



A MOTHER'S ORDEAL WITH HOMOSEXUALITY

ANONYMOUS

Editor's Note: This sensitive, agonizing story will arouse the sympathy of parents anywhere who have ever feared that their son—or daughter—might fall into the hands of a sex pervert, and wondered what they could do about it. It was this mother's courage which brought about the arrest of her son's molester—in this case, a homosexual.

■ FOR TWO YEARS I have lived with suspicion. Suspicion against one of the closest friends we have ever had. Could it be true that he was a homosexual, and involved with my child? Or was I only a

neurotic woman nursing warped, unwholesome thoughts?

Even to myself, most of the time, the latter appeared far more logical. And so I have lived not only with suspicion but also with a deep sense of guilt.

The charge of homosexuality against someone—anyone—is not a light one. It requires proof, the strictest proof there is; getting it is not an easy matter.

A month ago I got my proof.

Looking back now I ask myself what it was that made me wonder—when first did suspicion start? Surely not with any sudden, sharp

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conviction. It must have evolved like the amphibian, from tadpole to frog, for in the beginning it was not suspicion at all.

WE FIRST MET Austin Glenn five years ago, when we bought a small acreage beside his chicken ranch. He was a handsome man, a bachelor—tall, blonde, with a perfect set of teeth and a fine open countenance. There was nothing feminine there, although it was true he appeared to lack most of the petty male vices. He did not smoke, drink or swear. I never heard him tell an off-color story. And yet he was not a boring objectionist about those who did. There was something about him—poise, dignity—that demanded respect. When he smiled people were drawn. Casual acquaintances, neighbors, egg customers, rich men, poor men, my children, my husband Jack, myself.

There was of course that element of romance, that intriguing speck of mystery—*this* man—not married? But why? I learned of his past from his sister: the girl he once loved had been killed in an accident. But there were others—and two weeks before he was sent overseas with the Air Force he married one of them. Two years in England and all the while he wrote his bride and sent lovely gifts. And then the day he returned it all ended. "Ellen couldn't see why, and neither could any of us," Austin's sister told me. Puzzling? At the time, yes. We shrugged it off—a fascinating bit to add to that mysterious something. . . .

The sister's family who had stayed with Austin moved away and he was left alone. The house re-

²mained neat, the flowers and lawn thrived, while match-making friends plotted in vain.

With satisfaction we watched the chicken ranch change into a neat money-making venture. My carpenter husband was enlisted for building improvements, while our oldest son, John, was earning spending money by carrying feed and gathering eggs. Everybody marveled at the systematic endeavor, the endless efficiency that tackled so hard a job, showing profit while neighboring poultry farmers wore long faces and drove "For Sale" signs into their front lawns.

Austin's ranch was a haven for farm-hungry children. "He's a family man. It's a shame. He should have a dozen kids of his own," I'd say to Jack, as I compared our own irritated scoldings and impatience with Austin's serenity. He was never too tired to laugh, to talk and explain, or just to *listen*. Our two younger boys were six and five, and John was a manly twelve. But still too young, I felt, to work all the time. So my child stayed home, unhappily, and Austin looked the neighborhood over and chose Dick Patterson, a boy two years older.

In spite of my refusal to let John work, our friendship for Austin went on. Birthdays, picnics, movies, Christmas parties—all special occasions at our house seemed naturally to include Austin.

And in time, I discovered a bitterness in him. Against marriage; against women; against the church. An undercurrent coursing its silent unobtrusive way; an undercurrent that a casual acquaintance might remain unaware of. Outwardly he seemed happy. In fact he took un-

usual pleasure from simple things—food, scenery, conversation. A former school teacher, he had a quick, intricate mind, a fine interest in all subjects. Though nearing 40, his family ties were strong, so that when his father became ill he readily sold the chicken ranch to go back home, a distance of 600 miles. He lived on a farm adjoining that of his parents and wrote us that spring. "I need John," his letter said, "will you let him come to help me this summer?"

John was 14 by then, and a summer on a real farm would be fine for him, I convinced myself. My husband laughed at my momentary hesitation. "He's 14; in four years he'll be draft age, you know." So, with something inside me foolish and motherly saying No, I said Yes and let him go.

John didn't write us at all that summer. I thought it strange; yet perhaps boys on farms have better things to do than write letters.

Austin brought him home the Friday before school started. He had grown inches and sun and work had given him new color and a splendid set of muscles. I looked at him and felt proud, and proud of myself for letting him go. It's been good for him, I thought.

And yet—the realization came slowly—he was different. Those first two years in Junior High had been such fun . . . school dances . . . parties. . . . Girls, all girls—lightly and naturally, and all for fun. But now that was changed. Student activity tickets lay unused in his room. He seemed listless, enthusiasm had died young and I couldn't see why. For his summer's work he had a wrist watch, a fishing

pole and \$100 in the bank. But even the \$100 failed to elicit interest.

His voice was changing. He's growing up, I assured myself, and remembered how painful the old process had been for me. Perhaps for boys, I told myself, it is even more so. Don't pry. Don't ask questions or intrude. Privacy is a precious thing to a teenager.

