doctor was going to know where best to make the cut when there was just so much skin there, and he truly hoped for the best on its owner's behalf.

By the time Roger was sitting down with the Daily Telegraph and sipping what he called a "lartay", Argent had a long handled clamp carefully in position on Ben's foreskin. Mike was squirming to see how much of the boy was on the wrong side of its jaws. Circumcised himself as a baby, he always been a little uncomfortable seeing other men being done. When they didn't have an obvious phimosis, he sometimes couldn't help wondering if they really understood what they were letting themselves in for. For him, foreskins were rather magical and mysterious things and, although he didn't really mind his status too much, he had always rather wished he could have had a chance to experience what it was like having skin. He always tried to imagine being able to slide something so moist and comforting over his glans. The special texture of the severed hoods that ended up in a metal dish after Dr Argent had finished his "procedures" was something Mike often couldn't resist savouring as he cleared away, sometimes even discretely sliding a finger inside their dead openings when they had come off in one piece. The idea of lads actually opting to lose their skins when there was no compelling reason

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always disturbed him somehow. He remembered well the teasing he had had to put up with as the only circumcised boy in his class at school and, since then, how his conquests had so often done a double take when they had first become intimate and had seen his bare headed penis for the first time. Still, like the doctor said, if that was what they wanted...

Dr Argent's feeling on circumcision, had he ever actually stopped to think about it, was much less ambiguous than Mike's. As a Muslim, it was just something that happened. He would not for a second have thought twice about wanting it for his sons. As a man, he found it hard to understand why some patients who had presented with phimosis or balanitis had even questioned the need for the removal of their foreskins, nor seen how the loss of such a small piece of skin could bother them as much as it sometimes did. As a doctor, it was just an easy and lucrative piece of minor day surgery and that was that.

As Roger started on an almond croissant, the doctor was closing the handles of the clamp, waiting to sense the familiar feeling of squishy resistance as metal touched metal through skin. By the time Roger was picking crumbs of his plate, the device had done its job and killed Ben's foreskin. The doctor reached for the scalpel that Mike proffered and ran it across the bottom edge of its jaws, leaving a thin red line in its transforming wake.

By the time Roger had discovered that he had two fives in one of the boxes in his soduko, Ben and his foreskin were no longer connected. It was lying, limp and greying on a metal dish, waiting for Mike to tip it into the yellow surgical waste box ready for the incinerator. Mike looked at it lying there, amazed at how much of it there was. "It's half the length of the lad's dick" he thought, "and that's saying something in his case!" He had been surprised how high the doctor had cut, knowing that he usually preferred to do low cuts with the scar line hidden neatly in the groove behind the head. When he had remarked on it, the doctor had said this was a special request. As Argent set to work snipping out the boy's thick frenum Mike started to clear up, surprised that the lad had known enough to express such an informed preference.

By the time the doctor was threading self dissolving sutures through the red raw edges of Ben's inner skin Roger was well into the easy clues of the crossword, impatient now for the call that the lad was in the recovery room. He looked at his watch, annoyed with Ben for causing all this hanging about. If Ben kept him waiting much longer, Roger thought, he was going to miss the start of that night's quarter finals from Wimbledon.

Bare Ben

Chapter Six

The third time he came to, Ben managed to stay awake. He lay dead still in his bed, the curtains closed against the strong evening sunlight, as he weighed up the increasingly urgent need to pee against the nausea that washed over him. As his head cleared, Ben became aware that his penis felt uncomfortable. He cursed the doctor for messing about with his foreskin so much – it had been obvious to Ben that the mauling Argent had given it was going to leave him sore, and he couldn't see what the need for it had been anyway. Ben pulled back the duvet to have a look. As he stretched up the waist band on his trunks a bolt of shock hit him hard in the base of his stomach. Most of his penis was covered in a tight gauze bandage. Worse still, there was a small patch where some blood had oozed through.

