

Chapter 1 – Master Masters

It was the worst of times, it was the worst of times. The hardest time for a young gay man is when he has to announce himself to his father.

In the matters of Trent Masters, this day had been and gone over two years ago; at 15. His father had never openly rejected him, nor had he been anything other than kind. Nevertheless, by Trent's count it had been 804 days since his dad had given him a hug.

The most recent hit had come at the beginning of his gap year; meaning well, his father had signed him up to be a jackeroo in outback Queensland. 2000 kilometres from his home in Melbourne.

The conversation could not have gone worse...

"If you just expected to bum around the city for the next year you have another thing coming," Mike announced in his best *don't mess with me* voice.

"I wasn't expecting handouts, I would work!" Trent returned weakly.

"You're right, you will. In Queensland, where you might also learn to be a man," Mike replied.

"Oh," Trent sighed, sitting back down.

"I didn't mean it like that Trent. I meant that I want you to grow up." Mike attempted to cover the mistake.

"You think that if I go out west and live with only men for a year, their straightness might rub off?" Trent taunted.

Mike stared for a moment, choosing his words carefully. "No, not at all. I've accepted who you are, but you still need to grow up."

"Grow up like you did?" Trent scoffed.

"Exactly bud, my dad sent me out west. It's manly, and helps you to think on your feet."

"Manly hey, also another way for you to avoid touching me for another year," Trent looked up at his father, challenging him to argue.

"What?" Mike's confidence dissolved. Trent's four middle-weight belt's twinkled in their mountings across the room.

"803 days since I told you I was gay. 804 days since you have touched for even a hand shake."

“What are you talking about?”

“Think *Dad*. When was the last time you hugged me?” Trent rose from his chair, standing dominantly over Mike.

Mike shrunk, at 18 Trent was monstrous.

“I don’t remember, but honestly, it wasn’t a conscious choice.”

“More psychobabble?”

“Trent, there is more to people than their actions.”

Seeing his left hook connect with Mike’s right cheek, slow motion took over as Mike dropped to the ground and began to drip blood onto the rug. Trent straightened, immediately regretting the punch.

“Mum! Mum!”

A yell emanated from the depths of the house, “What is it honey?”

Trent answered, “I just knocked dad out and he is bleeding on the rug.”

“Funny sweetheart. What do you want?” Darcy yelled.

“Just come to the lounge!” Trent yelled.

Eventually Darcy appeared at the entrance to the lounge, her eyes widening as she took the corner.

“What did you do?”

“I hit him,” Trent admitted with a shrug.

“I think you should go to your room.” Darcy dropped to the floor, beside Mike.

“Mikey. Mike!” Stroking the side of his face.

Trent sighed and walked away. After several seconds, Mike sat up easily, wiping away the blood beneath his nose.

“What did you do Mike? My son just flattened his hero.”

“I figured I should stay down until he left,” Mike shook his head.

“What did you say?” Darcy repeated pushing her husband’s chest.

“He told me I hadn’t touched him since before I knew he was gay. I tried to reason with him, I said it wasn’t conscious,” Mike admitted.

“For a smart man, you are stupid. How many times have I warned you about academic nonsense with him...”

“My left cheek won’t forget now.” Mike heaved himself up holding onto Darcy’s hand.

“Well, since this is all your fault I am going back to work. *You* can sort this out. Darcy commanded, spinning on her heel and walking towards the door. “And, you will get that blood off my rug.”

Mike took a deep breath and exhaled heavily, looking around the room, Trent retreated from the door corner.

Laying quietly on his bed and staring at the exposed tin ceiling above him, Trent revelled in his own brilliance at refusing insulation. The chaotic harmonies when it rained were his release. His secret indulgence beyond his parent’s money.

Appearing at the door, a nasty bruise already expanding across his right cheek, Mike Hesitated.

“I deserved that.”

“Yeah. But I didn’t think I hit you that hard.”

“You didn’t. I thought it best to stay down,” Mike admitted.

“Well at least now the touch count resets hey,” Trent told the ceiling, missing the look of pain that crossed Mikes face.

“I can’t say sorry for doing that to you. It makes me feel awful,” Mike said as he lay down next to Trent. “Look,” Mike forced his arm underneath Trent’s shoulder. “I honestly didn’t realise I was treating you like that. In truth, the hugging thing, I thought you were getting too big.” Mike waited. “I almost need a chair to even try.”

Trent lay silently, still staring at the extremely interesting folds in the corrugated iron.

“Trent, I know you don’t need to become anymore of a man.” Mike tried. “You need experience, you need to fend for yourself for a while,” Mike took a second to adjust himself beneath Trent. “I can’t believe that was your left.”

Trent began to chuckle.

Mike shook his head.

“Those poor boys. I saw you hit one of them over thirty times,”

Trent puffed out a breath of air.

Mike stayed silent.

“I haven’t ever been able to really hit anyone. I think you’re right about the manly thing. Whenever I hit anyone, I hold back.”

Mike remained silent for a moment.

“You mean, you’ve just been toying with people in the titles.”

Trent nodded.

Mike smiled broadly, “My boy!” He said, suddenly flinching when his jaw moved.

Trent laughed.

“Your sister screams out every match for you to stop holding back. I guess I just missed it.”

“I guess that’s a patten for you then. Perhaps you should work on that.”

“I will.” Mike frowned, “Do you want to talk about it?”

“No.”

“You need to. To let someone hit you if you can avoid it, shows a lot of contempt for yourself.”

“Do you want to reprise the living room?”

Mike lay silently as the rain intensified.

“The punch wasn’t so bad, your mum made me clean the blood off the rug,” Mike scoffed.

Trent slowly started to chuckle, progressing rapidly into a belly roar that seemed to bounce off of the walls. Mike found the intensity infectious, eventually laughing to spite his aching cheek.

“Shut the hell up wankers,” bellowed Meg from down the hall.

“You know the only reason she is so fearless. It’s because she tells everyone at school her big boxer brother would *smash em*,” Mike joked.

“How do you know that?” Trent asked incredulously.

“We got called in to school last month because she had been threatening her class mates,” Mike laughed.

“I suppose she’d have to leave the fairy part out,” Trent chuckled.

“You’d think that,” Mike replied, “but, she told one of the football team that her gay boxing champion brother would come out and break him in.”

Trent roared with laughter.

Mike stared at his numb hand on the other side of his son’s head.

“Trent,” Mike nudged.

Trent looked to his dad questioningly.

“My hand is going purple,” Mike whined.

Lifting his head, Trent grinned as Mike pulled away his arm and massaged it.

“I suppose touching me isn’t without some dangers,” Trent smirked, his eyes shut.

Mike snorted back, closing his own eyes and dropping his head back to the bed.

“I’m starting to envy your roof.”

Chapter 2 – Boxing Jackeroo

Morose, Trent waited at the Virgin Blue counter. The chirpy young ticket attendant flirted with him, commenting on *the most intense blue eyes she'd ever seen*. Flustered, she even called another attendant over *to come see Georgie*. The people of the queue dominoed into fidgets of socially suppressed fury. The unfortunate little bald man that spoke up realised his mistake as Trent pushed tall from leaning on the counter.

“Where have I seen you before?” Georgie questioned.

“I’m a boxer,” Trent squeaked. Immediately embarrassed by his vocal pyrotechnics.

“That’s it, you just won the junior heavyweight boxing title.”

Trent scoffed, “Close, but yeah.”

“You annihilated my brother in the first round. I’ve followed you ever since,” Georgie smiled.

“Why?” Trent quizzed, suddenly spooked.

“Because you could have destroyed him and you held-off. And after what he yelled out at the start. You deserved to win.”

“Thanks. I better be going.”

“Wait, let me give you my number,” Georgie shouted quite loudly.

“Thanks anyway, but, what he said was true.” Trent frowned.

“Oh...’

Glaring at the outspoken bald man again for good measure, Trent retreated to join his family near the escalator.

“What was all of that about?” Meg demanded.

“Nothing, one of them recognised me from a fight.”

“What was she writing on the paper?”

“She wanted to give me her phone number.”

“Ew, grosse. Why would she even look at you? That’s foul, doesn’t she know you’re gay.”

“Well it isn’t printed on my jacket Meg. Besides, I’m better looking than any of the losers you bring home. Even the one’s I’m supposed to *break in*,” Trent taunted.

“Shut... Hey, Who told you... DAD!”

“He beat it out of me,” Mike answered.

“You loser, that’s why you hit dad, just to get dirt on me?!” Meg threw a bag at Trent.

“Not quite precious. But, you’re going to need more protection material when your friends find out I’m in the outback…” Trent trailed off, his gaze following a cute blonde walking in the other direction.

“Baby, you could be at least a little discrete,” Darcy requested.

Trent stopped on the concourse and watched the blonde as he checked to see if he was being watched. Shocked to see Trent stationary in the middle of the concourse watching. Smiling shyly he proceeded to collide with a vending machine.

“You have the best gaydar.” Meg announce from beside Trent.

“Practice makes perfect.”

“Grose!” Meg shook her head.

Arriving together in the boarding lounge, Trent found enough seats empty for them all to wait together.

“When you get back I am going to have to speak to you about discretion,” Mike whispered to Trent as they sat.

“No way, you’re the one sending me out to a farm to live with fifty men. I figure your encouraging promiscuity,” Trent smiled broadly.

“You be careful, those guys wont be as accepting as people in the city,” Mike became quite serious.

“That would teach you a lesson wouldn’t it.”

“Just be careful,” Mike cautioned.

Trent nodded vaguely, the sudden distraction of the blonde returning. Trent smiled. Mike and Darcy followed Trent’s gaze.

“Of course,” Darcy shook her head and began to rummage through her bag. Darcy found what she was looking for, pulling out a box and handing in to Trent. “Use them!” Darcy commanded.

Trent looked at the box, “Twelve, they’ll be gone before we land?”

“Really?” Mike Asked.

Darcy whacked Mike’s arm with her purse.

“What? I would have been lucky to go through that in six months at his age.”

Trent cringed a little.

“Looks like you choose the wrong team then. There’s no such thing as mood in my world. It just has to be a day ending in y.”

“STOP it! Both of you,” Darcy commanded. “We are in public, I will have none of this.”

Trent succeeded in getting the cute guys attention, nodding his head mouthing, *how you doin*.

The blonde shyly looked away for a moment, then indiscreetly flexed his arms over his head.

Trent stared, exaggerating a gape.

The loudspeaker announced the first stage of boarding, Trent’s focus snapped back to the family. A moment of silence, lasting slightly too long, passed before anyone could speak.

“I am really going to miss you all.”

Mike sighed, “I am starting to have second thoughts about this.”

“Good,” Trent said, pushing himself up.

“I’m going to miss you,” Mike added, standing to hug Trent.

“Be careful baby. If anyone tries to hurt you, remember who your mother is. I’ll get you out of prison later,” Darcy whispered into his ear, lingering in her hug.

Trent laughed.

“I mean it. Stop holding back. I love you. Don’t let anyone step on you.”

“Ok mum, move,” Meg announced.

“I love you too mum. I’ll call you when I get there,” Trent choked.

“No you wont,” Mike replied, “you wont get signal out there.”

“I’ll send smoke signals, look north-west,” Trent rolled his eyes.

Meg jumped up into Trent’s arms, “Bye big brother.”

“Bye Meg. See you at Christmas.”

“Can’t wait,” Meg smiled, whispering “Break *him* in, he’s hot!”

“Twice before takeoff,” he whispered back.

“You’re such a cool brother. I hate that you’re leaving,” Meg whined.

Trent picked up his carry on bag and looked over to the gate, “Well, here I go. Bye.”

The remaining Masters family stood back and watched as Trent walked into the boarding line. He stood in the line looking forward, careful to not make eye contact with them again. When he approached the flight attendant she smiled sympathetically at the tears flowing down his cheeks.

She ripped his ticket and whispered, “Don’t look back, they’re all balling too.”

Trent chuckled.

“And don’t look now, but a really cute guy is checking you out.”

Trent smiled, wiping his face.

At the plain door, Trent checked his seat for the first time: *Row 1 seat A*. He sat down, watching plane people file onto the jet.

The blonde looked down at Trent, then back at his ticket frowning. Sitting down in 1B he whispered into Trent’s ear.

“The attendant said we have 25 minutes.”

Trent grinned, “and then a whole flight.”

“Meet me in the top bathroom?”

“I’ll be there in thirty seconds,” Trent licked his lips.

The blonde stood and headed up the central stairs. Trent looked up at a woman standing over him.

“Can I help you?”

“You’re in my seat,” she announced.

Trent grabbed his ticket and held it up to the lady.

“A1?” Trent returned.

“This is 1A, perhaps try the upper deck,” she smiled.

Trent shrunk into the chair.

“Sorry,” he frowned,

“Not a problem,” she trilled.

Trent got up, grabbed his bag and ran up the stairs. Double-checking his new seat, he threw his bag onto the chair and walked quietly to the bathroom door. He took a deep breath and pulled open the door.

The blonde was standing inside, Trent pushed into him and shut the door behind them.

“What’s your name?”

“Tim.”

“Trent.”

Trent leaned in and kissed Tim, driving his tongue deep inside Tim’s mouth.

Tim ran one hand up through Trent’s hair and dove the other down inside his pants.

Trent’s brain drained its blood to a growth inside Tim’s hand. Unzipping Tim’s pants, Trent pulled off the exposed *AussieBum* briefs.

Tim pulled away, leaving Trent standing confused.

Suddenly, Tim had Trent’s arms behind his back and Trent felt a cold metal against his skin.

“You’re under arrest,” Tim said.

“What?!” Trent panicked.

“You are in violation of federal law, 26.8b, illicit relations in a public environment,” Tim continued.

“You’ve got to be shitting me!” Trent rested his head against the mirror.

Tim opened the cubicle door and escorted Trent off the plane.

Soon, Trent found himself sitting in a brightly lit grey room, right next to the Gate.

Tim left Trent there and walked out.

Sitting in the room alone, Trent stood and stepped through his shackled arms. Wrestling his mobile phone from his jeans, he dialled his mother.

“Honey, already, what is it?” Darcy answered.

“Mum, the cute guy was a cop. He arrested me and he left me in this room next the terminal gate,” Trent mumbled.

“What?!?” Darcy screamed. “Say nothing, I will be right there.”

Ten minutes later his mother walked into the room, followed by two police officers. Tim, and a man with “Airport Manager Mr Barns” printed on his jacket, joined them.

Tim solemnly walked over to Trent and unlocked the handcuffs. Nobody said anything. Darcy glared at her son viciously.

Finally the Airport director broke the silence, “Mrs Masters, the airport is truly sorry for the confusion. Solicitation of a minor is not an act the airport condones.”

Trent felt the tension drop out of his body, he looked back up to his mother. The glare she was still directing at him was venomous.

Darcy looked back at the director.

“Thank you Mr Barns. May I have a moment alone with my son please?”

“Certainly, please be aware that his plane must leave in less than ten minutes.”

“Of course.” Darcy replied.

The two officers, Tim and Mr Barns filed out of the room. Trent was immediately sorry to see them go.

“You’re out of my sight for five minutes and you get arrested for having sex in public!” Darcy screamed. “Do you even realise how lucky you are that you are underage? If you weren’t! You could have ended up in a federal prison. Aircraft come under federal law!”

“I’m sorry mum. But you did give me the condoms,” Trent defended.

“I didn’t think you would need instructions for using them! Now get on that plane! And keep your dick in your pants!” Darcy commanded.

Trent skulked out of the room.

Across the terminal Trent saw Tim under a barrage from the Airport Director. When Tim looked over, Trent grimaced and gave a thumbs up.

Meg and Mike were standing next to the terminal gate. When they saw Trent coming, they both began to shake their heads.

Mike smiled, suppressing laughter, “so long son.”

Darcy glared at him.

Meg laughed.

“So much for great gaydar.” Meg laughed again. “See you at Christmas.”

Trent turned reluctantly to Darcy.

“At least life is never boring with you around.”

“Thanks mum,” Trent said timidly.

“Always. Just try to keep out of trouble for a few days.”

Trent nodded and walked back onto the plane, without looking back. After being escorted off in hand cuffs, walking back through the crowd was torturous. Passengers stared at him. He was pleased that first class was almost empty when he arrived. He sat down in his chair and cried.