When Austin moved back, John seemed just as indifferent to him as he was to the rest of his world. Austin bought a house in the mountains and worked in a grocery store in town. There were no chickens to feed now—no hundreds of eggs to gather and grade. But still he wanted John. John, or other boys John's age, I noticed. Lonesome? I wasn't sure. I talked to Jack and he was shocked. "Austin? Eve, you're crazy!"

Yes, of course; it couldn't be. I put the worries from my mind.

Austin sold his house, making a profit of \$2,000. Other people need real estate agents to sell property, but not Austin. His old Midas touch was still at work, I thought with a smile. Then he bought another mountain acreage. Jack built the new house and John helped, sometimes staying overnight. "Why can't he come home?" I asked Jack. "You go back every morning."

"Oh, they were cleaning up around," the answer came, or, "There was some painting they could start."

We now lived in town, where I was working part-time. As receptionist in a hospital, I ran the switchboard and admitted evening patients. I talked to people, all sorts of people: the sick, the doomed, the discouraged, the in-

spiring. I studied them all for clues.

At last Austin's new house was finished. Chips and scraps of lumber littered the yard.

"Can John go home with me tonight and clean the yard?"

I looked deep into Austin's eyes. No, it couldn't be true. . . .

"Of course," I said.

But now it was John who rebelled. He refused to go. Gone, for a moment, was his usual indifference—that strange, hard-to-explain indifference, considering how good Austin had been to him.

"Let me go, Mother." This was Mark, our nine-year-old. "I can pick up chips."

"All right," I said.

I was washing the breakfast dishes next morning when Mark ran into the kitchen and waved two dollar bills in my face, innocently proud.

"Why, you couldn't earn that much just overnight."

"Oh, he pays us to sleep with him." The innocent, proud smile was still there.

My heart skipped a beat and froze over. Don't be shocked, I told myself. Handle this thing with just the right words. Be natural.

I forced a smile. We talked of other things, the work he'd done, what the money could buy. Already this child was money-wise. Unlike John, this one would never put these two dollars into his pocket and forget they were there. "Say, what did you mean—he pays you 'to sleep with you?'" I had put real effort into the question. It sounded natural enough, almost matter-of-fact. I congratulated myself.

"Oh, just for the time we're there sleeping." A logical answer. Yes, it

was free-flowing, unhesitant, the spontaneous answer I wanted. My child was all right, but now I knew the situation was not.

When I told Jack, he looked at me scornfully. I looked back with defiance. It had become an issue between us, and inside me, my black obsession mushroomed.

I told my doctor. "Probably nothing's happened," he said. "But it isn't a natural situation."

"I'm going to ask John outright. I think he will tell me."

"I wouldn't do that, Eve."

"Why?"

"Because if there *is* something to it, it will only impress it on his mind, give it added importance. And if there's nothing to it, it will be a terrible experience for both of you."

"I don't know. . . ." I hesitated.

"Just keep the children home," he advised.

Then about a month later, a telephone call one night.

"Eve, this is Austin, and this will slay you"—a laugh. "I was stretching rubber bands over celery at the store and injured something in my right hand. I have it in a cast and I'm helpless. I need John. Why, I can't even button my shirt or tie my shoes. I'll come in to get him if you'll let him come and help."

A moment of silence. "You can drive?" I asked.

"Oh, yes."

I groped for words to say No politely. I stalled. And at last I had the answer. "Come on in and stay with us, Austin. We have plenty of room. I'll tie your shoes."

A long conversation. Twenty minutes of good logical reasons why my plan was not a sound one. But

I was adamant. At last he hung up. I was shaking.

Three weeks later he called the house. It was after five. I answered the phone. Surprised, he said, "Not working tonight?"

"No, I have a night off."

"Good. I've been wanting to talk to you." A moment's hesitation, and then the bombshell, "Eve, what is the matter?"

Silence. I couldn't answer.

"This hurts me. It really does. I feel terrible about it—why, you and Jack have been the best friends I ever had."

I swallowed, said nothing.

His voice went on, sounding hurt and bewildered. "Eve, you surely know I wouldn't do anything to hurt John. I think so much of him. Why, I couldn't think more of him if he were my own son."

Sudden, welcome relief swept over me. Joyously, I knew—I *had been wrong*. Homosexuals do not ask what is wrong or beg for explanations. They know, and slink off to nurse their wounded pride and watch. Always to watch.

I was as truthful as possible. "Oh, Austin, I just didn't think it was a healthy situation."

"But why?"

"I'm not accusing you of anything. It's just that I resent your attitude about some things, I guess."

"What things?"

"Oh—marriage, women."

A surprised exclamation from the other end of the wire. "Eve, I've never said a word."

"You don't have to say anything, Austin. You're living it."

I could smell potatoes burning. "Look, why don't you come in

some day and we'll talk about it?"

"All right. I'll do that."

I hung up smiling. He would come in—I could tell him. Already I could feel the cloud lifting.

Days and weeks went by, then months. He didn't come. Jack let John go out to stay another night. Suspicion stirred again. I brooded.