Fighting back the nausea, Ben sat up in bed, instantly wide awake. It was worse than he thought. That fool Argent must have prodded him around so much that he'd done some damage. Ben reached down and took his penis in his hand. It was sore, in fact very sore indeed, and he winced. Trying to calm himself, Ben turned on his bedside light and reached for his glasses to see the worst. The base of his shaft was uncovered, the bandage veiled the middle section and, rather surreally, just the end of his glans was sticking out of the other end. Ben felt carefully for the loose end of the gauze, needing to take it off to see what harm had been done. Argent must have been incredibly rough with it during that last test if he had drawn blood, thought Ben. He struggled to think what the test must have been for, and why he had needed to be knocked out for it. He made a tentative pull at the loose end of the bandage but the shock of pain that it caused made him realise it would be too incredibly painful to take it off. He couldn't understand why the bare bellend of his penis was showing like that – the doctor must have rolled his foreskin back and tucked it inside the bandage for some reason. It would never normally stay back by itself for more than a few seconds unless his had a very full erection, and that was one thing that he certainly didn't have at that moment. A new wave of nausea swept over him and he had to lie back on his bed. As he did so, he noticed the brown envelope on his bedside table. He vaguely remembered that Mike had put into his hand as he had unsteadily left the recovery room. He reached for it, slid his finger under the flap and took out a thin leaflet - "The Burden Park Clinic. Post Operative Care: Circumcision."

Ben struggled to get a grip on things. He just couldn't make any sense of what this was all about. He knew more or less what circumcision was – they had covered the topic briefly in a very giggly year 9 RE lesson on the rites of Judaism and Islam, but that was about it. He was a Catholic. None of that weird stuff was anything to do with him. He couldn't have been circumcised - it wasn't done to people like him.

In that RE class Ben had been horrified at the thought of anything so awful being inflicted on anyone. "No religion is worth that", he had thought. In the break after the lesson there had been a lot of chat about amongst his friends, everyone saying how glad they were it hadn't been done to them. To Ben, the Muslim idea of doing to boys at

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puberty had seemed down-right sick. At least if you were Jewish it was over with before you were old enough to know what was happening or, for that matter, before you had had a chance to know what you were going to miss for the rest of your life.

Ben knew a boy from Pakistan in one of the other classes in his year. Every time he saw him after that lesson it had made him feel strange just thinking of someone having taken a knife to his penis. It was even worse that their parents could have willingly let something so dreadful happen to him. He had wondered if he would ever get to see what the result looked like if they ever ended up in the same sports set. Other than one of the back view of a rabbi bending over a child with his family gathered round, the RE teacher had brought no pictures to that lesson, and Ben had found it hard to imagine what a penis with its foreskin cut off would look like. Ben had some awareness that some boys needed to be circumcised for medical reasons, but he had been heartily relieved that it was nothing he'd ever had to worry about.

Now, in the cool of his bedroom, Ben couldn't quite manage that same confidence that circumcision was nothing to do with him. It couldn't have been inflicted on him, could it? Why would anyone have done that? At that moment, Dr Argent's words as Ben had given in to sleep came back to him like a slap on the face:

“Its elective – he's old enough to know what he wants.”

There couldn't have been some terrible misunderstanding could there? With horrified realisation, Argent's in-depth examination of Ben's foreskin, the mysterious second needle and the gauze around his sore cock just make some sickening sort of sense to him. That idiot doctor couldn't have got his notes mixed up with some Muslim kid's, could he?

“Shit”, said Ben aloud. “Shit, shit shit.”

As Ben was struggling to come to terms with things, Roger's son Matthew was downstairs and eavesdropping as his father spoke quietly on the phone to Carol.

“Yes, it all went fine” Matthew heard him say. “Yes, I was right. The doctor thought that it was best to take it all off to be on the safe side... Yes, he was fine about it..... Yes, he seems ok to me. He's resting – getting over the jab I reckon. ...Yes, I'll check on him. By the way, I really wouldn't mention anything about it to him when you get back. I think he'd rather just keep quiet about it. Understandable really, lad of his age. He'll talk if he wants to. By the way, will you wait on the road outside arrivals halls as usual?” Matthew knew there would be nothing more of interest to hear and made sure he was innocently back in front of the television well before his father had hung up.

Carol was a bit concerned about Ben when she arrived back from Spain. He seemed quiet and rather introspective, whereas she had thought he would be on a high because of his birthday the next day. She just put his strange mood down to the stress of

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his A levels and too many late nights spent revising. It genuinely never occurred to her that his unusual mood was anything to do with his circumcision.

Had she had ever thought about it, and she hadn't, Carol would have viewed a circumcision as being on a par with having a tooth out. It was a bit uncomfortable while it was being done, left you a bit sore for a while but you were glad you'd had it fixed, and you got used to the feeling of something being missing after a day or two. It would never have occurred to her that it could be something life changing for a man, and she would have been genuinely astonished to find just how much it had affected her son.