The two-hour plane trip passed without further incident. Even to the extent of holding onto his straining bladder.

A couple of the other toilet users kept staring at him, when he entered the room.

Trent finally broke, “They arrested me for having sex in the bathroom, but had to let me go because I am only 17.”

The men around him left without shaking, or washing their hands.

The four hour bus trip passed slowly. After the city, the whole expanse was bush, then scrub, then empty red dirt for miles on end. Seven arse-numbing hours later, Trent trudged up the stairs at the Longreach bus station. His bags weighing heavier than he remembered packing, Trent offered a few choice curses to the heat.

The space surrounding the station was just dirt for miles end. The desolation was complete but for the filthy dust camouflaged four-wheel drive parked at the curb. A hatted man was battling to open the encrusted tail-gate.

An occluded face peered uselessly through what most probably was glass. The hatted man’s silhouette glanced over at Trent and give up on opening the doors.

As he appeared on the pavement, Trent took a moment to recover his breath.

“That is the sexiest thing I have ever seen,” Trent whispered.
As he extended his hand, Trent dropped his bags keenly.
“Jack McCoach.”

Chapter 3 – The drover

It was already a crappy week; three months without rain, his horse had broken its leg and had to be put down, and he had to drive four hours into town to pick up a city kid.

Jack drove the whole four hours in silence. No music. No singing. No breaks.

After ten minutes of fidgeting with the botched tail-gate, he gave up, noticing the silhouette of a sawdust, waiting with its bags.

Jack walked towards Trent, and stuck out his hand.

“Jack McCoach,” was all he really felt like saying.

“Trent Masters,” Trent replied shaking his hand.

“Tail gate wont open,” Jack replied.

Jack walked back around to the rear of the vehicle.

“See,” Jack announced, pointing at the door.

Trent looked at the door, grabbed the handle and pulled it open, smashing the mud off onto the road.

Jack flinched with surprise as the door moved.

Trent heaved his bags into the back and slammed the doors closed.

Jack walked around to the drivers seat, Trent followed.

“Do you want to drive?” Jack asked.

“Oh,” Trent muttered.

Trent slouched around to the passenger door.

Neither said a word for the first hour, Jack watched the road and Trent was content to stare into the nothingness.

Finally after Trent made his move to find his ipod, Jack ventured to break the silence.

“What sort of music do you like?”

Trent looked at him for a second.

“Depends. If I am in a shit mood, happy mood, training mood. Pretty much anything.”

Jack looked back to the road. Trent thought it over then figured talking was better than his listening to the same music again.

“What do you like?” Trent questioned putting his ipod back into the bag.

“Everything really. Seem to be favouring heavy punk lately.”

“I have heaps of punk, maybe we could trade off what we have,” Trent offered.

“Yeah, cool. We have the internet at the homestead though, so I have most of the new stuff.”

Trent looked around a bit, “Have you seen anyone live?”

Jack shook his head, “Nah, since school finished I haven’t left Karrawarra.”

Trent did not say anything.

“How was the trip?” Jack mumbled

“Pretty shit. I got arrested on the plane for trying to have sex in the bathrooms,”

Trent shrugged.

“What?” Jack scoffed.

“Serious. The dude was flirting up heaps and turned out to be a cop. Lucky my mum’s a lawyer or I would have been charged.”

“You tried to have sex with a man on the plane?” Jack balked.

“Started to try,” Trent replied.

“You’re a fag?”

Trent’s body stiffened.

“I’m gay, but if you call me a fag again I’ll break your face for you.”

“Sorry mate, I’m not used to f...um... gays. Don’t really get a lot of you out here,” Jack stuttered.

“That’s cool. We tend to show up everywhere nowadays,” Trent shrugged.

“Crikey, you don’t seem like a gay though. You pretty much ripped the car door off to get your stuff in,” Jack announced.

“Strength don’t fit into your gay stereotype then? I’m a boxer too, does that cause you any problems?”

“Wait, your name is Trent McCoach?” Jack said becoming excited.

“Yeah, why?” Trent looked slightly sceptical.

“You just won the junior heavyweight title,” Jack yelled. “I watched the title fight on the net. You really held back on that wanker.”

Trent deflated in his chair.

“Who is your coach? Or did you come up with it?” Jack almost squeaked.

“What are you talking about?”

“Only doing what you need to win. It’s brilliant. Now no-one knows what you’re capable of. They can’t train to beat you,” Jack replied.

“You know, I’ve had this conversation nearly a thousand times. But this is a first,” Trent chuckled.

“Well, who came up with it?” Jack demanded.

“No-one came up with it. I’m not a nut, I fight to win, not to hurt people,” Trent admitted.

“Oh, that makes sense,” Jack allowed, slightly disappointed. “I downloaded the fight where you knocked out the Portuguese guy in four minutes. I couldn’t believe that. He had never been beaten.”

Trent smirked, “I didn’t hit him that hard. Well I don’t think I did. It just connected perfectly and he was down.”

“It was like a scene from Snatch.” Jack manoeuvred the car off the main road onto a dirt track. “It’s dirt track for the next two hours,” Jack announced.

Trent looked around bemused.

“What are you doing here? Why aren’t you going for more titles?” Jack questioned.

“My dad insisted on me coming here for my gap year. Boxing isn’t something I want a career at,” Trent admitted.

“Think you’ll ever go back?” Jack posed.

“Don’t know yet. I’ll have to see how I grow on a farm,” Trent answered.

Jack sat quietly for a few minutes, Trent made for his iPod again.

“For city folk the farm sounds pretty drab, but there isn’t anywhere else I would want to be. The property is almost two hundred kilometres across. We have every type of farm animal, and acres of feed paddocks. Most of our food is home grown and made, and everything revolves around keeping everything going. It almost passes as a country by itself.” Jack detailed excitedly.

Trent listened quietly as Jack continued to describe every inch of the place he would call home for the next eleven months. Jack finished his spiel on the farm and after a moments silence, started again.

“I just can’t believe that *you* are gay.”

“Believe it, I was just arrested for making out with a man in a plane toilet. I couldn’t get much gayer,” Trent replied flatly.

“What is it about women you didn’t like?”

“Nothing, I’ve never tried one, and never want to,” Trent shrugged.

“Why?” Jack’s asked curiously.

“I just think women are grose,” Trent replied. “Sexually.”

“Oh,” Jack thought for a moment. “And everyone was ok with fighting you as a f.. gay.”

“They were fine with fighting me. I don’t know how fine they were loosing to me,” Trent laughed.

“Wouldn’t be easier to just be straight?” Jack proposed.

“I would be much easier,” Trent mocked.

The four-wheel drive rounded a corner and Jack hit the breaks. They had stopped on the top of a hill overlooking a massive grassy expanse.

“This is Karawara,” Jack beamed.

Trent looked through the wiper crescent windscreen in wonder. The dusty dead transformed into flowing green in an instant. He looked out over the hills and fields. The stark contrast between red dirt and rich sky echoed his insignificance.

Realising the inadequacy of the windscreen, Trent found himself opening the door to see clearer.

Jack watched as the gigantic man left the car in silence.

Jack first saw Karawara from here on his fifth birthday. Finally the long drought has ended. It was the first time he had seen rain, it seemed wondrous that water could fall from the sky.

The next thing Jack knew the land turned green, blue, pink and orange; flowers and grass had sprung up overnight. Fields seemed to grow instantly. His dad brought him to this hill to see the farm.

Thousands of farmers flooded to farm with thousands of interesting toys. A million calves were born at once and the horses despised the crowding of their space.

Jack shook out of his reminiscence, surprise that sunset had begun. Trent was sitting on the bonnet, still mesmerised by the landscape. Jack opened the door and stepped out, walking around the car to sit with Trent.

“You zoned out completely in there,” Trent said.

“Sorry?” Jack replied.

“You were just spacing for about ten minutes with a goofy grin of your face,” Trent chuckled.

“Oh... Yeah... W”

“This place is incredible,” Trent segued.

“Yeah. It puts on quite a show at sunset,” Jack nodded.

“Do you think a gay guy will be a problem for people here?” Trent requested.

“Probably,” Jack admitted. “Most of the blokes here are meat and potatoes.”

“What do you think will happen, will people leave?”

“I doubt it, a few people might freak out. But none of the guys could take you, so don’t worry about it,” Jack shrugged

“I don’t want to hurt your way of life.”

“How do you hurt a way of life?”

“I just seem to.”

“How?”

“By showing up.”

“That’s not your choice then is it?”

“How old are you?” Trent asked.

“22” Jack chirped.

Trent could not contain his look of incredulity.

Jack’s face was boyish and tanned. His eyes were bright. His clothes appeared to have been picked out by a loving mother.

“I wouldn’t have guessed that,” Trent shook his head in astonishment.

“October 21st 1984. How old are you?” Jack asked.

“Why not guess?” Trent mocked.

“17, 18 in two weeks” Jack confidently announced.

Trent almost choked, “What?!?”

“Well... Your birthday is on your fight stats,” Jack replied.

“Stalker,” Trent mocked.

“So do you take steroids or something?” Jack asked.

“Never!” Trent shot. “The only drug that comes near my body is caffeine.”

Jack sat quietly as Trent loosened up again.

“This is weird,” Jack announced, “I’ve never been older than anyone out here.”

“There has to be a first time for anything I suppose,” Trent joked.

Jack nodded and checked the sky, “We better get going young fella, it gets dark fast here, and there’s a storm charted.”

Jack punched Trent’s arm as he stood.

“You better go careful with the young fella’s and the punching, Jackyboy. You don’t wanna go starting something you can’t finish.”

“You’re not that tough. We’ll see how well you fight after a weeks farm work,” Jack added another punch.

“My guess is it will be a lot easier than six months in a boxing gym,” Trent mocked.

“You may be a boxing icon, but out here, I can wrestle a bull to the ground that out weighs you.”

Trent jumped off the bonnet to face Jack.

“Is that a challenge? Jackyboy!” Trent taunted.

Jack thought for a minute, then launched off of the bonnet at Trent.

Trent was caught off guard by the steep decent behind him. They toppled over, Jack on top of him, then Trent, then Jack.

Trent tried to control his fall, so he would land on top. Half way down, a sharp cramp like a whip, spanned from his shoulder to his hip.

The two scrambled clinched together down the hill. Jack seemed to give up on the last tumble before the bottom.

They hit the flat, Trent figured his back would be significantly bruised the next day, but ignored it in order to get the upper hand. Jack flipped like a rag doll at the when Trent made his manoeuvre. Trent positioned above him, looked down holding his arms pinned.

“Looks like I can out perform a bull,” Trent panted.

Jack did not respond.

“Jack!” Trent yelled. Trent released his arms and nudged Jack’s face lightly.

Jack was out cold.

Trent took a deep breath, trying to remember his first aid course.

First take one deep breath.

Trent checked Jack’s pulse.

Beating.

Breathing?

Normal.

He checked over Jack’s body for signs of injury.

No blood.

No apparent breaks.

Trent carefully cradled Jacks neck and back, turning him into a recovery position. Taking one last check of his breathing and his pulse, Trent bolted up the hill to get the car.

Rumbling to life, the car slowly nudged the crest of the hill and down towards Jack’s prostrate form.

Trent moved the car as close to Jack as he could. Jumping out, he ran around each door, looking for something to use as a stretcher. On his second pass, he noticed that the bench seat in the back could unclip from the chassis.

He ripped the seat out and placed it along side Jack. Tentatively positioning the seat along side him, Trent manoeuvred Jack into position.

With Jack on the seat, Trent ran to his bags, his head pounding.

Pulling out three sets of boxing straps. Trent ran back to the chair and proceeded to tie the wraps around Jack to secure him in place.

Heaving the entire makeshift stretcher and its occupant up, Trent carried it back to the car. Fumbling to secure it in place.

Finally ready to leave, Trent sat at the steering wheel in silence.

“Where the fuck do I go?” He screamed.

Frantically Trent searched around the dashboard. Inside the glove box he found a small satellite phone with Jack etched on the back.

He switched it on and watched as it meandered through its startup sequence. Then it paused.

“PIN CODE” it prompted

Trent slammed his hands on the steering wheel.

“FUCK!!!” he screamed.

October 21st 1984

He tried; *21101984*.

The phone beeped negatively.

He tried; *1984*.

The phone chirped happily, recommencing its slow boot sequence.

“Thank god,” he announced.

The phone read searching for almost a minute before it found signal.

Trent smashed the recent calls button, only one number appeared.

He dialed.

The phone rang.

A female voice answered, “Jack, where are you, dinner is in twenty minutes.”

“Hello?” Trent begged. “This is Trent, the guy Jack was picking up, I need to know how to get from the ridge overlooking the farm to where you are.”

“Why? What’s wrong, where is Jack?” The woman questioned.

“Jack’s knocked out. We were horsing around and he hit his head,” Trent blustered quickly.

“Oh. Well... um... If you head from the ridge west until you hit a Y junction then take the left fork, you should be here in about thirty minutes.”

“Ok, I’m heading off now,” Trent announced, ready to hang up.

“Just be calm, drive slowly, a car accident wont help either of you,” the woman mothered.

“I have to hang up now,” Trent stated, disconnecting the phone.

Trent started the car and took off down the track, stopping every few minutes to re-check Jack’s vitals. He was unusually thirsty, his mind seemed to be working in a slight fog.

Worse seemed to have followed Trent from Melbourne; the dark sky that was clear moments earlier, split with a fork of lightning. The flash was followed immediately by a torrential downpour of rain, that in an instant consumed the landscape.

Trent stopped to check Jack again, pausing briefly at the sound of the rain hitting the metal roof of the car. Noticing the flood-lights on the bull-bar, Trent flicked at switches on the dash.

He clicked one.

Nothing seemed to happen.

He clicked another.

The tail-gate lit up brilliantly.

He clicked the next three all at once.

The vistas lit up around him.

He hit the accelerator.

The car took off; much faster and louder then before.

Trent could finally see the homestead lights in the distance. The main gate, was already open.

Half a kilometre away when the car began to hiccup.

The lights faltered.

The engine jumped.

The car stopped dead.

“FUCK!” Trent screamed.

He jumped out of the car into the monsoonal downpour, ripped open the back door and unclipped the back seat again. Seat in his arms, he began to jog towards the lights in the distance.

The spongy seat filled with water quickly; getting heavier with every step he took. Two-hundred metres from the house, steep incline to the homestead started.

Trent dug his feet into the ground and surged as hard as his thighs could manage. His body was burning to give way.

As the hill crested to a landing, Trent stumbled, cradling the seat to the ground as he dropped.

Unable to move, he saw several legs appeared in the distance.

“You fail, you die, FIGHT HARDER!” He mouthed, his coach’s familiar refrain.

Surging his legs and arms, he forced himself up. Driving towards the group with everything he had left.

He made it to the first of the figures, two large men in long rain-coats.

He held up the seat long enough for the two men to take either side.

He watched them both stumble with the weight until a third arrived to assist.

He blinked as the three men stumbled Jack towards the house.

He blinked again as a group of people came out of the house.

He blinked again and everything went dark.

Chapter 4 – Wet Dreams

Jack was perfect. Skin of rich honey. Chiselled face. Perfect spacing between neat white teeth. Warm-brown eyes. Straight sand-gold hair. Sparse smatterings of hair on his arms, chest and legs. Abs down to his groin.

Trent watched as the naked figure of Jack melted away into the bare corrugated ceiling of an alien bedroom. It took a long minute to reboot and process his memories.

His arms ached as if they were stung by an army of bees.

As he tried to stand, gravity caught him off guard and he stumbled fell. Trudging out, he discovered himself alone in a massive wooden house. The kitchen was empty, the rooms were empty, everyone was gone. He looked outside, through a window, he remembered the scenery from the drive in. The sky was now clear and blue.

He went to the front door of the house and looked out. An identical house, was staring at him just twenty metres from where he was standing.

Wearing only briefs, Trent wondered towards the other house. At the door he could hear the bustle of a family home. He knocked on the front door. He waited for a moment, then rang the bell.

“Just hold your horses, I am getting there.” A sweet old woman’s voice announced. “Oh my goodness!” The old lady gasped as she looked out at Trent. “Well colour me tickled pink, if I had any interest in young men I would be in heaven.”

Trent grinned.

“Silent, enormous, gay and gorgeous. Are you lost?” She questioned.

