

Part 3: The Shooting Gallery

This is the first half of a chapter from *The Shooting Gallery*. It takes place about a third of the way in, during the first day. It is representative of the characters, their inner thoughts, and some of their free time activity. The characters are introduced earlier and are well known at this point in the story.

8 Sid and Kurt

“S-D-H.” Sid muttered between his teeth... he watched Julian leaving the lake with Nick. He’d hung around all swim period hoping he could get Julian off to the side. After this morning’s performance out on the platform, it’s fair to assume Julian is just as hot to go as I am... I even brought along this blasted snorkel. How am I going to get Julian to do the “D/P” again? That’s my new nickname for it. I’m not that choosy, whether it’s the Doug or the Paul style, at this point... either one, any time. Besides... I have to have a little more practice before I can make a final evaluation, don’t I?

He had to hang around now anyway... he’d come in with Bruce, who was slaving away over in the F. Well, there’s always tomorrow; maybe I should link up with Julian in the morning when he stops by for the inspection. Why did I just *now* think of doing that? Sometimes I just don’t seem to be all there these days. He swam along the dock for a while, practicing the snorkel. Maybe I’ll come across something interesting— !!

A muscular chest appeared suddenly in front of his mask. He was forced to surface. He nearly gulped a mouthful.

“That thing really work?” Kurt was amused at having made Sid lose his momentum. He’d made up his mind to check into this, finally. He’d been watching Sid off and on for half an hour. Jeremy’s over by the chair, a safe distance.

“Oh! Hi. It’s you!” I remember him, all right. Wow. The shot he produced into the center of the circle was excellent. “Yeah, pretty good.” Wow. This is a surprise. “You want to try it out?”

“Yeah, kinda.” Kurt was only partly interested in that. He remembered how Sid’s face looked when Julian was talking about Doug and whoever. This is a kid who wants some. Kurt wouldn’t mind some himself. That story had primed him pretty good; the quick one on the platform wasn’t anywhere close to satisfying. This looks like a pretty fair chance. “So, show me.”

Sid demonstrated the snorkel and gave it to Kurt to try out. Kurt’s backside broke the surface as he jumped upward and swam off. What I wouldn’t give to have cheeks like those! There were times that Sid really hated his scrawny, stringy body. Maybe Kurt could make a suggestion on how I could build myself up some.

Kurt swam carefully and looked through the lens. Hmm... I expected to see farther. He glanced back and forth. It’s clear, better than the naked eye. He thought a little about Sid. He didn’t know how to manage this kind of thing... he’d always allowed somebody else to invite him, not the other way around. He wasn’t the conquering kind, like Tom. He liked to give somebody permission, at least... that’s what I did once with Doug. He preferred to be the invited one to somebody else’s party. This kid is a little younger... he probably isn’t savvy enough to be in charge. But he’s old enough to play—I saw that for myself.

He turned around to swim back. Not much point in this rig, actually. When he got there, he noticed through the lens that Sid was wagging one at half-mast... *hmm*. He surfaced. “How far can you see with this, really?” Sid’s condition looks promising.

“Depends on the water. Real far, if it’s clear”

“Did you really see those guys?” Kurt was curious about what Sid actually thought; is he interested in playing around?

“Yeah!” Sid grinned. He was delighted that Kurt had brought it up... his mind began to detect a possibility. “Not as good as Julian, maybe. I just saw them with my eyes, not this.” He tapped the snorkel mask. “And I didn’t have my glasses on, either, like today.” Even so, I saw enough to know what was going on.

“Wow. So how close did you get?” Sid had some kind of strap that held his regular glasses onto his head.

“Well...” Sid sensed that he just might have a chance here. “About two feet. I was swimming underwater and came across them by accident. I couldn’t hang around, you know. I didn’t want to get caught.”

Kurt's eyes grew larger. "Two feet!" He held his hands two feet apart. "You could have reached out and..." this kid had been up *close*!

"I never thought of that! But you're right. I was really surprised. After I swam off, I thought some about it. That's why I went after the snorkel." Sid looked around briefly to check if anyone was listening. "It was pretty hot, if you wanna know."

Kurt took the snorkel off and handed it back to Sid. "I take it those guys aren't around now?"