Ben's birthday had taken on a new and depressing significance for him. He had read the leaflet from the clinic so many times that he knew its shocking contents almost by heart, and realised with a feeling of foreboding that the day when it said he needed to soak off the bandage in a hot bath was going to be his 18th birthday. This wasn't the sort of unwrapping he had been looking forward to on that day at all. He didn't know which was worse though, the thought of seeing the awful truth under the bandage, or not knowing. He had to do it anyway, he knew that. He managed to get through the traditional birthday treat of a full fry-up breakfast with a semblance of light-heartedness but, as soon as he decently could, Ben locked himself in the bathroom and turned the taps on full.

He had reached a kind of state of emotional detachment when he lowered himself into the tepid water. He went through the motions of washing, knowing full well that this was the last reason for this particular soak. The sensation of the water on his penis was both unfamiliar, slightly uncomfortable and more than a little disconcerting. After a few minutes Ben noticed that the end of the gauze was starting to come adrift, and the urge to rip it off almost overwhelmed him for a second before he convinced himself that that was not going to be a good idea. The waiting was becoming agony when finally Ben risked a gentle tug at the softening wrapping. Finally, it started to unwind itself slowly in the water.

Ben had had no real idea what he was going to look like underneath the dressing. He had imagined every possibility several times over, so reality was neither better nor worse than he had feared. He hadn't expected the bruising though. The puffy, inflamed skin appalled him even though he could see through his panic that it wasn't going to be like that for ever. The obvious permanent damage that had been done to his penis really horrified him though. Every scrap of his foreskin was gone. In one way it did still look a little like his penis, but in another it was as if someone else's had been grafted onto his crotch. The familiar triceratops head was just there, just more baldly exposed than ever before. In its new context, his glans looked so different from when Ben had enjoyed exposing it by gradually by rolling back his skin during one of his long, luxurious wanks. Now there was nothing at all anywhere near the deep ridge of his helmet to soften its new, harsh and, it struck Ben, almost immodest outline.

The damage higher up his shaft looked no less horrific. The line the scalpel had taken was a red raw ridge right across his shaft. That was to be expected of course, but what Ben just couldn't fathom was why the skin beneath the scar like looked so different

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than it had before. The texture was altered somehow, but that was nothing compared to the fact that it seemed to have changed colour. It now seemed to be much lighter, a totally different tone than the skin higher up. Had there been anyone there to tell him, Ben probably wouldn't have believed them when they said that what covered shaft of his penis above the head and below the scar line used to be on the inside of his foreskin.

Back in his room, Ben found it so hard to analyse his feelings that he soon stopped trying. Anger, embarrassment, disbelief – they were all in there somewhere. Shame though - that was the hardest to understand. Why did he feel ashamed that such a thing could have been done to him? It hadn't been his fault. Was he going to have to feel like this for the rest of his life? Would he have to be ashamed that a part of him, a part of which he had always been rather proud, was now something so awful that it would have to be kept hidden away at all costs? Was he ashamed that he had let it happen, even though he had had no inkling that it was going to be done to him? Could he have stopped it somehow? That was hard to accept – he really had had no idea it was coming? Or was he ashamed that part of his body was so faulty that it had needed a doctor's knife to put things right? Ben thought he knew that that wasn't the case, or did he? He had no real way of being sure what a normal, healthy foreskin should be like, but he had never had cause to think there was anything wrong with his. Which ever way Ben came at the situation, there was just no answer.

Bare Ben

Chapter Seven

For the first few days, every step was agony. Any careless movement jolted the scar, but the torment of the ceaseless and unwelcome stimulation of his glans as it rubbed on his clothes was almost worse. Whenever he could, Ben had his hand in his trouser pocket to keep the material well away from his newly exposed head. At home, he could at least wear a loose tracksuit, but at school it was torture as his black uniform trousers were getting a bit tight for him. Ben knew it would seem ridiculous to buy a new pair for just a few more days school, and the embarrassment of having to explain such a seemingly reckless new purchase to his mother ruled it out completely. At nights, the torment of the bedclothes resting on his penis agonised him. Desperate for sleep, he soon resorted to propping up the sheets with a cd rack on one side of him and his French horn case on the other.