“Perhaps. Um, I woke up in the house across there. I have no idea how I got there.” Trent answered.

“With no thought to being in your underclothes I suppose,” She smiled.

Trent looked down and blushed.

“Perhaps you should come inside and I’ll get you a towel.”

The woman looked for a second longer, then vanished.

Trent pulled open the door and walked into the house. Standing alone, near naked he walked along the corridor in the same direction as the woman.

As he passed a large archway, he turned to see a sea of eyes.

The country kitchen scene before him held, two teenaged girls, a middle aged woman, an older woman, a middle-aged man and Jack, all sitting perfectly still staring at him. Breakfast spoons remained in mid gulp, glasses held still in mid-air and three weeks later a voice spoke.

“Wow!” Said the other old woman. “Did anyone just wish a miracle?”

Trent recognised the voice from the phone last night. The two girls raised their hands, their eye’s locked on Trent’s winter white body.

The first old woman appeared at a far door.

“Ahh, I see you all have met...?” She began.

Trent looked to her with pleading eye’s.

She tossed over a towel.

Trent quickly wrapped it around his waist.

The middle-aged man spoke, “This is our gap year recruit, Trent.”

The two girls continued to stare up at him.

Jack silently ate his breakfast.

“Where are my clothes?” Trent squeaked.

The middle-aged woman returned to reading hr paper, “The ones you were wearing yesterday are still wet on the line. The rest I’d imagine are still in the car you left out on the drive.”

“Oh... Um, sorry I...” Trent trailed off

“Isobel. One spit of empathy maybe,” the middle-aged man asked.

The old woman sitting at the table stood, “Come dear, you look like you could eat a horse. Pull up a chair and have some breakfast.”

“Thankyou. But I think I’d like to be dressed before I eat,” Trent nodded.

“The girls will be disappointed. Jack, run up and grab him a shirt and some pants,” she directed.

“Nothing will fit him Grandma Joan,” Jack replied.

“Well that settles it,” Joan stated. “You have no options. Sit and eat as you are.”

Trent walked obediently to an empty seat and sat next to the middle-aged man.

“As you may have heard, I am Joan, this is my son Tom, his wife Isobel, his two daughters: Georgia and Grace, and Jack you already know,” Joan dutifully introduced everyone.

The first old woman entered the room again.

“And this is my life long friend, Teresa.” Joan finished.

Tom finally spoke up, “You are enormous.”

“I said that,” Teresa interrupted.

“Jack said you were a boxer,” Tom finished.

Trent nodded silently.

“You have a lot to explain to the Jackeroos. It took three of them to carry Jack inside,” Isobel ventured, pouring Trent a bowl of cereal.

Grace whispered to Georgia, “Who cares if he’s gay, he’s nice to look at.”

Trent heard the hissed the comment and stared deep into the cereal for an escape rout.

“I take it you’re fine then Jack?” Trent mumbled.

“I’ll live,” Jack stated.

“Cool.”

Trent stood.

“Thank you for the breakfast, I better get my clothes.”

“You haven’t eaten anything,” Joan stated.

“Pleasure to meet you all,” Trent bowed slightly.

Putting the towel on the back of his chair, Trent walked out.

“Well that was tactful girls,” Tom shot.

“What?” They replied in unison.

Trent got out of the front door and headed towards the driveway.

When he arrived at the car, his skin felt slightly burnt. The hot Queensland sun bit like a stepped on snake.

Opening the rain-clean tailgate, he riffled through one of his bags, grabbing a long sleeve shirt, a pair of old jeans and the boots his dad brought him. He shut the tailgate and walked around to the drivers seat. The key was still in the ignition, he tried it, the engine sputtered.

In the daylight he could see the labels under each switch. He flicked the switch marked LPG; an engine pressure light instantly blinked.

Sighing, he got out and flipped the Bonnet. Manually priming the lines made the ache in his arms worse, but after twenty minutes he had the car going again.

Revvng the engine until the hiccups stopped, Trent drove along the dirt track that wound around behind the family house. Arriving at a massive warehouse with a diesel and LPG tank out the front, Trent parked near the browsers and Trent left to investigate the building. Attempting first to open the locked roller doors, he walk around the side of the building and found an open door.

Inside, it was enormous. There were six other four-wheel drives, four tractors, an earth mover, two bull dozers and several other vehicles Trent did not recognise.

In the distance Trent could see a man working on one of the earthmovers.

“Hey,” Trent yelled.

“G’day,” the man returned, lifting his head out of the engine.

Trent stared for a moment; *this man was a hot mechanic*. He wore boots, torn jeans and nothing else.

He walked over to Trent and stuck out his hand.

“Pip,” he smiled.

“Trent,” Trent shook his hand.

“Oh, you’re the new kid. The nancy.” Pip nodded.

“Watch it!” Trent glared at him.

“Easy kid, it wasn’t an attack. What do you need?” Pip asked

“The four-wheel drive out the front needs fuel.” Trent stated.

“Ok. Follow me, I’ll show you where the keys are.” Pip walked over to the front roller door, hit a button to open it. Pip rolled under the yawning door. After sauntering over to the diesel pump, Pip stood watching as Trent waited for the garage door to open before he to walked over.

“Alright, diesel pump,” he bent over and opened a hatch underneath the bowser.

Trent breathing became heavier as Pip’s well defined back flexed in front of him, the top of Pip’s jeans hid nothing.

“See these switches?” Pip looked back at Trent.

Trent nodded.

“Flick ‘em all on, then it’s like any pety station.”

“What about LPG?”

“Same thing.”

“Right. Thanks.”

Trent walked back to the four-wheeled-drive.

“How old are you kid?” Pip called.

“Why?” Trent replied, still walking.

“You’re my room mate, though a *con-ver-sation* was called for,” Pip stated.

“I turn 18 on Friday,” Trent turned to look at Pip.

“Well rudeness makes sense then.” Pip shrugged.

“What are *you* talking about? Calling me a nancy, showing off your arse while priming a petrol pump. I thought rudeness was the theme,” Trent mocked.

“So your not just a sawdust then?” Pip chided.

“I have no idea,” Trent replied.

“You could at least be grateful. I did lug your heavy arse in out of the rain last night,” Pip smiled.

“Did you cop a good feel?” Trent spun on his heal and got into the car. Pip stood at the Diesel bowser smiling.

Trent finished with the car and parked it back in the shed without looking at Pip again. He grabbed his bags up, cueing the pain in his arms and back again. Managing to find the room he woke up in, he checked one of the cupboards for space. It was filled with Pip’s cloths. The opposite cupboard was empty.

After three hours of laying out all of his clothes and hanging them all up inside the cupboard, Trent was hungry. A pungent stench found its way into Trent’s nostral. He leant down to his smell armpits, the odour was overpowering.

“A day without deodorant will do that out here,” Jack said from behind him.

“Yeah. I think I’ll go find a shower.” Trent moved across the room towards the door.

Jack stopped Trent with his hand.

“Hey, Look. I came over to thank you.”

“For what?” Trent scoffed.

“You know what.”

Trent looked blankly at him.

“Well you ran me and a hundred kilo chair full of water half a k up a hill in the rain. Not to mention everything else you must have done at the drop off.”

“Yeah, that would warrant some sort of thanks,” Trent blinked at Jack.

“Look when I woke up inside, I got excited and blurted about you a little too much,” Jack explained, gesturing expansively.

Trent smiled.

“I don’t care what you told anyone Jack, I’m out. I was just cut that you stonehedged me this morning.”

“You walked into the house half naked and all the guys had just finished paying me out about being carried to the house.”

Trent grimaced.

“Did you really pass out?”

“Apparently,” Trent blushed and looked away.

“The guys were all talking about you this morning. They said it took three of them to haul me and the chair into the house.”

Trent blushed even deeper.

“Most of them were pretty cut they didn’t get to meet you this morning, even after they knew you were gay. Pip was even talking about setting up a boxing room downstairs.”

“Yeah I met Pip at the garage,” Trent added.

“He said it would be pretty easy. All we’d need is a few supplies from town and they could build the rest. I showed them some of your videos, everyone wants you to teach them,” Jack’s excitement, impossible as it seemed, continued to grow.

“I’m not a coach Jack,” Trent shrugged.

“That’s ok. We’ll build the room anyway, at least you will have somewhere to workout.”

Trent looked around the room anxiously.

“I think I’m going to be spending more time learning to ride a horse,” Trent admitted.

“You can’t ride a horse?!” Jack laughed. “Do you live under a rock?”

“Well there aren’t many horses in the city,” Trent answered.

“Oh, yeah. Well. Ok. Let’s go,” Jack reasoned.

“Go where?”

“To the stables. We’ll pick you a horse and I’ll teach you to ride,” Jack stated.

“I was just going to have a shower. I stink remember,” Trent avoided.

“All the better. The horses will prefer it. The stables stink anyway.” Jack announced. “Besides, if you can’t ride you’re no use to us. The trikes don’t get very far on one tank of gas and without a horse it will take you days to get anywhere.”

Trent chucked his toiletries bag back into the cupboard.

“So what are the basic rules for horses?” Trent asked.

“Don’t stand behind them,” Jack replied.

Jack walked down the stairs towards the back of the house. Then he ducked into a small laundry and out a side door.

“Where are you going?”

“To the stables, weren’t you listening?” Jack looked over his shoulder as he was walking.

“Though a laundry?” Trent requested.

“It’s the quickest way,” Jack shrugged, walking down the hill behind the house.

Trent could not see anything that looked like a stable in the distance.

“How far away is this stable?”

“About ten minutes,” Jack called back.

Trent stopped and stared at him.

“Should we expect black riders to be crossing the plain in pursuit, or will Gandalf be along directly?” Trent yelled to Jack’s back and trotted to catch up.

Jack turned suddenly, “What colour *would* you prefer?”

Trent was caught off guard again and fell right over Jack, knocking them both to the ground.

“What planet do you live on?” Jack joked from underneath Trent.

“You scared the crap out of me,” Trent huffed, pushing himself off Jack.

“Who is Gandalf?”

“That was a lord of the rings joke.”

“Oh, haven’t seen it,” Jack replied, sitting up.

“Or read it?” Trent asked, offering Jack a hand.

“Nah, but you just spaced out like I do. Dad tells me I am wondering around Pluto. Where do you go?” Jack asked accepting the hand and heaving himself up.

“I can think of one planet that would actually make sense,” Trent chuckled.

“Uranus?” Jack questioned.

“Why are you so interested?”

“Just interested. Can’t say I get to talk to many young blokes out here. Pip is the closest to my age and all he can talk about is cars,” Jack replied.

“Ok, well I know a lot of dirty old gay men that would say something seedy like Uranus as a pitiful innuendo. I hate that. I held it back,” Trent admitted.

“It would have been a good call. I would have laughed,” Jack smiled. “Keep moving.” Jack gestured north and moved off.

Trent stayed at his side.

“At me suggesting you have a good arse,” Trent probed.

“No, I know I have a good arse,” Jack stated.

Trent began to laugh.

“You’re not low on modesty out here,” Trent mocked.

“Don’t be like that, I know who I am and how I look. I know I can’t stay on this property forever if I ever want to have kids. Being here doesn’t change the fact that I look better than most guys,” Jack announced.

“There’s pride in yourself, then there’s just arrogance Jackyboy,” Trent laughed.

“Why? I know you are good looking for a man. My sisters even told you that this morning,” Jack said seriously.

“Ok but you don’t talk about it,” Trent returned.

“Why? We are in the middle of nowhere, a thousand kilometres from the nearest city, how would anyone know? If anyone asks, I’ll lie,” Jack shrugged.

“This place is certainly different,” Trent shook his head, still chuckling.

“Out here if you want a complement, you have to give it to yourself, no-one else will give it to you.”

Trent glimpsed a massive wooden building off in the distance behind a group of trees.

“Is that where we are going?”

“Yep, that’s the main stables,” Jack pointed at the building. “So you didn’t answer. What colour do you want?”

“What colour what?”

“What colour horse do you want?” Jack stated slowly.

“I can have a colour?” Trent asked.

“You’re havin me on?”

Trent shook his head.

“Christ man! You must have grown up on Mars. We have grey, brown, black and white. They all usually have different temperaments. Then you can chose between sex and size, everything really.”

“I think you better choose for me, the last time I was near a horse was at a circus,” Trent admitted.

“This is going to be a long day mate,” Jack chuckled. “Your arse is hunna hurt more than ever, even for you.” Jack laughed.

Trent stared at him.

“I thought I was the first gay bloke out here?”

“As far as I know, but it will.”

They arrived at the stable within *twenty* minutes. Jack took Trent around to the main door. Inside there were about twenty horses and there was room for another forty. Jack took Trent over to a particularly beautiful white horse.

“This is my mare, Leia. I only got her a few weeks ago when my old horse Brax broke his leg. We had to put him down the day before yesterday,” Jack sighed, a deep sadness crossed his face. “All of the Jackeroos have their horses at the moment, so you’re pretty much free to take your pick of the horse you want. Except for the five in the far stalls, they belong to the rest of the family,” Jack’s voice had noticeably changed.

“Would you choose one that you think would fit me?” Trent requested.

“Usually I would say no to that. This will sound weird, but I have this feeling I have known you for ages. I think it is just because I watched your fights so many times. I figure you and Bill would get along well,” Jack blushed a little at his revelation.

“Who is Bill?” Trent asked.

“Bill is an eleven year old black gelding, he sired Brax.” Jack answered, looking morose once again. “Sired means he was his father, gelding means neutered.” Jack added. “He’s over there.” Jack pointed. Jack walked towards the back of the stable and stopped at a stall that looked empty. Jack stood and waited, “Come over and call him.”

Trent walked across and waited for his eyes to adjust. Squinting he could almost make out the outline of a horse.

“Bill!” Trent called in a high-pitched voice that he immediately regretted.

Trent found himself instantly face to face with a pitch-black head looking at him through sparkling brown eyes. Bill blinked at Trent, then looked over to Jack and attempted to bite him.

“He has a foul mood, but he is very strong. No one else is big enough for him,” Jack jumped back avoiding another attempted bite.

Bill turned back to Trent, his face an inch away from Trent’s. Nudging his head forward at Trent, Bill head-butted him.

Trent head-butted him back.

Bill looked completely shocked, let out a massive sneeze then just stood there. Jack moved closer to Trent.

“No-ones been able to stand that close to him since he was gelded.”

Bill nipped at Jack again, Trent took the cue and nipped back at Bill. Bill was about to go at Jack again and Trent spoke up.

“No! Don’t Bill,” Trent scolded.

Bill just stared at Trent for a moment, then again stood quietly.

“I’ll grab a saddle, open the gate, see if he will come out with you,” Jack whispered, standing close to Trent, Bill ignored him this time. Jack disappeared towards the front of the stables.

Trent opened the gate and took Bill's reigns.

Bill nuzzled him for a minute.

Trent tried calling him a few times, then patted his knees and called.

Bill just stood staring blankly at him.

Trent figured he must have to lead him, he tentatively tugged on the reigns, holding him close to the nose as he had seen on the racing channel.

Bill followed next to Trent happily.

When Jack arrived, carrying two saddles back he was stunned that Trent had managed to move Bill an inch.

"How did you get him out here?" Jack balked.

"You told me too," Trent replied.

Jack laughed, "He likes you, I knew he would."

"I understand his secret pain," Trent smiled.

"What secret pain?" Jack mocked.

"Outcast, weird, big, strong. I'd be pissed too if someone cut off my balls," Trent stated indignantly.

"Right, sure you don't complement yourself. Take the left saddle," Jack offered it up to Trent, "I'll get Leia and show you what to do."

As Jack left, Trent noticed that there was a neatly folded blanket on top of the saddle.

Jack appeared again with an arctic white horse.

Trent saw Bill preparing to have a go at it.

"Ah! NO!" Trent growled.

Bill immediately arched back.

"I can't believe that. He usually would be going off," Jack shook his head.

Trent blushed again.

"Ok. So go round to his left side and put the blanket on his shoulders down as far as it will go."

Bill stood perfectly still as Trent flattened the blanket.

"Then place the saddle like I am," Trent copied Jack's as he saddled Leia.

Bill remained still.

“Should I be worried about riding him?” Trent questioned.

“No,” Jack replied. “He may be moody bugger, but he still is the best riding horse on the farm.”