"Nah. I haven't seen 'em since that day. It could be because the water polo bunch took over the space." Sid remembered the two finishes... and his own. Boy, did they make him feel needy right now. "I bet they're doin' it someplace, though."

Kurt could see the hunger in Sid's expression. He was starting to feel real receptive, himself. "Why do you say that?"

"Man, if you could have seen the expressions on their faces! Who wouldn't want to do that again?" He looked at Kurt in the face. "I'm telling you: if I could ever figure a way..." Oop... maybe I went too far. I better cool it, here.

Kurt decided. "Well..." he looked down to see if the half mast was still there. "You guys sure make a case for trying it out, at least." He kept his head down and looked up to see Sid's reaction... yep. Sid just licked around his mouth.

"But I don't see doing it underwater. I can barely stay down for a minute. Not even that, actually." Sid wasn't about to let on that he knew another way just yet. Kurt's older; he probably has some good ideas—if he's really thinking about it like I hope he is. The thought was causing his problem down below to grow.

"Me either; I doubt if it was the lake that made it feel so good, anyway." It hit Kurt like a slap on the butt: I can take this kid to that inlet I found!

"Exactly!" Why didn't I think of that?! Sid looked straight at Kurt. Something told him that Kurt had an idea.

"Ever been out in a canoe?"

"No." What difference does that make?

The Buddy Whistle went off.

“I hate that thing!” Sid turned around and searched for Bruce. There... they waved at each other and pointed.

Kurt scanned the area around the Boardwalk for Jeremy. There he is... they raised their arms; Kurt beckoned to Jeremy to swim over. “You won’t hate it for long.” The spot I found during canoe class today is perfect... we’ll be there in five minutes. What time is it, anyway? This can’t wait.

“Huh?”

Jeremy worked his way over doing a slow walk; he wasn’t supposed to swim until the whistle blew again.

The whistle blew and Jeremy swam up. “Hi, Sid.”

Sid blushed. “Hi.” He looked at Kurt. Including Jeremy isn’t a good idea, at all. How can I say that without—

“I’ve got a job for ya, Jeremy.”

“Sure.” Kurt was super in Jeremy’s book.

“I’m gonna take Sid here for a run in the canoe. I need you to keep Bruce company for the Buddy Whistle.”

“Bruce? I haven’t seen him around.”

“He’s over there in the F.” Sid pointed. “He has to swim there until he can get qualified for his blue half.”

“Oh. I’ve never been over there.” Jeremy jumped up to see over the dock. Bruce was resting against the bottom fork of the F. “There! I see him now.” He grinned. I don’t know Bruce, but...

“Good. Sid will go tell him while I go tell the Counselor at the gate.” Kurt had it mapped out now. “I’ll move the badges around, too, just in case we don’t make it back before the swim time is over.”

Sid was impressed and thrilled: Kurt is determined to try this out, now. “Thanks, Jeremy. See ya later.” He hiked himself up onto the dock and walked over to Bruce, fast. Bruce knows who Jeremy is—this is perfect.

“Am I s’posed to go over there?” Jeremy watched Sid going over to Bruce.

“Yeah, probably be a good idea... you need to be close to him for the Buddy Whistle.” He figured Jeremy didn’t know what was going on.

Jeremy looked at Kurt. He was impressed that he'd take Sid for a ride! Sid really deserves it, too. "I bet Sid will really like it, Kurt. What a neat idea!" Kurt's power will really impress him.

Kurt smiled back... if Jeremy only knew. "See ya, Jeremy. Thanks." He pulled up onto the dock and headed for his cubbyhole.

Sid was slightly embarrassed. He was half way up, and the snorkel was not exactly a good shield. As he got to the cubbyhole, he saw Kurt putting on his clothes. Excellent! He stepped up and tried to hide his problem while he reached in for his towel. Kurt was only two feet away.

"We're supposed to be dressed when we take out a boat or canoe," Kurt explained. "We gotta get the lead out, too. There isn't a lot of time left."

"Yow... I didn't think about that." Sid rushed it... I can dry off later.

Leonard noticed Sid's problem. Delightful... he nodded his approval to Kurt. He had to wonder about this sudden arrangement... most curious. What in the world could have inspired it? He looked at his watch. Hmm.