At school, Ben took great care to ensure that he was alone when he went to the toilet. He had never before felt the least bit shy about urinating in public, savouring the sensation of letting his long penis flop out of his fly and not caring much who saw. Now though, he took to using a cubicle as the barrier-free urinals offered no protection from prying eyes. He was relieved that he had so few days of school left as there was a good chance he could make it through to the end of term without anyone finding out his dreadful secret. The rest of his life was a different matter – he would have to face that in due course, but for now he could at least try to avoid the shame of any of his schoolmates seeing the awful thing that had been done to him.

In retrospect, Ben realised that the distraction of his exams had been a good thing in saving him from the depression that overcame him whenever he let himself dwell on his recent modification. At the time though, the stress of A levels seemed as nothing compared to the horror of living the rest of his life as a circumcised man. Luckily, Ben was both bright and well prepared for his exams and there were few nasty surprises in his first block of papers. After two weeks of moving cautiously to avoid the pain of his circumcision rubbing on his trousers plus a week sitting at a cramped desk in the exam room, Ben's body was aching for exercise. He had a couple of free days and a whole weekend before his last papers and, although going for a jog was still out of the question in even the tightest of pants, the thought of going for a swim was becoming tempting. He was hesitant, as the thought of anyone seeing him appalled him, but the more he thought about it the pool seemed a fairly safe option. Ben was longing to feel the sensation of his limbs stretching out in the water and, after thinking it through carefully, he reckoned that if he went midweek and in the quiet time between school parties leaving and the lunchtime rush of business men arriving, there was very little likelihood of anyone much being around.

Ben knew that throwing a leg over his bike and sitting on the small, racing saddle wasn't going to be wise, so it was a long, hot walk to the pool. Unusually for him, he chose to change in a cubicle rather than in the open area. Although he wouldn't have

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admitted it even to himself, he had always rather enjoyed the freedom of being naked in public as, although he was a quiet lad, this was one area where he really was his father's son. He took care not to look at his penis as he pulled down his pants. If he had done so, he would have seen one which still looked very raw and, to anyone who knew the signs, obviously freshly cut; the bloated flesh around the scar line was still bruised, the suture marks still obvious.

Ben realised his first mistake when he came to pull on his Speedos. With all the events of the last couple of weeks, he had forgotten that they were getting a bit small for him too and that he had meant to buy a new pair before his next swimming trip. Very cautiously, he managed to ease them up over his genitals. Carefully arranging his battered penis inside them, he was glad that the uncomfortable tightness of the material would at least offer some support and stop his manhood moving around painfully as he swam. Ben was relieved that he had been right about the locker room being empty. Stowing his rucksack in the locker he cursed when, as usual, he realised that he had forgotten to take a 20p piece out of his track suit before folding it carefully away.

Ben's second mistake was not being prepared for the big, full-length mirror by the showers. As he sluiced down before heading for the pool, he caught sight of himself and had one of the punch-in-the-stomach moments that had happened so often since his circumcision. His Speedos were verging on indecent tightness; the eyes of anyone appreciating this fit, good-looking young man would instinctively be drawn down to them to see if his contour there was as pleasing as the rest of him. What shocked Ben was the bald, bare outline of the head of his penis that showed so obviously through the taut material. He stood transfixed for a moment, adjusting to the fact that it would be clear to anyone who cared to look that there was no foreskin covering the large glans that lay inside. He had occasionally seen other men with the same sort of shape in their trunks, but it was only now that he realised what it was he had been seeing. The sharp ridge of his newly bared glans was so obvious; the whole shape of the head brazenly on show, as if he was setting out to show the world that his penis was denuded.

Ben's first instinct after the panic had subsided was to get dressed again and head for home. The thought of having to go past the girl on the front desk again so soon embarrassed him though and, with a heavy heart, Ben went back to his locker and retrieved his towel. His plan was to carry it as casually as he could in front of him to the side of the pool, from where he could make a quick dash for the safe covering of the water.

As he dived in, the familiar shock of the cold water hit him. What was new was the sting of the chlorine on the still-raw wound on his penis. As he set out instinctively into his strong front crawl, he was all too aware of the new sensation of the water flowing over part of him which had, on every other time he had been swimming, been modestly veiled in its protective bag of skin. Ben usually alternated lengths of front crawl with back stroke, but he knew that until he got some new trunks (and he was sure that, for the first time, he was going to have to buy the sort of baggy Bermuda shorts he hated) that nothing

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would compel him to swim on his back. The risk of anyone seeing the obscene outline of his crotch was one he was just not going to take.