Jack came over to check the stirrups and buckles.

“Perfect.” Jack announced. “Do you know how to get on?”

Trent looked at him quizzically.

“Ok, you don’t. One foot in here and throw your other leg over.” Jack pointed at the stirrups. “Watch.” Jack went around to Leia. Put one foot in the right stirrup and threw his leg over. “Remember, foot in the stirrup, knee in the shoulder and relax.”

Trent tried to copy Jack. He failed.

“16th times the charm hey,” Trent grimaced, his back and arms were aching, but he was finally on.

Jack went through a series of instructions on riding a horse. Jack then jumped off Leia to unlock the gate, so they could have a “test ride”.

After a few hours, Trent was starting understand the basics. Bill behaved perfectly.

When they arrived at the west quarter dam, Jack instructed Trent to carefully edge Bill forward for a drink.

As Bill drank, Trent shifted is aching arse in the saddle, squeezing his legs too hard. Bill jumped into the water happily, and the last thing Trent saw were his feet in the air as he flew over Bills head. Slapping back first into the water.

When Trent finally surfaced, Jack, Leia and Bill were standing happily on the shore. Bill was already drying off, Toni stood eating grass, and Jack was on his knee’s, laughing hysterically.

Trent looked to Jack in horror. His back felt like it was on fire from his shoulder to his hip. He could not move, the heaviness of the water in his clothes pulled him under.

Chapter 5 - Pip

Peter Isaac Packer: Pip, was one of those kids that could program a VCR from two years old. He pulled his mother's brand new camera apart at three, but could not put it back together, using 'all the parts' until he was four. Girls at school never payed much attention to him, being an 'audio/visual geek'.

Not that Pip cared. After one speedo saunter at the swimming carnival, Matt, the pent up prodigy of donation crazy parents, and, captain of the swim team, came to the theatre control room for a 'look-around'. The two never separated for longer than a day after that, boy's will be boy's, and these ones had a lot of sex too.

The end of school came about with the end of Pip and Matt; Matt went to college and Pip retreated west.

The outback became as bigger part of Pip as Matt had left empty. It all made sense to him, lonely Jackeroos were as common as bedrock and his mechanical skills kept him payed.

Three days after Pip's twenty-eighth birthday, he had lived at Karawara for exactly ten years. The phone rang in the main room, followed by Jeff shouting.

"The bosses son is hurt, suit up!"

Pip ran to the lounge room and chucked on his dry-asa-bone coat.

"What's happening?" He asked Jeff as the room filled with workers.

"Sawdust is haulin Jack up here on foot. Car died about a k out. They need elp," Jeff announced as he was throwing on his own coat.

Pip and Jeff stepped out into the downpour and several other workers followed behind them. They spotted a dark form carrying what looked like a coffin towards the homestead. All together they sprinted towards him. Pip, being quite short, had never tried to run in any form, he was a body builder for show, nothing more, he fell quite a bit behind the others. Watching as Jeff and two other workers took a dislodged car seat and were barely able to haul it together, Pip approached the sawdust, who suddenly dropped face first into the mud. Jeff called out to the others for assistance.

"Pip, Dan, help him inside! He's housing with you Pip," Jeff called back, his voice strained by bearing such weight.

"Roll him over, I'll take his feet," Pip called out.

Dan nodded.

Pip locked his arms under the Sawdust's shoulders. They got him to the house and up the stairs by the time Tom arrived.

"How's Trent?" Tom panted.

"Heavy as lead," Pip replied, panting.

"Get the wet clothes off him, the doctor will be over in a minute to check him," Tom ordered, bending down to take his shoes off.

"How is Jack?" Pip requested.

"Still out, he has a few bruises and most probably a concussion, but should be fine. The doctor's trying to wake him up now," Tom detailed, chucking Trent's wet boots and socks into a bag he produced from his pocket.

"Why was he on a car seat?" Pip asked.

"He'd been tied to it. The doctor figures it was to protect his spine, young Trent here must know first aid."

Tom took a long appraising look at Trent.

"We can't figure out what happened," Tom shrugged.

Pip struggled to remove Trent's sloppy shirt. Pip chucked the shirt in the bag and went for the belt, only to be beaten by Tom.

Tom unbuckled Trent's belt and peeled off the wet jeans. Tom stood up, dumped the jeans into the bag and handed it to Tom

"Take them over to Isobel, get her to clean them. Tell her it's the price for a rescued son," Tom ordered.

Dan left the room with the bag as the doctor walked in.

"Jack's fine, has a nasty headache and a few superficial cuts. The last thing he remembers is rolling down the drop off wrestling with Trent here," The doctor shrugged. "Must have hit a rock."

"What about Trent?" Tom gestured at the man in his underwear on the floor.

"I'd say he just over pushed himself, the chair he was carrying Jack on was extremely heavy. But I best check his back, it will at the very least confirm Jack's story." The doctor laughed. He leaned down and tried to pry Trent off the floor, failing twice.

“Could I ask a hand?” Said the doctor looking up.

Pip almost jumped at the opportunity. As Trent’s body shifted, a large line of blood, extending the length of Trent’s left shoulder to his right hip was on the wood floor. A matching line was cut across Trent’s back.

“Oh my,” the doctor gasped. “I think we know exactly why Trent passed out.”

Pip shifted his position to check out the injury, his eyes nearly shooting from his head.

“Jesus Christ! Won’t that need stiches?” Pip gasped.

“Not at all, just a bandage, it isn’t overly deep.” The doctor made this announcement to the room in general.

As the doctor leant back to open his bag, Tom stepped over to see the cut.

“I’d say the rain made it re-open and the water wouldn’t let the blood clot. He’ll be fine.” The doctor was lecturing this into his bag as he removed a long piece of gauze and cut it to the length of his forearm.

With Trent bandaged and resting on his unmade bed, the doctor took his leave, announcing that he should check on Jack once more.

Tom stood staring at Trent for a moment.

“What is it?” Pip raised an eyebrow at Tom.

“It’s bizarre. He’s like a child with a man’s body,” Tom replied. “His back must have hurt like hell. Still he looked after Jack, strapped him to a chair, drove him for 45 minutes, and carried him and a chair the last 500 metres after the engine died.” Tom shook his head in disbelief. “Why would he do all of that for a simple concussion?”

“Probably didn’t know it was,” Pip shrugged.

“You don’t meet people that sacrifice themselves for others often Pip. For two reasons, they don’t usually last long enough to be met, or they don’t value themselves enough to be overly social,” Tom announced.

“Maybe he’s just a hero?”

“Maybe it was just adrenaline.” Tom pursed his lips. “I better go check on the boy, call if he has any problems.” Tom nodded his head at Pip, still perturbed as he left the room.

Pip took a moment to collect himself before turning around to look at Trent again. The boy in front of him could not be over 18. He had no scars, no moles, just pure milky skin that was obviously very well groomed. Pip turned around to shut the door, he stripped his wet coat off, then his shoes, his shirt and his pants, hanging them up in the bathroom to dry. He walked back into the room in his underwear and stood next to Trent's resting form. For a moment he only looked over every inch of his body, then lent down to his lips, reaching his mouth with a turned head, putting an ear to his lips. Trent was breathing fine.

Pip walked back over to the door to flick off the light switch, retiring to his own bed. In the darkness Pip could hear the soft intake of air drifting into and out of Trent. His dreams tonight were going to be good, the one time he was going to be able to imagine Trent as he wanted too, without any tarnish of reality.

Pip woke, as usual, when the first streak of light shot through the window. Trent lay in his bed unchanged from the night before, perhaps slightly more definition across his chest in the morning light. Pip proceeded into the bathroom to begin his morning ritual.

Every morning he would wake up, take a long shower; wash his hair, scrub his body and cleanse his face. Then, after making sure to shave perfectly, he would dry his hair and dressing would take place.

Now, Pip would spend nearly an hour making himself look messy, trying to present the no effort 'rolled out of bed look'. Until now Pip had never the worry of a roommate, the house was always under filled and he carried enough 'leverage' with Jeff to remain alone. Tom, however, had decided this new kid shouldn't have to live with anyone too old.

Pip was putting the final touches on his hair, 35 minutes after beginning the initial touches, when he heard Jeff's door squeak open; indicating the working day was 8 minutes away. The exact amount of time it took Jeff to finish his morning work on the porcelain. Pip stood in the middle of the room deciding whether to wake the sawdust or not... Not. He ran over to his cupboard and grabbed his boots, chucked them on. Intentionally forgoing underwear, hoping Jeff may make his weekly 'inspection' today.

Pip arrived at the table just as Jeff was exiting from his 8 minute morning dump; regular as clockwork. This tradition had been so for the last ten years; except for one Christmas when he had over indulged on the date cake Mrs McCoach had given him. It was a memory the whole farm described with distain.

Sitting down as Cookie planted a tray of fresh cooked eggs and bacon in front of his seat, Pip dove in. He was happily slurping down the first strip of bacon just as the toast arrived.

Jeff took a seat next to Pip as he was shovelling over his second helping.

“Inspection today Pip,” Jeff boomed, snapping his paper open in front of him.

“Yes sir,” Pip mumbled with a mouthful of egg and toast.

“Juice Cookie!” Jeff yelled towards the kitchen.

Resulting in Cookie crashing out of the kitchen with two pitchers of orange juice at hand. Cookie placed a pitcher at each end of the table, before stopping at Jeff’s side.

“What will breakfast involve today, captain?” Cookie smiled, glaring at the gluttonous behaviour of Pip.

“Leave him be Cookie. He has the tractor overhaul today.” Jeff spoke without looking away from the paper. “Poached over easy, corn beef, tomato, rye toast.”

“5 minutes,” Cookie replied, bustling back to the kitchen.

“That wasn’t charity Pip, I need all four tractors back out before midday or the whole schedule goes down,” Jeff added.

“Two and Three are already finished, One and Four will be ready by nine.” Pip replied while masticating a mouth full of bacon.

The paper finally loosing the battle of attention, Jeff looked at Pip, “Between five yesterday and now you’ve replaced hydraulics on two Tractors?”

“Yep.” Pip took a proud swing of orange juice.

Jeff shook his head in disbelief, returning to his paper, “You said twelves a *fat chance?*”

“A good mechanic always gives himself time,” Pip smiled, wiping his mouth and standing.

“Whe’re you off too so early?” Jeff questioned.

“Gotta check the sawdust again before I head over,” Pip announced.

“Jack seems quite taken, he’s a boxer, all he could talk about this morning. Wouldn’t’ve thought a shirt lifter, didn’t think limp wrists and boxing would go,” Jeff shook his head

“Can’t say I guessed myself. He has a two-foot gash across his back. Mr McCoach said that bench can’t have come in under 200 kg. Carrying it half a k in the rain must have been a task with flimsy wrists too,” Pip replied.

“Let him rest, Tom’s cleared his first few day’s off,” Jeff ordered. “If one and four are ready by seven you can knock off at twelve.”

“What time would that make inspection?” Pip countered.

“Right after roll call,” Jeff said to his paper.

“I’ll get started now,” Pip announced, bee-lining out the front door.

Pip finished both tractors before six and headed off on his rounds to make sure the actual inspecting would only take a few seconds. Pip called over to the main house at 6:50 to announce the completion of the tractors. By seven, all tractors had been collected and Pip decided to accelerate his plan to disassemble the earthmover. He shucked his shirt and shoes, and crawled inside the diggers belly.

In no time at all Pip heard a loud banging on the outside of the earthmover. He crawled out to yell at the culprit and found Jeff leaning on the rear wheel beating a clipboard against the frame.

“You missed roll call,” Jeff announced.

Pip checked his wristwatch.

“9:30! Wow, sorry sir.”

“I finished the checklist. Everything is present and accounted for. Except my engineer,” Jeff looked at the clipboard.

“Sorry sir,” Pip sighed, pulling himself out of the engine and standing before Jeff.

“I’ll get my shirt.”

“Leave it,” Jeff commanded.

The sound of a four-wheeled-drive approaching, marked the end of the inspection. A few seconds later the formerly unconscious sawdust wondered into Pip’s garage.

“Hey,” Trent yelled.

Chapter 6 – Stabbing in the back.

Trent watched as the water engulfed his eyes, Jack's image fading from clear to distorted into blackness. The pain across his back pulsed as if he had just been whipped.

Jack opened his eyes, the image of his boxing hero careering through the sky seemed limitlessly hysterical. The water's surface was still, Trent was gone.

“TRENT!” Jack yelled at the water.

Jumping off Leia, Jack grabbed a rope from saddlebag. He quickly fastened the rope around the saddle horn, and then around his waist. The cool sting of the water made him flinch as he waded in. Trent was not more than two metres from the edge, but when Jack reached him he realised it was futile. Trent plus drenched clothes was too difficult to lift as he swam

Returning to the surface for air, Jack dropped below the water again, this time grabbing Trent under the shoulders. As a hand connected with Trent's back, Trent flinched violently knocking Jack away. Jack swam to his front, locking his arms with Trent's. Forcefully kicking off the bottom for the surface, Jack managed to get both heads above for air. Jack locked his arms around Trent and screamed at Leia.

Leia took off. The rope around Jack's waist snapped taught dragging both men to the shore. The careering horse, unaware of her success, continued to pull, dragging Jack across the field. Jack struggled to release the knot, but it had been pulled tight.

Jack screamed at Leia again, causing her to hit the anchors and stop abruptly. Stumbling to his feet, Jack shimmied out of the rope and ran back to Trent. Writhing in agony, Trent lay on the bank feebly attempting to reach his own back. Jack skidded the last few metres, kneeling at his side.

“Trent! Trent, what's wrong?”

“It burns, my back. My back!” Trent cringed.

“Stay still,” Jack begged.

Pulling a pocket knife out of his belt, Jack cut Trent's shirt down the middle. Spreading it open, a crimson stained bandage extended from Trent's shoulder to his hip.

“Trent, what is this bandage for?” Jack asked.

“What bandage?” Trent gasped.

“I have to take it off. It's gunna hurt.”

“Get it off, it hurts already!”

Jack peeled the bandage off. Trent bucked violently at each movement. Jack eventually had the whole bandage off, but the pain continued. The cut, now a deep gash, had started to bleed profusely.

“Wait here, I have to get my flask,”

Jack jumped up. Running over to Leia, he grabbed his water flask from the saddle and bolted back.

“Trent, I am going to clean it,” Jack announced.

Trent nodded, clenching his teeth and his eyes.

Jack bit his lower lip, moving around so Trent could rest his chest on his knees.

“Take my hand, just try not to crush it, ok.”

Trent let out a small pained laugh as he nodded.

Jack poured the fresh water along the cut.

Trent screamed through his clenched teeth.

Jack poured until the bottle was empty.

Slowly, the grip Trent had on his hand began to lessen and his gasping slowed.

Trent stayed lying on Jack's knees for several minutes before he could talk.

“Thanks,” Trent whispered.

“I figure you'd do the same for me,” Jack chuckled.

“Can I just have an uneventful outback experience from now on, I didn't order the action package?” Trent joked, his voice returning to normal.

“Trent, this is bleeding badly, we have to get you home?” Jack questioned.

“Ok, give me a hand. If I keep my back stiff it should be ok.”

Trent found that twisting of any kind, offered a new experience in pain. He could not move.

“Alright. If I put my knees under both of your shoulders and your head in my lap, I can leave you upright,” Jack said as he began to shift from underneath Trent.

Jack moved around to Trent's shoulders, “Ready? One, two, Three!”

Trent heaved his body upright, roaring in pain.

“Are you ok?” Jack begged.

Trent's eyes were closed, he was breathing heavily.

“Let’s just say, now I’m up, I better have to stay up for a while,” Trent panted.

Jack watched Trent for a moment before standing, his back was still bleeding and his jaw was clenched.

“I don’t think you’ll make the walk back like this. Do you think you can ride?”

“I doubt I can get up,” Trent admitted.

“If I can get Bill to lye down, you shouldn’t have too,” Jack proposed.

“I think we should get this shirt off first.” Trent gasped as the flap of the tattered wet shirt attached to the cut.

Jack ran around to Trent’s back and began peeling the shirt back off the cut.

Trent sharply inhaled.

Once it was off again Jack cut the neck and slipped the shirt off from the front.

Jack chucked the shirt on the floor then headed over to Bill.

