Farm Boys
Fellows, Will

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John Berg

Born in 1957, John grew up on a 300-acre mixed livestock and crop farm near New Ulm, in Brown County, south-central Minnesota. His older sister and brother were grown-ups during his childhood. John lives in northeastern Iowa and works as a librarian. This brief narrative describes how he responded to his emotional and physical attractions to other males, from grade school through high school.

Watching the TV movie of Cinderella, with Lesley Ann Warren, I was very taken with the handsome prince and thought how lucky I would be if I were Cinderella and could land him. Sometimes when my parents weren't around, I would get into my sister's wardrobe and put on her bridal gown and veil, pretending I was getting married, walking down the stairs with the long gown trailing behind me. Sometimes I would go outside with my sister's dresses on and pretend to be a woman visiting the city. I'd sit on one of the farm implements and pretend I was driving somewhere. The pole barn would be a restaurant where I'd have lunch, and then I might go to the chicken barn to visit with the girls and do some shopping.

It was typical for my mother and father and me to go for a drive on Sunday afternoons. As we drove around they would look at other farmers' fields, chatting and listening to polka music on the car radio. My father was always very interested in seeing how his crops compared to other farmer's crops. I would sit in the back seat, day-dreaming and waiting for the ice cream that we would stop for about mid-way through the trip.

On our drive one Sunday, when I was twelve or thirteen, my mother had to return some dishes from Ruthy and Les's wedding that had taken place the day before. It was the first wedding I had ever gone to and I was very happy about going. Both the bride and the groom had dressed in white, and Les was stunningly handsome in his white tux. He was a farmer, so he was very sunburned. His face and hands were ruddy and his hair was slicked straight back. Watching him during the ceremony and the reception, I thought how lucky Ruthy was to have a nice man like that—a man like I wanted to have. When they left for their honeymoon, I was almost jealous that she was going to be the one with him. Sitting in the back seat
of the car, looking out the window, I was day-dreaming about what it would be like to be alone with Les. He would be driving the car and I’d be sitting right next to him, like a boyfriend and girlfriend would do.

Kevin was a couple years older than I and lived on a farm maybe ten miles away. The summer before my sophomore year in high school, I saw him doing some field work. He was shirtless and very tan. After that, I would ride my bike past his farm, hoping to see him. That fall, Kevin’s sister and I were working on a school project with two other students. I planned it so the group would meet at her house, and maybe I would get to see Kevin. After we finished with our project we were sitting around in the living room and Kevin’s mother served us bars and soda. It was harvest time and apparently Kevin had been working pretty hard that day. I was hoping he would get in from the field before I had to leave.

Kevin came into the living room shirtless, wearing tattered, snug-fitting jeans. He usually worked shirtless and always wore long pants. He was a little taller than I, very slim and muscular, blonde hair, blue eyes, and very tan. He kicked off his boots, pulled off his socks, and reclined on the couch to watch TV. This was my first chance to talk to him. Seeing that he was interested in farming, I geared my conversation to that. How was the work? Was it pretty hot? How were the bushels running? Kevin seemed to pay pretty close attention to me and made good eye contact, so I went home fantasizing about how wonderful our conversation was, and hoping we would meet again.

A few weeks later I had built up a bit of nerve to ride my bike to Kevin’s place and invite him over to my farm. Much to my surprise, he said, “Sure, let’s get together tomorrow.” I had our date all planned. I needed to get Kevin upstairs to my room so my mother wouldn’t be able to horn in and become the focus of conversation. The next day, waiting for his arrival, I cleaned up my room, getting everything as spotless as I could. I dusted my dressers and even refolded all the clothes inside. I planned a menu of finger foods—crackers and Cheez Whiz, popcorn, and a selection of soft drinks. I had a phonograph, and wondered what kind of music Kevin would like. I had David Cassidy, Bobby Sherman, and one country-western record.

Trying to figure out what to wear, I went through four or five changes of clothes. I settled on a newer pair of jeans and a nice shirt, but not too dressy. We had a long driveway and I sat on the front steps of the house watching each car go by. Finally, Kevin turned into the driveway and I felt faint. I didn’t know what to do—should I run out and meet the car, or sit casually on the steps and look macho, farmer-like?
After Kevin and I had talked in the driveway for ten or fifteen minutes, my parents came out of the house and we visited with them for a short time. In order to break away from them, I invited Kevin to go for a walk around our farm. We had just built a new farrowing barn, my father's pride. I explained all about the stainless steel pens and the slat floors, and the whole process from breeding to farrowing to working with the feeder pigs. Kevin was quite taken by this new building, so I showed him some of our other farm buildings and we walked through some fields.

After an hour or two of looking around, Kevin said it was about time for him to get home. That was not my plan, so I suggested we go up to my room to listen to some records. We sat cross-legged on the floor, the hors d'oeuvres on the floor next to us. My emotions were running very high, but I tried the best I could to make eye contact with him. When I put on a David Cassidy record, I said, "You might not like this," but he said he was a Partridge Family fan, too. In no way did he mock or tease me. He ate my munchies and listened to my records and we had a good time. I wanted him to really like me and to come back a second time.

There was an electric energy. I wanted Kevin to touch me and to hold me, and I wanted to touch him. I was really thirsting for that kind of attention and affection from another male, but I didn't know if it was appropriate or how to get it. I was certainly drawn to how Kevin's jeans fit him, but I think what I really wanted was his attention and validation—for him to see me as a male on an equal level with him. When it was time for Kevin to leave, I walked him out to his car and told him how much I had enjoyed the evening and that I would like to do it again. We never did, but there has always been a fondness in my heart for Kevin and my first date with a man.