After thirty minutes of hard swimming, Ben felt his limbs regaining some of their usual suppleness. He was reluctant to leave the water, but had begun to think about revising for his next physics paper and the fact that it was getting dangerously near close lunchtime - he needed to be on his way before the rush of health-conscious business men arrived for their work out in the gym beside the pool as he certainly didn't want anyone seeing his penis. He found it hard to imagine letting anyone look at it ever again but it certainly wasn't fit to be seen in its current state. Ben hung around near the steps out of the pool, eyeing the safety blanket of his towel on the bench by the side. He timed his departure with careful precision, the other swimmers at the far end of the pool and the lifeguard distracted filling in something on a clipboard.

This time, Ben made himself avoid looking in the mirror as he went past. His plan had been just to get dressed, go home and shower there but it was so totally deserted in the changing room that he reconsidered. If he was very quick, laying everything out ready, he could be in and out of the shower in seconds and then be ready for revision as soon as he got home.

Having a shower had felt different since Ben had been circumcised. From being comfortable being nude in public, now even being naked alone troubled him. Even the sensation of the hot water flowing over his bare glans was new and disquieting. Before, Ben had had to roll back his long hood so he could carefully soap underneath it in the way his father had taught him. It had been no chore to soap his glans; the pleasant slippery feeling had always given him the beginnings of an erection, and then letting go of the roll of bunched-up overhang and see it sedately slide back to its default setting of its own accord was always strangely satisfying. It was all so different now. Ben just didn't have to give his penis any special attention anymore. It was a much less complicated piece of equipment in its new form, and reaching down and feeling its bare, blunt end in his hand was something he took care to avoid. Under the powerful showers at the leisure centre, Ben was struck by the fact that the arc of water made a different shape as it ran off his starkly re-modelled penis. Lulled slightly by the water which was always so much warmer and more plentiful than their rather miserable shower at home, Ben's mind wandered a little as he pondered this. With his impending physics exam in his mind, he was vaguely wondering about the scientific explanation for the different course of the water when the sound of the door from the gym area banging and the loud voices that followed panicked him back to reality. He was suddenly aware again of how unaccustomedly vulnerable he felt, standing there more naked than he had ever been in public before, his most intimate part so obviously stripped of any covering. In a second, he realised that things couldn't be much worse - it would have been bad enough if it had been a stranger coming in, but it wasn't. Two young men were right there in front of him, sweaty in shorts and vests after a work-out in the gym. Ben struggled to control his panic. With shock, he had realised that they were two boys from his year at school, George Carter and David Evans.

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Unable to ignore them, Ben was surprised how casual he managed to sound as he said hello. He had never felt any discomfort at being naked in front of his peers before - he had never had reason to feel awkward about that state, quite the opposite in fact. It was awful now to feel such shame. Ben managed to say something inane about how the exams would soon be over. He cursed that he had placed his glasses safely on top of his locker as he struggled to see where they were looking, and to read the expressions on their faces to judge if they had noticed what he dreaded them noticing. With adrenaline rushing, Ben grabbed for the protective shield of his towel.

Bare Ben

Chapter Eight

Ben had to make a super-human effort to concentrate on his revision that afternoon. His mind kept going back to the changing room, searching for any sign in George and David's comments or demeanour that would tell him if they had noticed. Ben knew them quite well, and he drew comfort from the fact that they weren't the sort that would hold back from passing personal remarks, however sensitive the issue. He was sure they would have said something either mocking, enquiring or perhaps even sympathetic, if they had noticed his penis and, overall, he was relieved to think that he had got away with it.

Ben had thought long and hard about tackling Roger about his circumcision. Part of him needed so badly to know why it had been done. He remembered agreeing with Roger that Dr Argent should just go ahead and do what was needed if anything showed up in his medical, but Ben was sure that there hadn't been anything wrong with his penis. He thought of his father, and how his penis looked pretty much like his own. Richard certainly had a lot of foreskin, but it didn't seem to cause him any problems. Ben had seen other lads at school who had almost as much overhang as he did, and none of those had ever come into school as drastically changed as he had been. Asking Roger seemed to be the only way he would get the whole story, but that was assuming that Roger even knew why himself. Indeed, did Roger even know that he had been circumcised? He hadn't mentioned anything overtly, and Ben went over the things that his stepfather had said to him after the event and there was nothing he could pin down that conclusively showed that he knew. Even so, there was something intangibly different in the way that Roger had treated him since it had happened. As well as that, Roger had made no comment on the occasions early on when Ben had obviously winced when his scar caught him, and some instinct told Ben that he must know. Another powerful instinct told him just not to ask him anything. Whatever that instinct was, it involved more than just the squirm-making embarrassment of broaching a subject like that with his stepfather.