“Down Bill!”

Bill stood firm, rearing up to snap at Jack.

Jack held his gaze, “DOWN BILL!” he demanded.

Bill backed down, dropping to his knees then to his stomach.

Trent stood watching, he smirked as Jack won the battle.

Moving to step over the horse, Trent grabbed Jack’s shoulder for support. Once he was sitting on the saddle, hugging Bill’s neck, he looked back to Jack.

“It’s winning the little battles that builds the strength to win the big ones,” Trent smiled.

“That’s very deep mate,” Jack chuckled.

“Try panicking. See what happens then,” Trent grinned.

Jack smiled back, shaking his head.

“Up Bill!” he demanded.

Bill responded immediately, pushing himself up off the ground. Jack ran over to Leia and jumped on in one fluid movement. He kicked her sides and guided her over to take Bill’s reigns.

Back at the stables, Trent was still hugging Bills neck, but his consciousness was failing.

“Do you think you can make the homestead? There is nothing here that will help us,” Jack admitted.

The cut on Trent’s back was still bleeding and he white pale.

“I’d say it looks worse than it is,” Trent nodded.

“I’d say you’re hiding how much it hurts.”

“Fine, if you stop looking at me, I’ll stop hiding how much it hurts,” Trent smiled.

“At least your sense of humour is still terrible,” Jack replied.

“At least I got my head in your crotch,” Trent mocked. “And, within two days, you hussy!”

Jack laughed.

“See I laughed. I told you I’d laugh..”

Trent started to pant.

“Seriously, we should get back, quickly. I’m really getting thirsty and that bad.”

“Right Bill, lets step it up some,” Jack kicked into Leia and both horses cantered towards the Homestead.

Finally arriving at the house, Trent’s colour had, if possible, become whiter. Jack was having trouble keeping him focused. Stopping outside the front door, Jack ran inside to find his mum and call the doctor. Moments later Isobel ran outside followed by Teresa, Joan, Jack and Tom. Trent was still lying on the horse, he looked drunk.

“Jack what is he doing on Bill,” Isobel yelled.

“Jack, help me get him down,” Tom ordered.

“No dad. No need,” Jack put his hand on Tom to hold him back. “DOWN BILL!” Jack ordered.

Bill obeyed, dropping first to his knees then too his belly.

“How did you do it?” Tom gaped.

“Trent did,” Jack answered.

“One fighter to another,” Joan posed.

“Can you stand?” Jack whispered into Trent’s ear.

Trent could barely lift his head, “I don’t think so mate.”

“Dad, come help. Don’t touch his back.” Jack put his head underneath Trent’s shoulder, Tom followed suit. Trent groaned a little to be lifted, but they made it inside without hurting him terribly.

“Where’s are we going, Jack?” Tom asked.

“Put him in my room, I don’t want to try the stairs.” Jack grunted.

Trent was now drifting in and out of consciousness. His weight seemed increase as they got to Jack’s room. Laying him face down on the bed, Tom studied the cut briefly.

“This is worse than it was,” Tom stated.

Isobel flew in with a first aid kit, towels and a bottle of whiskey.

“I don’t know what good it will do. I have no idea what to do with a cut like that,” She admitted. “What happened?”

“He fell into the water, nearly drowned,” Jack answered.

“It happened last night, the doctor saw it, he said it was fine,” Tom added.

“Well it isn’t fine now, Tom,” Isobel interjected.

“He didn’t even know where the bandage came from,” Jack said.

Trent woke up again.

“Hey!” Trent announced shakily.

Jack moved over so Trent could see him.

“You’re at the homestead,” Jack replied.

Trent took a moment to focus on him.

“Hey Jack,” he grimaced, “Is this your room?”

“Yeah,” Jack nodded.

“Oh no Jack, why do have super hero posters?” Trent blinked.

“You’re hurt mate, just hang in there,” Jack smiled.

“You should know man, my back really feels awful,” Trent whispered, uncontrollably shaking his head.

Teresa arrived at the door with the doctor.

The doctor rushed over to Trent and checked his back then his eyes.

“What happened?” He asked.

“I was teaching him to ride and he came off and fell into the water. He was under for a minuted and I had to drag him out. I pulled off the bandage because it was blood red and washed it off with water from my flask, his back I mean. And we had to ride back, it took a while,” Jack stammered.

“Jack calm down,” Isobel hushed, taking his arm.

“He must have torn the wound. I will have to stitch it. I am going need some help,” The doctor looked up.

“I was a scrub nurse for 40 years,” Teresa announced.

“Good, you stay.” The doctor opened his bag and took out a needle. After spraying a little and flicking it, he injected it straight into Trent’s exposed ass cheek.

“Guys you should leave,” Teresa directed.

They family filed out. Tom closed the door once they were outside. A pained roar sounded from behind the door and a bottle broke, suddenly Teresa burst out though the door.

“I need more alcohol and boiling water, and towels,” she commanded.

“I’ll get the kettle going and grab towels,” Jack sped off.

“I have peroxide in the Bathroom, and gin or vodka?” Isobel announced

“Bring it all,” Teresa answered.

“What happened?” Tom queried.

“He’s a very big boy, the sedative wasn’t completely in effect when we tried to start. He bucked smashed the doctors alcohol and tore out the first stitch,” Teresa replied.

“Will he be ok?” Tom requested.

“It should be fine, but he’s lost a lot of blood, and added to last night... And it is going to take weeks to heal,” Teresa frowned.

Jack returned with a steaming kettle and a pile of towels.

Teresa grabbed both and disappeared back into the room.

“Tell Isobel to come in when she gets back,” Teresa shouted over her shoulder.

Jack and Tom headed outside to wait.

Tom studied at his son for a moment.

“What a bizarre two days,” Tom puffed. “You’ve both managed to drag each other home unconscious,” Tom laughed. “I suppose this makes you even.”

“Not quite.” Jack looked away.

“What’s wrong?” Tom questioned.

“This is my fault; I dove at Trent and knocked us down the drop off, then I took him riding,” Jack admitted.

“I have a feeling it wasn’t intentional. It’ll be fine,” Tom assured him. “You both seem to bring each other luck. How else could you pull that lug out of the water?”

“I tied a rope on Leia and she pulled us out,” Jack answered.

“God, that was lucky,” Tom nodded.

“How?” Jack requested.

“Lucky you insisted on training Leia. Brax would have been in the water with you,” Tom chuckled.

Jack thought about that for a minute.

“Trent could be dead now if I hadn’t taken Leia.”

Half an hour later the front door swung open and the doctor walked out.

“He’s bandaged up, and he is dosing. If you want to talk to him, but he needs to rest for a while,” the doctor announced. “Just insist that he not move. He should avoid moving at all for the next few days.”

“That’s easy, there are two beds in there anyway,” Jack replied.

“He will want to get up tomorrow, he must stay still,” said the doctor. “Except for bathroom breaks, no movement! Even then, he should not twist or bend.”

“Thanks Doctor Hayes. Thanks dad.” Jack walked inside.

“What did you do?” Doctor Hayes questioned.

“Helped with the guilt,” Tom replied.

“That was quick.”

“Jack’s always picked things up fast,” Tom smiled.

Condemned to rest for two days, a guilt-ridden servant doddering around him and a two foot scar on his back, Trent was belligerent, to say the least.

Jack was continuously bringing in snacks, or movies he had just downloaded. Trying everything he could to stay calm, Trent eventually snapped, scolding Jack viciously. He regretted it immediately, offering that it was just because Jack was putting his own needs on hold to help.

Jack left the room looking confused, he returned minutes later with his laptop.

“Come on Jack, go. Don’t you have jobs on the western fence?” Trent suggested.

“Well, you said do what I want. I have about nine of your fights I downloaded that I want to ask you about,” Jack shrugged, “Want to watch them?”

“No!” Trent rolled his eyes, “But it’s about time I don’t get pampered.”

Jack grinned and sat down next to Trent with the laptop balancing on his knees. He fiddled with the mouse and brought up several fight videos.

For the next six hours, Trent watch himself in reverse, slow motion, compared to later fights, compared to other fighters. And finally, deconstructed by other fighters.

“Enough!” Trent bellowed, “God almighty, start them on the gym already, I’ll just teach you. But please, never make me watch another video of myself with you, ever!”

“But at least you found out you drop your left shoulder,” Jack offered, “Besides, they finished the gym yesterday.”

“How long have I been trapped in here?” Trent whined.

“It hasn’t been that long, and it could be worse. You could be over in the workers house,” Jack replied

“Yes it could be worse. How long do I have to stay in here?”

“You’re allowed to move around a bit more tomorrow morning, as long as it doesn’t hurt too much,” Jack closed the laptop.

“I stink like hell! Spongw baths suck, when can I shower again?” Trent repeated for the fifteenth time.

“Tomorrow, but we have to cover the bandage and replace it afterwards,” Jack replied, “Teresa will miss the sponge baths though I think.

“Jack, go back to work, you have to stop looking after me,” Trent requested.

“And do what? There isn’t anyone else to help you, they all have their own work,” Jack reminded him, “My job was supposed to be training you for the next few weeks anyway.”

“Can’t we do some of that in here?”

“No. It is all hands on, we’ll start in a few days.”

“What do you mean we shower? There is no way you are coming into the shower with me too,” Trent replied

“What has the big man a bit modest downstairs?” Jack mocked.

“No, the big man will get bigger if another man touches him, me in the shower,” Trent grunted.

“Oh,” Jack drew out his realisation. “Well ok then, no biggie,” Jack thought for a second. “Wait, no biggie, Ha!” Jack laughed.

“What if I don’t want you in there?” Trent demanded.

“Stiff.” Jack replied, “Wait. HA! Stiff. Ha!” Jack laughed even harder.

“I’m in prison, with a three year old,” Trent announced to the ceiling.

Jack stood up and walked around, “So you’re saying that you’d get a woody over me in the shower? Really?”

“Oh my god, I am not going to answer that,” Trent balked

“Why?” Jack exclaimed.

“My dick doesn’t know the difference between medical and sexual, fuck. Especially with you and your self assessed cover model looks,” Trent mocked.

“You can just control it,” Jack announced.

“Could you control it if a hot chick was giving you a shower?” Trent asserted.

Jack moved away and started fidgeting with assembled toys.

Trent tried to move to get a look at Jack’s expression.

“Don’t worry mate, I’ve never been with a woman either,” Trent joked.

Jack looked over at Trent.

“Really?” Jack seemed to get happier. “How can you know your gay then?”

“What? Well, I don’t need to eat a cow pat to know it would be revolting,” Trent replied.

“Yeah, that makes sense,” Jack nodded, pacing around the room.

“So why didn’t you try the fields at boarding school?” Trent decided that if Jack could make him squirm, he could do the same back.

“I don’t know. It never crossed my mind, I was a bit of a loner at school,” Jack shrugged.

“Why?”

“I can’t say. I suppose I grew up here. We had tutors until I went to high school. Then my mind was always stuck back here,” Jack shrugged

The beeper on Jack’s watch went off, he hit a few buttons to silence it.

“What is it?” Trent’s interest peaked.

“Time to heard the Angus for the butchers,” Jack replied.

“You can go if you want,” Trent offered, hoping for an hour alone.

“Nope, no luck for you. I hate Thursdays anyway,” Jack shrugged, “Slaughter house folk are creepy.”

Chapter 7 – Punch up

Ten days of rest had left Trent on edge. The doctor's clearance for his return to normal, came as a gift wrapped in gold. But of course, it rained for the rest of the week.

Albeit a seemingly interminable stay, Trent was not looking forward to moving back into the workers house. Rainy dampness mixed with fifty jackeroos, smelt a lot like a seven year-olds school bag; mouldy sandwiches and mysterious liquid.

Jack had been running Trent through his various duties for days; never allowing him to do anything. But now that he was well, he had to do something, even if it was boxing.

A vindictive smile spread across his lips, *Jack was the one who asked for lessons.* Trent changed clothes into a pair of silk shorts, his boots, grabbed two pairs of wraps and two sets of gloves. Stringing the gloves around his neck, he pocketed the wraps and set off to collect Jack.

He looked around the house for an hour, finding everyone except Jack. Finally, he figured it would be better to ask if anyone had seen him, Tom suggested he try the office.

Trent hiked to the other end of the house and came to the office. He stood there for a moment listening to the sounds on the other side of the door. The sound emanating from beyond the door was the same of that which had tortured him all week. Trent shook his head and barged through the door. Jack didn't look back.

"Tell me again why you let him hit you here," Jack called without taking his eyes off the screen. Jack let out a slight yelp as his was lifted out of his chair. "What the hell?" He screamed.

"Why don't I just show you?" Trent smirked.

Jack's grimace threatened to consume his entire head.

"Finally!" Jack shouted enthusiastically.

Trent led Jack to the front door, grabbing an umbrella and heading across the yard. The umbrella might have been made from gauze for all the good it did against the torrent of rain that drowned them both.

They arrived at the door to the new gym and ducked inside. Two other workers were inside, Pip and a young seasonal Jackeroo named Kirk. Trent headed over to an empty corner of the room.

“First wrap up, watch,” Trent announced. Jack watched as Trent’s hands moved almost faster than he could see applying the wraps.

“Try the next one a little slower,” Jack suggested.

Pip’s attention was peaked as soon as Trent had entered the room.

“Do you think we could join you guys?” Kick called across the room.

Trent smiled, “Sure.”

Kirk trotted over.

“What are you up too?” Pip asked timidly.

“Just taking Jack through a light training session, you want to join...” Trent posed, staring off his second wrap.

Wrapped and ready Trent searched for extra gloves the cabinets. Finding several pairs, he throw one set to each of them.

“Gloves on,” Trent grinned.

Twenty minutes of footing drills were enough to crack Pip.

Jack and Kirk were panting heavily.

“We’re supposed to be boxing?” Pip challenged.

“This is boxing,” Trent replied.

“This is aerobics,” Pip scoffed.

“Really, and I suppose you’d know,” Trent smiled.

“Boxing starts with a bag,” Pip announced to the room.

“We can settle this am the ropes if you like.”

“Love to sawdust.”

Trent smiled.

Jack bit his lip, returning to the footing drills.

Pip walked over to the new ring and stepped through the ropes.

Trent walked up to the ropes and stepped over them.

“Right, go,” Trent announced.

Pip raised his arms, and started bouncing around. Trent left his arms at his sides.

“Jack, Kirk, come watch!” Trent called. “First lesson of boxing; never start a fight without discussing the rules,” Jack and Kirk stood outside the ring watching Trent.

Pip jumped over to Trent, firing off several punches into Trent’s unguarded head. Trent stood still, “Second lesson of boxing; footwork first.”

Pip continued to assault Trent, suddenly, Trent moved, avoiding a hit. Pip growled in annoyance, throwing more punches, Trent was no longer in any of the places Pip’s hand struck.

“Third lesson of boxing; always wear a mouth guard,” Trent announced, avoiding two more strikes.

Pip then threw one final punch towards Trent, faster than either Jack or Kirk could see, Trent returned every one of the six punches Pip had hit him with earlier. Pip dropped to his knees, his vision was blurred and he could not seem to balance.

The fight was over. Trent walked over to the ropes, stepping over them.

“Let’s do it,” Trent announced.

Jack looked back at Pip who was blinking wildly, “Will he be ok?”

“I only tapped him lightly. He just isn’t used to getting hit in the face. He’ll be fine,” Trent shrugged.

Jack and Kirk followed him back over to their corner. Trent continued the footing drills, adding arm positioning and intermittent push-ups or crunches. Pip rejoined the group about ten minutes later, following all instructions perfectly. After an hour and a half, Jack was lying exhausted on the floor with Kirk and Pip. Trent was off in the corner savaging the bags and speedballs.

Jack watched as Trent seemed to glide around the bag, taping its surface with hands that did not seem to be moving. He was a creature in his element, all of the boys were memorised by it.

The next day, Trent's 'class' had quadrupled in size. Jeff, Tom and Dan had joined, along with ten other workers. Today it was Jeff's turn to make the mistake of a challenge to Trent's teaching method. Jeff's turn in the ring ended much more abruptly than Pip's, after he made the mistake of stepping on Trent's foot.