I called Janet Patterson, Dick's mother. Dick was 18 by now, four years since he'd started working at the ranch. "I'd like to talk to you," I told her. "Stop in one of these days when you come to town."

She came by casually.

"Janet, this is not a very nice consideration, but—well, have you ever wondered about Austin Glenn? I mean—if he could be anything but a normal man?"

Janet looked slightly startled then shook her head.

"No, I've never suspected anything like that. Of course Dick doesn't see him any more, but I've never thought too much about that."

We dropped the subject then, talked of other things.

The next morning the phone rang—it was Janet; she was upset

It was true!

She had questioned Dick and he had told her. Twice, Austin had approached him and he knew of several other boys.

I talked to John. Yes, once Austin *had* acted suspiciously.

"What did he do?"

"He started talking funny—you know, about things like that. I told him to cut it out."

"So?"

"So he said, 'All right. We'll never mention it again.'" The next

day another phone call. It was Janet Patterson again. She sounded distraught this time.

"Eve," she said, "I'm not sure how far this thing has gone. The more Dick tells me, the worse it sounds." He had told her about a trip with Austin and the reason he had come home before it was over.

"Mother, I fought him one whole night, and finally got away. I stayed at a neighbor's house from then on. Austin was mad—that's why he wouldn't bring me home."

Why had my son escaped? Had I been too quick a believer?

I talked with John again, and little by little the sordid details seeped through. It was not easy. The telling or the listening—which is hardest I can't say.

"All that summer, Mother, he promised I could come home a week early. But when the time came, he said, 'All right. But if you go now, you'll only get half your wages.'"

Janet had already talked to Mr. Kendrick, the sheriff. Would she be willing for her son to testify? Yes, she would. Would others help? Janet was unsure.

"You know, Mrs. Patterson, this is our biggest headache. There are 18 of these known offenders right here in town, and the only place they'll ever look good to me is behind bars. But no matter how much we know, our hands are tied. We need cooperation from those involved—people like yourself. I get pretty discouraged when I hear the law criticized for laxity. Whose law? Whose complaints?"

We were advised to contact the other boys and their parents, to get as many behind us as possible. Our

goal was to confront Austin with such overwhelming evidence that he would confess quietly. In that case it could all be settled quickly without a jury trial, and the boys' names would be protected.

We had proof of nine boys being involved, yet finding others who would testify was discouraging work. One mother refused to believe. "Why, Austin's the nicest man I know," she insisted. Another mother, like me, had suspected but had been over-ruled by a disbelieving husband.

At last we gathered for our appointment with the district attorney. Five tall scrubbed kids and four sets of parents. We were ushered into rooms, the boys to one, the parents to another. Mr. Kendrick, the sheriff, was a small man, soft-spoken, with a nice approach which put everyone at ease. He introduced us to the lawyer, the assistant district attorney, who sat down at the desk, laced his fingers together and started talking in circles. From a maze of tangled words I heard, "...and of course you know that legally and technically you have no charge against this man."

I gasped. "What do you mean—*no charge?*"

"Why, these boys are 16."

"But my son was 14 when most of this happened to him."

"Well, it's pretty hard to press a two-year-old charge."

My heart sank. I could see it all slipping away—ending in failure.

"We want that man brought in, and we're going to stay right here until he is." This was Dick's father.

"Well, it may be a long wait."

We looked at each other, shocked and angry. "Does he think that just

because these kids are 16 *today*—”

The lawyer excused himself to talk to the boys and returned, a bit meeker. “Our best case is with the 15-year-old. This happened last week, so the recency is good, too.” He turned to the boy’s mother. “If you will sign the complaint, I’ll have it typed up.”

The woman nodded, without hesitation.

We got up to leave. At the door the sheriff stopped me. He smiled. “I’ll let you know when I get this job done,” he assured.

“Yes, please.”

In an hour he called. They had been to Austin’s house, but had missed him. “He’s gone to the city for dinner. We’ll watch, and get him the minute he gets back,” he promised me.

It was midnight when the phone rang—the sheriff again. “We got our man. And now my job is just beginning.” He sounded tired.

In the morning I called. Yes, the confession had come.

AUSTIN GLENN had been a man of extraordinary intelligence, a man

with instinctive psychological wisdom, who had studied and planned his course carefully. Not once had he ever threatened or said to anyone, “You mustn’t tell.” Boys like this will not tell. Instead they will take the guilt upon themselves—and the worry.

For my son it is not too late: he will recover. I must believe that, just as I must remember to look forward and not back. My son will recover, for the crisis of illness has passed and the lengthy process of healing begun.

But Austin?

After he had spent seven days in prison, his case was dealt with a month ago—released on \$2,000 bond on condition he undergo psychiatric treatment. The local newspaper reported the case: “INDECENT ACTS CHARGED TO LOCAL MAN . . . accused admits guilt . . . expresses humiliation and remorse . . . asks for probation. . . .”

I read it and wondered. How *does* he feel? *Is* he truly humiliated? Truly remorseful? Or could it be wounded pride preparing for a long wait? ■ ■

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