After events at the pool, Ben knew that the following Saturday was going to be an even more difficult than he had thought. Ben was down to play his last cricket match for the school side and his obvious concern was that he might well turn up to find out that he had been wrong, and that George and David had noticed his circumcision after all. If they had then, knowing them as he did, then Ben realised that it was more than likely that word of his circumcision had already spread like wildfire round the school. At first, he thought about making some excuse and getting out of the match altogether, but the idea of being on the team one last time meant a lot to him and he hated the idea of missing it the last fixture. Sidestepping the changing room and the showers was going to be an issue, but there had to be a way round it. The idea of his whole school cricketing career being tainted by a last match where he was taunted for something so embarrassing and beyond his control was ghastly. Luckily, it was a home match and that at least gave him a fighting chance of getting through it.

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As it was to be most of the team's last match, they had long ago planned a celebration for afterwards. Ben realised that he would probably have to forgo that now. He couldn't bring himself to head into town for the planned pizza in his cricket gear, and getting changed without showering would be bound to attract ribald comment from his mates. He planned an excuse to duck out of the trip so he could make a dash for home straight after the match. Wearing his whites on the bus to the playing field made Ben feel very conspicuous but, as he rationalised to himself, not nearly as conspicuous as he would have felt standing in the showers without a foreskin.

To his great relief, no one said anything unwelcome when Ben arrived at the pavilion. He did his best to enter into the slightly poignant end-of-an-era banter and managed to slip away into the toilets to ease his box over his genitals before the match started. Wearing that on the bus would have felt just too weird, even though no one apart from Ben would have known. Careful though he was, he winced as the plastic edge of his box snagged the still-raw scar line when he tucked it inside his pants. That, though, was nothing though compared to the unpredicted discomfort of the match itself. Ben was in agony every time he ran to field the ball. His penis slapped around inside the box and grated every time it hit the sides, rendering him almost useless as a team member for this significant match. At half time, he sneaked into the toilets and padded out his box, wrapping wads of toilet paper round his penis to try at least to stop it moving around so much. Was there was nothing, thought Ben angrily, that being circumcised wouldn't spoil?

Three days later, and it was the day of the last exams. Many of Ben's year had already finished, and the rest of them just had Physics 3 or Biology 2 to get through before it was finally all over. Ben's policy was normally to stay in the exam room to the last minute, un-embarrassed to remain checking through his answers even after most of the other candidates had handed in their papers and headed off into the sunshine. His resolve weakened in this, his last paper. He was fed up with exams and felt confident that he had given his best answers in a paper that had let him play pleasingly to all his strong points. More than that though, he had unwisely come to school wearing the boxer shorts he much preferred to the old-fashioned slips that his circumcision had necessitated. He had forgotten for once to check his underwear draw the night before and, slightly late in getting up, he had found that boxers were all that was left. Within minutes of leaving home, they had started to chafe on his shaft. In the exam room, they had settled uncomfortably and clung round his circumcision scar. However much he squirmed round in his desk, Ben couldn't get comfortable and, with clammy morning heat adding to the discomfort, he had been one of the first to get up and leave. With the exultation of freedom finally washing over him, Ben set out across the deserted mid-afternoon playground to the sixth form common room and, sticking his hand in his pocket, he savoured the relief of stretching the material of his boxers away from his scar.

Realising that this would be one of the last times he could do it, Ben let the door of the sixth form kitchen bang with its ever-satisfying crash. He stood on the stool that was, unless any member of staff was hovering, left permanently in place and climbed out of the window and into "cough corner". The name had been coined years ago for this

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small area of flat roof over the class room below that was totally shielded from view from anywhere else in the school and, therefore, the only place where a crafty, unobserved smoke was possible. Ben hated cigarettes, but he loved sitting out there as it was always a suntrap in the afternoons. The view out over the nearby countryside had always pleased him too, and he looked at it through the fresh eyes of someone who knew that this would perhaps be the last time he would take it in. Relaxing in the sun, Ben felt a sense of well-being that he hadn't felt since he had had a foreskin.