A realisation dawned on Trent as he stepped out of the ring, Jeff was not just any upstart, he was also the boss. Little did he know the impending onslaught of extra tasks would prove to be a blessing. Overall, Jeff took the knockout quite well, he had never boxed before and had started an argument with Trent. No-one seemed to believe in the training Trent took them through. After another knockout and none lasting over half way through the session, most were proven wrong. Jeff decided then that ritual 'sawdust' hazing might be a problematic prospect for application on this 18 year old.

Jeff sat exhausted, resting against a wall. Jack was lying on the floor watching the ceiling.

"What was yesterday like?" Jeff panted.

"The same," Jack huffed, "but he knocked Pip out instead," Jack turned his head to watch Trent.

"Did he do this yesterday too?" Jeff pointed at Trent who seemed to be annihilating the punching bag.

"Yep," Jack nodded, "But he didn't seem so angry yesterday."

"Do you think it was the toe thing?" Jeff cautioned.

“No, he’s been in a mood all day,” Jack posed, “That scar on his back is pretty nasty. He only saw it this morning.”

“Don’t think I am up to this everyday,” Tom tried to stand and failed.

“Don’t give up so easily, wait for an hour. You get this euphoric energy burst, it’s addictive,” Jack turned to look at Tom.

True to Jack’s telling, the whole boxing group were bouncing out of their skin within an hour. Jeff was even considering the idea of a rain run. Soon, the entire core of Jackeroos were edging to be let out of the house.

Jack and Trent bolted from the workers house over to the family house, getting saturated all the while.

“You walk mud on this floor and you’ll both be licking it off,” Isobel announced.

Jack and Trent stopped simultaneously before opening the screen door. Jack began to take off his shoes.

“Do you really think I want you both dripping on my clean floor either?” Isobel added.

Trent had begun taking off his shoes, then looked over to Jack who was stripping off his top then his pants. Trent sighed and copied. Leaving their clothes on the porch in a wet lump, they tip toed across the floor in their underwear.

Trent arrived in Jack’s room first, looking around for the towel he had used in the morning. Jack padded into the room a moment later.

“Where’s my towel?” Jack yelled to the ceiling.

Isobel's head popped around the door, "It stunk, it's being washed."

"Great!" Jack announced, throwing his hands in the air dramatically. Trent turned around, looking at Jack, silently asking for a plan. The outline of Jack's penis in his wet underwear caught his attention immediately. The white material was as wet as his clothes had been, it had gone virtually transparent. Jack immediately notice the beeline Trent's eyes made from his face to his crotch.

"Should I just strip completely so you could take a photo?" Jack mocked.

Trent made eye contact, "Your underpants are white and wet; they may as well be plastic wrap," Jack looked down at his pants, immediately blushing.

"Oh shit," Jack shook his head.

"Why hide now, the whole family got an eyeful as we streaked through the house. I'm just smart enough to buy black," Trent shrugged.

Jack thought for a moment. "Oh well, can't change it now," Jack announced, regaining his composure. He walked over and flopped on his bed, lying on his back. Trent touched the door closed and peeled his briefs down to the floor.

"Just because my pants go invisible with water doesn't make this a show-me-yours-show-you-mine event," Jack rolled his head to look at Trent.

"Well turn the other way then, I need to get changed," Trent replied.

Trent turned to his chest of drawers and rummaged for more underwear. Jack starred as he moved, the deep purple scar across his back was enormous. The guilt he felt was

beginning to become a problem. Trent found his underwear, put them on and turned, finding Jack staring at him in thought.

“What?” Trent put on a sassy expression. “Don’t approve of the goods?” Trent joked.

Jack shook from his stupor, “Hu, what? Get over yourself, I was thinking.”

“This from the self complement king?” Trent mocked.

Jack turned his head away, continuing his admonishment.

“Man what’s wrong?” Trent sat on his own bed, suddenly serious.

“Nothing.” Jack replied.

“Jack, don’t bullshit a bullshiter,” Trent accused.

“I’ll answer you, if you answer this.” Jack began, “Why are you so pissed today?” Jack stared at Trent, forcefully eyeing him down.

“I don’t think I am particularly pissed,” Trent answered.

“Come on. You practically ripped the stuffing out of that bag,” Jack scoffed.

“Fine, I’m alone, five thousand k’s from home, and oh yeah, I’m the only fag in residence,” Trent responded honestly. “I need other gay men. Being pent up talking tits and cunt doesn’t really whip out my happy boots,” Trent stood angrily.

“Then why did you come here?” Jack questioned, sitting up.

“It wasn’t by choice! And I was taught; best way to get rid of anger is on a bag,” Trent admitted, “besides, what difference does it make. I’m here, I’m queer, and fucked if I can do anything about it.”

Jack hid his hurt. He thought Trent was becoming a mate, “Maybe your family sent you away for a reason.”

Trent held his temper in check, “Oh yeah man, there is a reason; probably the same one that means you should leave here.”

Jack could not help being disappointed further, his life had gotten much better since Trent arrived. “You know nothing about me. Just stay happy thinking about yourself.”

Trent lost his temper, two weeks of frustration was coming Jack’s way, “Myself! Myself! That’s what you fucking told me to do! And you were dead right! I’m lying on this *fucking* bed for two *fucking* weeks, in the middle of it was my eighteenth, which no-one remembered, and I’m in this fucking place that my mobile phone doesn’t even *fucking* work!” Trent slammed on his pants and shirt, “Sorry if I don’t give a fuck about your dickwit problems now.” He ripped open the door and left.

Jack was alone in the room, a shadow of regret creeping around his mind. Trent had told him about his eighteenth three times before he was laid up in bed, then he stopped. Jack felt revolting, not only had he forgotten a birthday, he had assumed Trent was vein, upset about the blemish on his perfect body. His mind began reliving the argument, memories of his tone and wit intensified in each replay. He felt sick, the person he thought he was now did not shine brightly, in fact, for the first time in his life he disliked himself. The room felt stained, heavy and hot, Jack needed to leave. He got up and walked to his drawers, grabbing a new pair of underwear. As he went to pull his wet jocks off, he stopped. Everything now was worse; he had an erection and did not know when it happened.

Trent was fuming; he had just taken out all of the anger for everything over the past few weeks on his only friend. When he had finally released it all he felt good, but afterwards, the sting of guilt sent him into a rage at himself. He could not think properly, he was firing, every muscle in his body was ready to burst. This was the man his trainer had always wanted him to be, the man Trent most feared. The horror struck him like a blade, what if he hurt Jack, what if he lost control. Jack would not stand a chance, he'd probably be out with one good hit; the drop off fall had proven that.

Jack appeared at the door to his room and hurried off towards the bathroom wearing a very baggy change of clothes. Trent jumped on the moment, he darted into the room and packed his things. His bags were full within seconds; he hoisted it up over his shoulder causing a sudden burn of pain. His back still hurt when he put pressure on it. Ignoring it, he grabbed his toiletries and his gloves and headed for the rain.

After ten minutes in a cold shower, Jack's problem had diminished. On top of destroying a relationship with the only person he could actually call a friend, he did not have the energy to dwell on the cause of a boner. He left the bathroom in his baggy pants and went back to his room. He was hoping to find Trent inside so he could apologise, when he got there, he was out of luck. The absence of Trent's toiletries was the first thing Jack noticed.

While Trent was sick, Jack had picked through every item, questioning its importance. He had been impressed as each was explained with definitive necessity. This was not good. Trent had obviously used the time in the shower to vacate the room. His drawers were empty, as was his cupboard, even his stupid cartoon sheets were missing from the bed.

Jack ran his fingers through his wet hair, and flopped back onto Trent's old bed.

Trent walked into his and Pip's room with his bags. Pip was on the ground reading a magazine.

"So are you a top or a bottom?" Trent asked.

"Of what?" Pip panicked.

"Don't be dense, I want to fuck. Pick!" Trent commanded.

"Both!" Pip replied.

"Which first?" Trent was not in the mood for games.

"Bottom," Pip announced, standing.

"Not here. Is the garage empty?" Trent demanded.

"Only the rovers are out in this rain, everyone else is here," Pip eagerly replied.

"I'll go first. Meet me in five," Trent finished, dropping his bags and striding out of the room.

Pip looked up to the ceiling, thanking god for his luck, he had not had actual sex in over three years. He waited exactly five minutes, running out of the room, down the stairs, forgetting his coat and slamming out the door.

Trent was waiting in the garage next to the biggest truck he could find. Pip slammed through the door saturated, locking and dead bolting it behind him. He saw Trent sitting against one of the MAC dump trucks.

"What brought this on?" Pip announced on his way over.

“I’m male, I need sex. Are you actually surprised?” Trent mocked.

“Yeah, I thought you’d waist your whole year pining after Jack,” Pip assessed.

“I’m not a stupid love sick kid,” Trent shrugged, lying through his teeth, “But I have never fucked anyone in a dump truck.”

“Neither have I,” Pip returned.

Trent stepped forward into Pip, forcefully grinding his body against his wet clothes, gripping the back of his head and inhaling Pip’s plump red lips. All of his angst, frustration and desire flowing through his mouth. Pip was surprised by the intensity at first, just melting into the moment. He soon found his confidence, engaging his hands and returning Trent’s force, gripping the sides of his head, probing deep into his mouth.

His mind blank, intoxicated by pleasure, Trent fell into instinct. His right hand searched Pip’s hard body for his groin. The wet clothes added to the fantasy in his mind. Trent dug his hand under Pip’s jeans, gripping his thick gushing cock. Their mouths locked, with his free hand, Trent opened the Truck door, picked Pip up and carried him backwards into the cabin. Forcefully breaking from Pip, Trent lifted him onto the dash board, deep throating Pip’s thick choad, sniffing deeply in his musky pubes. His mind reeling, Pip could not remember how Trent had managed to undo his pants. The feeling of his cock at the back of Trent’s throat was beyond measure, he came instantly, blasting thick streams of searing cum into Trent’s stomach. He moaned primitively, skull fucking Trent’s face to take all of his seed. The taste, the feeling and the intensity of taking cum again drove Trent wild. The white fuel inside his empty gut, Trent sucked furiously for the last squirt, dropping the spent cock in a frenzied search for Pip’s arse. Lifting Pip without any effort Trent sat Pip’s bubble arse onto his face and crammed his tongue into Pip’s trembling pucker. Pip roared in lust. Trent unbuttoned his jeans and skilfully rolled a condom onto his massive rod with one hand. Trent returned his hand to Pip’s hip, grinding his mouth

into his hole as deep as it would allow, Pip moaned again. Trent realised Pip was going to be a very vocal fuck, making him more randy, challenging his ego to turn his lustful moans into uncontrollable wailing. Lifting his arse off his face, Trent lowered Pip toward his slick rod, licking from his arsehole to his lips. Impaling the spit soaked pucker in one motion. Trent watched as Pip was forced to taste his own arse in a kiss, relishing the roll of Pip's eyes into his head as he accepted nine inches of pure bliss. Trent waited a moment for Pip to adjust to his size, watching closely as Pip girated around his pulsating member. Pip's eyes flew open.

“What the fuck are you waiting for you oversized cunt! Pummel my guts,” Pip demanded.

Trent licked his lips and removed his hands from beneath Pip, dropping him the final three inches onto his massive rod. Pip moaned deeply.

“OH MY GOD!” Pip roared. Trent could tell he had managed to give Pip a serious shock, no-one had ever managed to take him completely within the first ten minutes of penetration. It took about five minutes of loosening for Pip to unscrew his face.

Pip finally opened his eyes, “Go to town whore, breed my arse raw!” He challenged.

Trent smiled driving his tongue deep into Pip's underarm, lifting him half way up his pole and dropping him again. Responding viciously, Pip drove his arse down onto Trent's fence post, making him drop his head back in ecstasy. Trent needed no more encouragement, bucking his hips savagely into Pip's tender pucker. Pip assisted, driving down as Trent would thrust forward, slapping his cheeks against his hips. Motioning like a psychotic jackhammer, Trent slammed into Pip's prostate rapidly. Pip gasped, letting out ropes of cream onto Trent's face and body. Trent licked as much as he could, then forcing Pip to clean off the rest using his hand gripped around the back of his head. During the tongue bath, Trent lifted Pip up to the height of his cock tip, beginning long plummeting strokes into the swooning mechanic.

Trent locked lips with Pip as he power fucked his tight anus, drilling his cock in the deepest confines of his body. Trent felt his body seize, bucking violently with pleasure, emptying volumes into the condom, causing overflow to seep out into his pubes. Jack quickly realised there was not a hot liquid drenching his insides. As Trent settled back into the chair, eyes closed tightly, Pip pulled off his diminishing rod quickly ripping off the rubber and fingering it into his own hole. Savouring the feel of Trent's cum inside his body, pulling out the empty rubber, and slamming his dick again with his other palm, Pip blew another load directly into Trent's face. Pip spun off Trent onto the other seat, panting heavily, Trent slowly opened his eyes staring at Pip through his cum coated eyelids.

"Thanks, man. I'm gunna get some sleep," Trent panted, ripping of his drenched shirt, wiping his face clean and jumping out of the truck. He looked back at Pip, slinging his shirt over his shoulder. "Let me know when you're keen again. It's nice to see cum pig's still exist," Trent turned and headed for the door.

Pip sat in the cabin gasping, realising all of the windows had fogged over. He looked around, figuring it would be best to cleanout the interior of the cabin before left. After ten minutes he stood, immediately regretting his lustful exuberance. His walk was significantly altered, he knew this was going to be difficult to explain. He walked over to his office to get a rag and a chamois. He spent half an hour cleaning the Truck and decided to make a break through the rain for the house.

Walking back into his room, as normally as possible, he closed the door and collapsed onto his bed. Even though he was a bit tender now, he had no regret, that was the hottest fuck he had ever had. 'How the hell could an eighteen year old know how to fuck so well?' he thought. He looked over at Trent, sleeping naked across the room, life at Karawara had just become even better.

Chapter 8 – Midnight watch and a bar room brawl

It had been almost a month and Jack had not been able to talk to Trent. Every time he went to find him he was out on a job Jeff had given him. He even woke up early six times to catch him at breakfast, but he was already gone. Jack eventually stopped Trent after one of the boxing sessions, interrupting his massacre of the bag, while everyone else was lying exhausted around the floor. Jack had been getting better in the classes and was now able to last up to the end of the footwork section. Trent would still not let anyone use the bags; stating that footwork had to be perfect first.

Jack stood next to Trent's bag, "Can we talk?" Jack requested.

Trent continued to box, "Hold the bag and talk," Trent panted. "Put your best foot forward and cradle the bag in your shoulder," He instructed.

Jack complied, finally realising the intensity Trent could manage by altering his foot placement and support. "I haven't spoken to you in a month," Jack grunted.

"I've spoken to you every second day, here," Trent replied.

"Yeah, hi, bye, and centre your support doesn't count," Jack returned. "Every time I try to find you, you're doing some random job, or you've left early."

"Well you can put that down to slugging the boss. I think he's getting back at me," Trent shrugged, stepping away from the bag and heading for a speedball.

"Yeah well, you could have come found me," Jack replied.

Trent felt slightly guilty, every spare hour he could find had been spent making Pip moan in every vehicle and on every surface the garage had to offer. Trent started working in the speedball, his technique was poor, Jack was distracting him.

“So we’re talking, what do you need?” Trent increased his focus on the bag.

“First, your attention would be a start,” Jack barked.

“What Jack? You said it yourself, even my family sent me away. I’m just doing what you wanted,” Trent quit working on the bag.

Jack stared at Trent, trying as best he could to keep on plan, “I am sorry about that. I was angry,” Jack attempted, “As you may have guessed there aren’t many people out here to practice my social skills with.”

“No. You were upset and you took it out on me,” Trent returned.

“Who is coming too the pub?” Pip announced around the room.

Jack rolled his eyes, hating the way all of the workers seemed to rely more on alcohol than anything else. “Yeah I was, but I was wrong.”

“I’ll come.” Trent replied, not really wanting to be stuck at the pub, but wanting to be anywhere else.

Jack looked at him with surprise, “You’d just rather be anywhere that I’m not,” he assessed.

Trent grabbed Jack’s arm and dragged him through the door and outside.

Once they were alone Trent stopped, “What? In two weeks you managed to make me feel worse about myself than when I was stuck in the closet,” Trent stared into the eyes he had been imagining when he was with Pip, “if you think I am going to let you close to me again, you’re completely insane.”