"You need to be careful about the time; the gate will close at 4:45, remember." They won't have time to do very much. He nodded a silent good luck as they scurried over to put their badges on the canoe board. What are the odds, I wonder: will they be in the canoe again in the morning? I'll bet they are... they do make an odd pair.

Kurt waited at the rack for Sid to catch up. "Help me get this in the water." He took the lakeside end and Sid took the other.

Sid followed Kurt's lead and helped lower it into the water alongside the dock.

"Hold onto the side while I grab a couple of paddles."

Sid bent over and held on. He had never been in a canoe.

Kurt stepped back to the rack; he pulled a couple of floatation vests from underneath and fetched the paddles.

"How do you get in?"

"Let me climb in, and I'll show you... It's a cinch." Kurt handed Sid a vest. "Put this on first." He slipped a vest on and climbed into the stern end. "Hand me the paddles."

Sid handed them one at a time.

Kurt shipped the paddles, one on each side.

“Now, I’ll steady it while you climb in.” Kurt pointed to a stretcher aft of the bow crossbar. “Put your hands on each side like I did. Always step on one of those stretcher boards, not right on the bottom. When you’re in, kneel down and rest your back against that cross bar. It’s not really a seat. You lean on it, mostly. You can see how I sit—do the same thing.

Sid studied the problem and reviewed the instructions Kurt had just given. He focused. Boy, this is a challenge... he counted to three and... he was kneeling in the canoe before he knew it—and the canoe barely rocked an inch!

“Hey, you’re a natural!” Kurt was impressed. He half feared they’d come close to tipping over. He handed a paddle to Sid. “This is really your first time?”

Sid looked at him—oh—he means in a canoe. “Yes. What am I supposed to do?”

“You paddle on the left side, I’ll paddle on the right. We’re going down the west shore a short way.” Kurt raised his paddle. “You need to turn around and face the other way.” When Sid was settled, Kurt lowered his paddle into the water with vigor—he pulled hard.

Whoa! Sid was jolted back—I wasn’t expecting such a sudden start. He followed along, clumsily at first—I didn’t know I’d be in the front. How am I supposed to hold the paddle, exactly? He glanced behind and saw how Kurt was doing it. He tried to mimic that. We’re going ahead full steam, somehow.

Kurt was adept and compensated for Sid’s awkwardness. He had twice the arm power, and his J-stroke kept them on course. “I know an inlet that looks... well, let’s say that it’s not very crowded, if you know what I mean.”

“I know exactly what you mean.” This was Sid’s very first ride in a canoe. He was sold on it instantly. It took a while to get the hang of it, though. He worried about balancing Kurt’s paddle strokes, but it seemed to go all right. Kurt is incredibly strong.

“See that inlet? The second one after the big rock?”

“Yeah.”

“We’ll swing in right there; it bends a little to the left after it goes in. There’s a great place to land.”

Soon they were there. Kurt steadied the canoe with his paddle. “I’m going to pull up and touch the shore just a little and steady the canoe. You step out first, carefully. We’re gonna get our feet wet, so let’s take off our shoes first.” Kurt knew the spot well enough to tell it was barefoot safe.

Sid took off his shoes and socks and put his left leg over the side—ew. The silt oozed up around his feet and between his toes... luckily, it isn’t too deep. He lifted his left leg out. Barefoot is the only way. It was only a couple of steps. He used the grassy bank for a doormat... the sensation of mud squishing between his toes was not very pleasant. Well, no point in complaining. He watched Kurt lift the front onto the grass. What an adventure! Sid was having such a good time... oh. I just remembered why we came here. He glanced around... it’s very secure and quiet. The swimming area is completely out of sight. The configuration of the inlet masks the canoe completely. “Man, this is something! Is this inside the camp?”

“I don’t know, to tell the truth. I was only here once before.” Kurt was a little embarrassed. “I was under some pressure, y’know? I didn’t want to get caught takin’ a whiz in the lake, and I whipped in here. Jeremy stood guard.”

“Your secret is safe with me. In fact... a whiz might not be a bad idea.” He looked at Kurt.

“Oh. You’re right. I didn’t think about that,” Kurt laughed. “Follow me—there’s a clump of grass back here that needs another watering.” He led Sid into the small stand of beech saplings.

(This scene continues on page 71...)