After a few minutes of solitude, Ben was vaguely aware of hearing the kitchen door bang and hearing voices of unseen newcomers in the room a few feet below him. Chris Newsome, Ed Parker, Nathan Reed and Gemma Thompson - he recognised their voices as they discussed the paper they had all just left and celebrated the fact that it was all over now.

“You coming out tonight, Gemma?” said Chris. “A few of us are going up the King's Head to celebrate with a few bebies.”

Since they had all turned 18, Ben's cohort had had a wider range of place to go for a night out other than Pizza Hut and Burger King. He had been looking forward to the still-new pleasure of a pint or two with his mates in their favoured pub in the high street.

“Dunno”, Ben heard Gemma reply. “Depends who's coming.”

“George, Emma, Will, and Ben” replied Nathan.

“Which Ben is that?” asked Gemma. “Fat Ben or Bare Ben?”

“Bare Ben” said Nathan, without hesitation.

There was no comment or follow-up question. It was obvious that they were all used to the new nickname, and that they knew exactly to whom it applied. They moved on to discuss when they were going to meet, but Ben had stopped listening.

“Shit”, thought Ben, burying his head in his hands as despair washed over him. “Shit, shit, shit”.

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Had, by some strange means, Ben been able to know what Gemma Thompson was thinking that night as she sat at the bar in the King's Head sucking at her fifth Bacardi Breezer through a straw, it is hard to know what he might have felt. With no little trepidation, Ben had made himself face them all that evening and, to his great relief, nobody had made any unwelcome comment. Gemma had been eyeing Ben ever more closely as each drink went down, rather regretting that he was wearing a track suit bottom instead of the usual rather un-fashionably snug jeans that she always enjoyed seeing on

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him at non-school gatherings. Always a slyly observant young woman, Gemma had noticed how Ben was taking care to time his visits to the gents just the other boys in the group had emerged from theirs. Twirling the cheap wooden umbrella from her glass in her fingers, she looked for signs of bulk in his trackies, remembering so clearly the feeling of his fascinatingly sizeable penis in her hand when she had finally managed to coax him outside on the night of her party. Excited to feel him stiffen so quickly as she pressed against him, she had needed to be unusually persistent before he finally allowed her to get her hand inside his trousers. Remembering the experience of his thickness made her cross her legs tightly as she fantasised with pleasure over her plans for later that night - getting Ben alone in the pub car park and doing the same again.

She found it hard to imagine what his penis would be like now. She had experienced rather a strange new feeling when she had heard from George Carter and David Evans that the end of Ben's penis no longer had its covering of skin. Gemma had never seen a circumcised penis, let alone held one. The thought of what one might feel like in her hand excited her, and the idea of something so stark, brazen and instantly available to her touch was one she found truly erotic. She hadn't managed to work Ben's foreskin back before as there was just too much of it to manipulate in the confines of his trousers, but she loved the thought of it not being there and she wondered what had prompted him to have it removed. Reaching in and getting her hand straight round that big helmet and feeling its shape un-disguised in her hand made her moist. Rolling the neck of her empty Bacardi bottle in her hand, she wondered idly about the other things she would like to do with it too.

It may or may not have been a shame that Gemma's sixth Bacardi was one too many. If she hadn't stumbled when she tried to get off her stool and promptly been sick over Nathan's new trainers then she wouldn't have had to go home and Ben might have been very distressed and confused when she made her move on him. On the other hand, he might just have felt something other than the anger, shame and frustration as he lay on his bed that night and once again wondered if he dared try and masturbate, not that he was even sure if masturbation was even an option that was still available to a man who had no foreskin.

As Ben lay on his bed, it may or may not have been a shame too that he was equally unaware of what was going on in a bedroom in the next road where David Evans was standing naked in front of the mirror on his wardrobe door. With a little difficulty, he had rolled his rather tight foreskin as far back along his shaft as his slightly short frenulum would allow. After looking at his reflection from every angle and without allowing his head to cover over again, he began to stroke his bared glans as he savoured the image of Ben standing under the shower at the swimming pool that was so clearly fixed in his mind's eye. He vowed again to himself for the fifth night running that the next day would be the one when he finally plucked up courage to ask Ben what it was like to be circumcised and, more importantly, to find out how he had managed to arrange to get his foreskin removed so he could ask for the same himself.