The month of built up guilt finally betrayed itself to Trent. Trent wished he had not seen the pain beneath Jack's eyes, but there it was staring him in the face. Jack starred, unable to speak or move, he had spent the month beating himself up for hurting the only real friend he had ever had. Now, with his fears realised, he was unable to conceal his feelings anymore. He needed Trent, in more ways than friendship would allow, and now it was Trent's turn to beat himself up.

Trent panicked, had he truly seen what he thought he saw. Jack was staring into his eyes, silently begging Trent to be with him. Trent could only feel remorse, he had run away, turned to sex instead of dealing with an argument. He had to walk away, and did, leaving Jack alone out in the dark.

Walking back into the house, Trent ran straight into Pip, who insisted he come to the pub. In a daze, Trent sat in the four-wheel drive with six other workers, regretting each moment as it passed.

They arrived at the seedy hole of a bar with half an hour of driving. Trent was obviously aggravated, Pip attempted to talk him around, quickly finding himself in the firing line. Trent was not in the mood to be mocked, annoyed or tormented, in truth, he actually felt like a fight.

"Come on city-fag, snap out of it," Pip accentuated his point by pushing Trent forward.

"I'm not in a great mood Pip, shut up," Trent returned.

"Don't give me orders, this isn't the farm," Pip stood firm, "A fag out here should watch himself," Pip joked.

Trent glaired at Pip, he figured Pip had lived out here long enough to be beyond suspicion, and any attempt to 'out' him would backfire. Trent bit his tongue.

“What, is the pretty-boy lost for words?” Pip ridiculed, peaking the attention of several other pub patrons. Trent could feel his skin crawl, he had heard stories of gay men being beaten to death in ‘outback’ towns. Pip began to puff up with the support from his peers. Trent recognised most of the occupants from dealings with Karawara.

“What’s the problem boy’s?” The owner stepped up from behind the bar.

Pip was unaware that his posturing had created a dangerous situation. Trent saw the menacing throngs forming around the room.

“Nothing mate, think it would be better I leave,” Trent backed himself towards the door. Pip recognised the fear in Trent’s eyes, looking around, realising the predicament he had caused. Pip looked at Trent, his countenance failing, uncertain how to proceed. Trent stood tall and exited the bar, hoping beyond hope it would end there.

He approached the four-wheel drive and reached for the handle. A near full beer can struck the centre of his back, sending a searing burn across his scar. Trent ground his teeth, the best approach was to leave, knowing that turned to fight. All of his fury, shame and regret flooded in, he needed a fight.

A small mob of five men from the bar were standing close to the entrance of the bar. Trent had taken enough beatings to know what he could handle, as long as none of them decided to pull a knife, he would be fine.

“Bring it on,” Trent challenged.

Trent stepped away from the car. Pip exited the bar as the first punch was thrown by the men into Trent’s stomach, he took it. The second came from the man behind him. Stepping back into the punch, Trent’s elbow slammed into the man’s face knocking him to the ground. The others seemed to take the response as a challenge, three of the group jumped at him. Trent had never fought more than one opponent before, the first hit that

connected got his ribs, then his side. Protecting his face, Trent decided to let loose, his jab broke the noise of the third attacker. The other two moved to restrain him. Ripping free of the shortest one, Trent drove his fist up underneath his chin. The man's head snapped back and his sprawled body fell onto the gravel. The other man holding his arm saw the hit coming and ducked, releasing Trent's arm. Assuming a controlled position, Trent watched the movement of the three men as they moved around him.

Pip suddenly disappeared back into the bar. The man in front of Trent seemed to have some skill as a fighter, Trent watched him for a moment, not noticing the fifth man behind him opening a knife. The other man pressed forward to hit Trent. Side stepping, Trent drove his own fist through the puncher's face; knocking him out cold. Turning around the man with the knife was already upon him. An enormous blast echoed through the air, stopping both men with surprise. Trent checked himself for holes, and turned to the source. Pip was standing behind the bar owner, who was pointing a smoking shotgun upwards.

"I think you'd better let him just leave Smithy," The owner announced. "Last thing you need is to be in jail with three girls to feed."

Smithy folded the knife, calmly placing it back in his pocket. Trent's Jaw was firmly clenched, the owner stared at him.

"Chalk this up as a win for the rainbow community and walk away," the owner glared at Trent.

Trent loosened his Jaw, "Fine."

Stepping over two unconscious brawlers, Pip looked at the carnage on the ground. Trent was already in the drivers seat of the four-wheel drive starting the engine. Pip flew into the passengers seat as Smithy bent down to help up the elbowed man. Trent had

obviously been quite kind in his attack's, but Pip worried about opening his mouth to speak. In the end he could not help himself.

"Are you alright," Pip squeaked.

"If you are under the impression we will ever speak again you are wrong," Trent huffed.
"You nearly got me killed. We're through," He turned the car onto the Karawara track.

Pip had seen Smithy pull the knife and bailed inside to get help, he figured he deserved some credit.

"You'd have a knife in you if I hadn't gotten Chris," Pip balked.

"If you could shut your mouth I wouldn't have even been fighting," Trent shot back.

Pip forgot that he had cause the incident in the first place, "Sorry about that, I forgot where I was for a minute."

"Never again mate. I can't afford to be killed at the moment, it would put a damper on my plans. To real gay people, discretion is a lifestyle. If you had an ounce of backbone you might understand. But you're content keeping your head in the sand," Trent glared at the road ahead, "Just be quiet now Pip, we're through!" he commanded.

Chapter 9 – Tempest

Three months passed, Trent moved out of Pip's room the day of the fight and had been sleeping on the floor in the boxing room ever since. Word of the brawl spread through the workers at Karawara instantly. Talk of Trent flooring four guys in a pub brawl was hot gossip. The actual reason behind the fight was lost before it got to Jack, the story he received was that Trent got drunk and challenged the men for cash.

Trent had not felt the true sting of loneliness before and it was beginning to effect him physically. The mix of the negative temperature of the winter nights and his isolation from the other employees, Trent had gone numb to cope.

It was the first of June, Jeff walked into the boxing room at midday looking for Trent.

“Three of the water pumps in the far western quater have alarmed. Probably froze last night, Pip thinks their anti-freeze tanks were missed in the service,” Jeff said.

“I'll head off now,” Trent answered blankly.

“All of the vehicles are being used in the refit. You're going to have to ride,” Jeff added.

Trent sighed, standing, “What will I need to fix them?”

“Everything will be in the supply shed next to the pump station,” Jeff replied. “Take woollens, you'll need them if you come back after dark.”

Trent nodded and grabbed two woollens, a jacket and a horse blanket before leaving. Being the new guy he had resigned to the fact he would cop the shit jobs. Arriving at the stable, Bill was elated to find Trent approaching with his saddle. Over the last three months he and Bill had bonded. He had to laugh when he looked at the horse realising he was his only friend. Bill got him, he too was a fighter made to live alone. Trent smiled,

Jack truly had horses in his blood, Bill could not have been a better match for him if they were born together. Trent headed out at a gallop, a minor burst of serenity in this lonely place.

Jack was rushing over to the workers house to deliver a severe weather warning. It seemed strange to be approaching the workers house. This was the first time in six weeks he had come here at all. Jack found Jeff in the operations office filling out pay slips for the monthly banking.

“I just got an email from the weather service,” Jack handed the print out to Jeff.

Jeff read the email and nodded, “Thanks Jack, I’ll call it in,” Jeff said picking up his radio.

Jack sat in the chair opposite Jeff watching as he radioed the crews. Looking at the location board, Jack noticed Trent’s marker positioned alone in western quarter.

“What is Trent doing in the western quarter, isn’t it his day off?” Jack casually mentioned.

“Oh fuck!” Jeff realised, “I sent him horseback to repair the water pumps.”

“That’s an eight hour ride, when did he leave?” Jack balked.

“Two hours ago,” Jeff answered.

“I’ll have to go out and get him,” Jack stood alarmed.

“You can’t, every vehicle in Karawara is out on the eastern quarter dam for the refit. They are two hours from here if they leave now. The storm will hit in less than four. They can’t reach him in time. He’ll have to spend the night in the supply shed,” Jeff reasoned.

“He won’t know that. He’ll only be half way back by the time the storm hits. Call him!” Jack demanded.

“I can’t,” Jeff realised.

“What?” Jack accused.

“He didn’t take a phone,” Jeff admitted.

“I’m going,” Jack announced, grabbing his sat phone off the charger and heading out the door.

“Jack, he is a grown man, he can take care of himself,” Jeff called after him.

“He’s a city kid, he would have no idea how dangerous a plane storm is. Or am I wrong, have you taken him through what to do?” Jack demanded, staring incredulously at Jeff. Jeff’s face turned pale.

“I didn’t think so. I’m going to get him, I have my phone,” Jack turned on Jeff and headed out the door forgetting to take a thermal jacket.

Running the entire way to the stables, Jack found Toni, threw on her saddle and had her galloping west before she could blink. He figured he had a three-hour gallop to the pump stations and then, however long it would take him to find Trent. He would definitely be cutting it close.

Trent had finished the first two repair jobs and was hoping to head back earlier than expected when he came to the final pump. Water was erupting from the ground like a giser. Shaking his head he walked over to the pump, preparing for the worst. The cold had frozen the pump completely and the intake pipe had exploded under the load. The

only thing he could do was to seal the pipe and have an engineering crew sent out the next day. He walked back to Bill heading back to the supply shed to get different tools. An hour later he arrived back at the pump to begin work. Taking off both of his woollens, Trent looked around to figure out what was causing the sudden rise in temperature, in the distance great black bellowing clouds were breaking over the horizon.

“Great, now we get to ride back in the rain too,” Trent announced to Bill, who was more interested in a tuft of grass.

Jack arrived at the pump station, he checked the log, as usual the only person to actually fill out the book was Trent. He could see his report on two pumps, figuring he had finished to leave.

“FUCK!” Jack yelled as the book knocked open a storage cabinet and spilled washers everywhere. As he begun cleaning up the mess he noticed that all of the sealing equipment was missing. He pulled out his phone and rang Jeff, the phone stalled for a minute, then sputtered into a ring tone.

“Hello?” Jeff answered.

“I’m at the supply station, the sealing equipment is gone, where else did you send Trent?” Jack barked.

“Pump three, seven and eight.” Jeff replied.

Jack looked at the reports, the numbers of the pumps he had fixed were not written.

“He hasn’t written the numbers, I have no idea where to find him,” Jack bellowed.

“Well just wait there then, he’ll have to drop the equipment back before he leaves,” Jeff stated the obvious.

Jack was not in the mood, “If he gets back in time. Otherwise the sealant kit will act like a lightning rod,” Jack replied.

“Wait a second. Pump seven and eight are running properly now. He must be at three,” Jeff announced proudly.

“Great,” Jack yelled cutting off the phone and bolting out of the shed.

Jack flew onto Toni and galloped towards pump three. As Jack arrived lightning was striking the ground only a few miles away, he saw Trent in the distance and began to yell to him. Trent did not move or respond.

As Jack approached closer he found Bill wondering happily around the grass, he grabbed Bill’s reigns receiving a nasty bite for his trouble. Jack glared at the horse, who begrudgingly allowed this complete imposition. Jack trotted the horses together over to Trent who was completely oblivious to everything around him. Jack bounded off Toni and bolted over the fence grabbing Trent’s shoulder. Jumping with a start, Trent spun around in fright, his ipod fell out of his ears in the process.

“Oh my god. You scared the shit out of me, what is it?” Trent gasped.

“That!” Jack pointed at the storm.

“What, it’s just a storm?” Trent shrugged.

“Yeah, a plane storm. If you stay out in the open you’ll either drown or be struck by lightning,” Jack yelled. “We have to go, now! Leave everything,” Jack grabbed his arm and pulled him away from the pump.

Trent still did not realise the danger he was in. He half-heartedly followed Jack towards the horses. Behind them a massive thunderbolt struck the ground mere metres from them. The sound was deafening, Trent dropped to his knees, the metallic taste in his mouth felt awful. Jack turned, screaming something at him. The ringing in his ears blanked it out.

Trent stood, this time sprinting towards Bill. They each jumped on their horses, lying as close to the body as possible. They kicked in, urging the animals to gallop swiftly away from the storm. Lightning struck ground behind them several times, causing a familiar metallic sting in their mouths. It was no use, the storm was moving rapidly and the horses were soon overtaken. Lightning struck each side of them, in front of them, sometimes so close their eyes would burn. Each blast left them both more dazed than the last; Trent was terrified. Jack's mind had stepped into survival mode. The horses powered on against the storm, flinching slightly at each bolt around them. Trent could not take the pressure he closed his eyes tightly, hugging close to Bill. Jack looked back as Bill dropped away from Toni's side.

Realising Trent's predicament, "Trent," Jack screamed, "You have to ride. Bill can't run like that. TRENT!"

Trent opened his eye's, tears pouring from the sides, he saw Jack in the distance screaming at him. His arms would not listen to his mind, he tried to make them let go, they would not. He shut his eyes again burying into Bill's shoulder blades. A warm hand latched onto his forearm, Trent opened his eyes, Jack's face in front of him.

"You're ok Trent. Let go, you have to ride," Jack pleaded.

Trent looked deep into Jack's rich brown eyes, "I can't," he shook his head.

Jack rubbed his hand along Trent's forearm, "You can. *You* can," Trent saw a look of admiration in Jack's eyes that struck him deeply.

Jack picked up Trent's hand and placed it on the reign, for a moment the storm seemed to disappear, "Ride," Jack begged.

Trent kicked into Bills sides and took off, Jack close behind him. The storm had intensified, now the thunderous roar of rain was approaching quickly. The plane had gone dark, the constant blasts of lightening were the only light to see with. Jack glimpsed the supply shed within 100 metres, he pointed left.

"See it?" He yelled.

Trent turned his head and nodded, guiding Bill left. Toni followed their path

Trent jumped off Bill's back running towards the building. He held tight to Bills reigns, leading him through the door. Jack followed after with Toni in tow. Jack turned back to close the door, the sky suddenly opening in a torrential down pour. It sounded like a massive army on horseback. Trent rested his head against Bill, breathing heavily, tears streaking his face. The rain on the tin roof above him was not the simple intoxicating chatter Trent adored, but a monstrous and savage attack on his senses.

Jack looked over at Trent, knowing what to do, it was so much simpler when they were both in life threatening danger.

"Trent?" Jack approached, just speaking above a whisper.

"What is it Jack?" Trent eventually answered.

"Are you alright?" Jack took another step forward.

"No I'm not," Trent replied, still sobbing.

"What is it?" Jack moved over quickly, placing a hand on Trent's shoulder.

“How did you get out here?” Trent could not manage to look at Jack.

“I found the weather report, and I saw on the board where you were,” Jack replied, noticing where his hand was and taking it away.

“I’d be dead if you hadn’t come,” Trent cried into Bill’s side.

Bill was thoroughly displeased by this display of weakness, he turned and bit Trent sharply on the arm.

Trent looked up, “BILL!” he roared. Bill’s attitude brightened decisively with the return of his belligerent master.

Trent could not help laughing at him. Jack looked away, running his fingers through his hair. He fished into his pocket for the sat phone, picking it up and attempting home. Three times he tried, three times the signal failed. He looked up, Trent was watching him.

“I can’t get signal through the storm,” Jack admitted.

“Oh Fuck!” Trent realised, “I left both of my woollens out at the pump.”

“Where is your thermal?” Jack questioned.

“Here,” he walked over to the cupboard and fished it out, the jacket well XXXL, well over sized for even Trent, “Where’s yours?”

Jack looked down, “oh shit,” he grasped his face to his hands, “I didn’t even think to bring one.”

“Isn’t the temperature going to drop below zero?” Trent asked.

Jack nodded, “last night it reached minus twelve.”

“What are we going to do?” Trent questioned, Jack did not come up with anything.

“We’ll have to share mine, we can huddle for warmth.”

Jack looked at Trent, his eyes scared for a moment and quickly he closed off with an anger Trent had never seen before, “No!”

“What?” Trent stared at him.

“God doesn’t want me to be gay. I wont,” Jack shook his head, staring at the ground.

“What?” Trent laughed, “it’s a jacket, and you’ll die if you don’t. It won’t make you a fag.”

Jack just glared at him.

“Fine. Freeze to death then,” Trent walked back over to Bill, “Down Bill!” Bill dropped to the ground quickly and Trent rested down against him.”

Jack did the same with Toni, resting his side against the horse.

An hour passed, Trent was sitting comfortably with Bill sleeping soundly next to him. The rain had lessened from a deafening rumble to a pleasant sounding downpour upon the tin. He looked over at Jack, who was sitting against Toni, his teeth were chattering and his face was pale.

“I was thinking about what you said, I have two thoughts” Trent posed, “considering the circumstances, sharing heat isn’t being gay, and suicide is as deadly a sin as any

anyway.” Trent looked over at Jack who didn’t respond, “And, since when have you had any problems with being gay?”

Jack did not move, his jaw was clenched firmly. Trent decided to wait.

Another hour passed, Jack's lips were now blue, he was shaking violently, and his breathing had become short. Trent stood, resolving his own thoughts in his mind.

He walked over to Jack, taking off his jacket and wrapping it around Jack, who could barely move.

“Take it.” Trent said.

“W.ww.w.hat are yyou dddoing?” Jack mumbled.

“I’m not about to sit here and watch you die. If you are so against me and my kind, it would be better for me to go than you,” Trent walked over to Bill, forcing the horse awake and leading him next to Jack. Trent made Bill lie down next to Toni, making a sheltered room around Jack. He bent down to Jack and rubbed his arms, “Don’t look for me. It’s better this way anyway, one more month alone here and I would have killed myself anyway,” Trent pulled off his shirt, pants and singlet, laying them over Jack as well.

“TttRent, nno!” Jack chattered.

“Mate there isn’t anything you can do. You can’t move,” Trent stood and thought for a second. He squatted back down and kissed Jack, “I am sorry about boxing, you should have started bag work 6 weeks ago,” Trent smiled and stood. He turned around and opened the door, revealing the dreadful storm.

“Trent!” Jack yelled. Trent turned to see a stream of tears running down Jack’s face.

“It is quite stunning how this place can change so quickly,” Trent admitted. Trent looked out at the storm, tucking his hands around his waist, he went out and shut the door.

Jack forced himself up, trudging over to the door, forcing it open.

With the last shed of force he had he screamed, “Stop!”

A dark figure, metres away from the shack, drenched by the pouring rain, turned.

“Why?” Trent barked.

“This is stupid,” Jack cried.

Trent stood for a seconds and came back to the shed, standing shivering at the door.

“Jack, I give up. I can’t do it anymore, I can’t be alone all of the time. I’m sick of fighting.”

Jack raised his hand to Trent’s neck, pulling his freezing body in close.

“Me too,” Jack rested his head on Trent’s shoulder. For a moment Jack would have swore his body was floating, but reality set in, Trent had picked him up and carried him back to sit with the horses. Trent stood in front of Jack, his hands rapidly unbuttoning his clothes.

“Trent stop. I didn’t mean this,” Jack begged.

He continued to strip off Jack’s clothes, “I’m not hitting on you, idiot. If we don’t share heat, we’re both going to die.” Trent pulled his pant’s over his legs and sat down between the horses, Jack sitting in his lap facing him. Pulling the jacket off Jack, he reached around underneath Jacks top, embracing his frozen torso. Even though he had just been near naked in the rain Trent was still radiating an incredible amount of heat. Jack dropped

his head onto Trent's shoulder as Trent zipped the oversized jacket around the two of them, ignoring the sleeves.

Trent began rubbing his hands up and down Jack's icy back. Within a few minutes, colour was returning to Jack's lips, and an icy hand began to crawl it's way around Trent's scar. Soon a second hand clasped the other behind Trent, locking tightly, barely reaching around the boxer's enormous torso. Jack felt life refilling his body, he snuggled happily into Trent's soft neck.

Trent looked around, sneaking his hands out of the jacket to grab his shirt and singlet. He pulled the clothes back inside the jacket, further padding the cocoon he had made.

Jack's body had finally recovered itself, Trent felt his arms being warmed by heat radiating from Jack's back. If it had not been for the jeans, Trent would have felt heat radiating from somewhere else.

Jack was elated, since their fight he had dreamt about Trent every night. In the beginning it had been harmless. Recently it had evolved into intense sessions of love making, from which Jack would wake up to stained sheets.

"This will sound strange, but every happy moment in my life, I remember because of the sound of rain on a tin roof. Now I am the happiest I've ever felt, and the rain has been the most intense," As Trent reminisced, Jack was enjoying the vibration coming from Trent's chest as he spoke.

"I've never really payed that much attention to it before," Jack admitted.

Jack lifted his head, pulling back to look at Trent.

"I love they way your eyelids keep your eyes just slightly closed, it makes them look sexy," Jack announced.

“I thought the only way to get a complement out here was to give it to yourself?” Trent smiled.

“Yeah, well I’ve never had a man like you around before,” Jack grinned, looking over Trent’s face again.

The room went quiet all of a sudden, it even seemed like the horses were holding their breaths. Jack creped his head across and placed his lips onto Trent’s. He closed his eyes, and pulled Trent against him tightly. Trent’s mouth crept to life, exploring within Jack’s mouth. He had an insatiable desire to squeeze himself into one person with Jack. With a crack of thunder the rain started again, falling again like a cacophony of stampeding horses.

After an hour of kissing Jack was exhausted, nuzzling playfully with Trent’s neck he quietly dropped into a deep sleep. Trent adjusted them over towards Bill, giving them something for support. Terrified he would not wake up the next day, Trent found it impossible to drift off. So there he sat, all night, listening to the rain, supporting Jack until the morning sun rose.

The heat of the new day made the tin roof expand and creak.

At precisely five o’clock Jack began to stir on Trent’s shoulder, his nose sniffled first. A pool of spit had dammed in Trent’s collarbone, his erection attempted to rip through his jeans. Eyes blinking to life, a moan escaping from his depths, Jack looked around.

“Mmm, god. I thought it was a dream,” Jack mumbled. He closed his eye’s again, after grinding his erection against Trent for the second time they shot open wide. Jack pulled back, pinching the back of his neck into the zipper of the jacket, flinching back forward, head butting Trent.

“Ow. Chirst bud, calm down,” Trent laughed.

Embarrassed by his morning wood, Jack looked sheepishly into Trent’s eyes.

“That’s ok now, remember?” Trent smiled, mimicking Jack’s blinking haze.

Jack grinned, “I’m really horny.” Jack whispered into Trent’s ear.

“I’m exhausted, and I have a pool of spit welling in my collarbone,” Trent replied.

Jack looked down at the shoulder dam, “Yuk, sorry.”

“That’s ok too. After last night, half of it is probably mine,” Trent grinned broadly, revealing deep bags around his eyes.

“Didn’t you sleep at all?” Jack asked.

“No, I had my very own virgin to look after,” Trent teased.

“You should have woken me up.” Jack whinged.

“Never. I hate being woken up.”

“I’m always first up so it hasn’t ever really happened to me before.”

“What do you say we head back to the homestead?”

“Yeah, ok. But we should get that pump fixed first, we’re here anyway.”

Trent rolled his eyes, Jack held tight to his ‘do it now’ attitude. For all of the annoyance it caused him, it was still adorable.

“Yes sir. But since the intake valve exploded, we can’t fix it. I closed off the pipe yesterday.”

“You should get your woollens tho, you shouldn’t leave them out here,” Jack added.

“Ok, we’ll get my woollens, and pick up the equipment, and bring the broken part back for Pip,” Trent mused, “just for you, ok.”

“That is supposed to be your job anyway.”

“I have a feeling you are trying to avoid getting back home.” Trent raised his eyebrows, “You do realise that just because we sucked face a bit, you don’t now have a neon gay flag above your head?”

“Yes.”

“There is nothing to worry about. I was fucking Pip for a month and no-one even imagined.”

“Really?”

“Yep. He’s major queer,” Trent chuckled.

“Pip?” Jack scoffed, “Pip is the only bloke that has ever brought live in girlfriends to stay up here though.”

“I don’t know anything about that, but I know he moans like a whore when you lick his pucker.”

Jack’s eyes widened to the point Trent thought they would pop right out of his head.

“Wow, I’d never’ve picked that,” Jack shook his head, pinching his neck again and head butting Trent again. “Could you please let me out of here?”

“Only if you promise not to run away,” Trent pressed.

“Never. I hate running,” Jack teased.

Trent sensually unzipped the jacket, running his fingers along Jack’s spine. Instinct sent Jack’s hip to grind against Trent’s stomach. As Trent’s hand arrived at the bottom of the zipper he gripped his hands on the two globe arse cheeks. Cramming Jack’s erection against his abdominalis and up towards his chest.

“Stop, stop. I’ll blow into my jeans and that would be a waist,” Jack smiled wickedly.

“Have you been watching porn?” Trent squeezed his arse firmly.

“Yes. Gay porn, weeks of it, twelve to be exact,” Jack fought back poking into a pressure point on Trent’s arm. It made Trent jump and allowed him to escape.

Jack stood quickly to button up his shirt. He the unbuttoned his pants to tuck in his shirt, and adjust his dick, flashing Trent in the process.

“What a waist, all that cum,” Trent stood, stretching luxuriously, exposing his bare chest and free standing erection. He had managed to unbutton his jeans and pull down his jocks without Jack noticing.

“You’ll want to be careful Bill doesn’t get bitey,” Jack said, staring at the large pud that was pointing at him.

“You want this don’t you,” Trent crooned, mimicking the emperor from star wars.

“Yes. But I don’t think I’ll be using it like a light sabre, nerd boy,” Jack winked and walked outside.

Trent grinned, realising Jack was not exactly ready yet. But the lust in his eyes was unmistakable, Trent recognised it well. He also was giving back an identical look back.

Trent dressed and woke Bill, getting Toni up at the same time. He walked outside with the horses, Jack was standing next to a bush with both hands on the back of his head. Trent could not resist himself, he snuck over behind Jack and took hold of his penis from behind. Jack jumped slightly, settling into the feeling and leaning back onto Trent as he finished taking a leak. Trent shook for him and Jack turned around into his arms, devouring his mouth, his semi hard cock bouncing free between them. After several minutes of intense tongue battle, Trent pulled back, looking slightly dizzy.

“Can I do you now?” Jack requested.

“What?” Trent leaned in.

“Turn around,” Jack urged.

Trent complied, turning to face away from Jack. Jack moved his hands to Trent’s waist, unbuttoning his jeans and reaching in for his cock. Jack stood holding Trent’s cock, as Trent pissed into the same bush as Jack had. Trent finished, Jack shook his cock and put it away. Trent was of course completely solid by the time he had finished. Jack had a struggle to get it to fit back in the jeans. Trent turned around to continue the kiss he had broken earlier. They kissed until the sun had risen much further overhead. Jack pulled away this time, blinking slightly to re-focus.

“Jack, I’m really, really horny. You sure I couldn’t take you through a fellatio lesson,” Trent begged.

“Not here. We’ll get there, just give me a little while to get used to what we’ve done already,” Jack answered earnestly.

Trent smiled, “That’s cool, I’ll wait until you’re ready.”

Jack frowned slightly, “I heard something a few months ago that I want to ask you about.”

“Shoot.”

“Why did you start that fight at the Pub?” Jack pressed.

“What?” Trent asked incredulously, “Start the fight. Pip was mouthing off. I left to keep the peace and five blokes ambushed me in the car park. One threw a full beer can at me, then another pulled a knife.”

“What?” Jack was shocked, “They all said you bet them you would win.”

“No way! But I’ll admit, when I got hit by the beer can I chose to turn back and fight when I could have just left in the car,” Trent shrugged. “But I had just fought with you and Pip was being a cunt and I couldn’t stand being quiet anymore...”

Jack broke Trent’s rambling by pressing his tongue through his lips. Forcefully grasping the hair on the back of his head, he explored deep within Trent’s mouth.

“Let’s go get your stuff,” Jack smiled, “Out of the boxing room too.”

Chapter 10 – A treasure trove of male

“Dad, Mum, I’m home. Trent is too, he’s moving back in here,” Jack announced to the ceiling on his way through the front door.

Trent stumbled through the door, weighed down with everything he owned. Jack’s ‘right now’ attitude was in full swing.

“Are you sure they are fine with this?” Trent huffed through his packs.

“Yes, they will just be happy you’re out of the boxing room,” Jack replied, gesturing wildly with his empty arms.

“What do you intend to tell them?” Trent called behind them.

“You just heard me tell them,” Jack shrugged.

“Rightio.”

“As for everything else, I haven’t even tried sex yet, I might not even be gay,” Jack smiled.

Trent stopped, stunned at the frank attitude Jack was presenting, “Right.”

“Hey it might yet be a phase,” Jack grinned brilliantly.

“You’re fucking with me aren’t you?” Trent nodded.

“Yep, but it is cute when you look hurt,” Jack pushed open the door to his room, walking in.

Trent noticed the door handle was now lockable. As he entered he stopped dead. The two single bed's were gone, replaced with a king size.

"I figured you can sleep on the floor here. Since you were in the boxing room anyway," Jack grinned.

"What is actually going on here?" Trent still could not move from the doorway.

"Nothing."

"When did you change the room?" The only sign of life emanating from Trent was the movement in his lips and his eyes that were darting around the completely remodelled room.

The room now contained a door to a private bathroom, a computer desk and laptop, and a second door to a private sitting room.

"When you left," Jack shrunk visibly, ashamed of himself.

"Why?"

"I'm twenty three, you're eighteen; you looked at me like I was a six year old throwing a tantrum," Jack sat down on his bed, "and you were right. I still lived in a room made when I was three."

Jack sighed, "This doesn't change anything, I know."

"Jack, I'm so sorry. I can't believe I did that to you," Trent finally moved into the room, placing his bags down squatting in front of Jack.

“Don’t be sorry. It was the most honest thing that has ever been given to me. I realised I was living in the same bedroom that I grew up in. Not even my posters had changed.” Jack shrugged.

Picking up Jack’s hand, Trent looked up at him, “No. I was completely wrong. I was judging you from a different world.”

“Jack look at me,” Jack was beginning to brood, looking only at the floor. Trent shook him, “Out here, compared to you, I’m a six year old. I don’t even know to get away from a storm. Without you, I’d either be dead in a river or frozen to death next to a water pump. You have nothing to be ashamed of.”

“So why do I keep acting like a baby when something goes wrong between us?” Jack scorned himself.

“I’m no expert to answer that. I turn into a lumbering knuckle head. What we have in common is we have both spent a lot of time alone. How could we have any experience connecting to someone?” Trent reasoned. His father’s words had found a way out of his mouth.

“That makes sense. I made the mistake last time of seizing up, but if I talk now, you have to let me finish, and promise not to leave,” Jack admitted through his pained countenance.

“I can’t promise not to leave, I might need time to think, but I promise I’ll come back,” Trent nodded.

“Ok. Can you close the door?” Jack requested. Trent stood up, stretching his knees and walking back to the door, moving his bag to shut it. “Lock it.”

Trent twisted the knob. He walked back over to the bed and laid down looking at the roof on the left side.

“Lie down with me,” Trent asked. Jack walked around the bed, lying next to Trent looking upwards.

“Trent, I’m terrified,” Jack began, “you terrify me. I feel so little around you. For the first time, living the rest of my life at Karawara doesn’t matter. If I have to leave to be near you, I don’t care. Halfway through doing this room, I realised that it had an expiry date.”

Jack cleared his throat, struggling with himself to speak. Trent lay there, desperately wanting to touch him, but scared of the effect it would have. After a moment, deciding he had to follow his heart, Trent wriggled closer, forcing his arm in and under Jack’s shoulders. Pulling them close together as they remained staring at the roof.

Following Trent’s lead Jack continued to speak, “On Thursday, I put in an application to study at Melbourne University next year.”

Speaking the words out loud, Jack began to feel very foolish.

“I don’t understand what’s happening to me, it’s like I’ve gone crazy on you. I finally get what a stalker is thinking. There is this insanity that makes stupid things seem normal.”

Jack silenced for a moment, looking for some signal on the blank roof to continue. Trent felt Jack’s back tense, squeezing tightly to comfort him.

“I, I spent hours every night watching the footage of your fights, and I’d even beat off thinking about you,” Jack waited a minute, expecting Trent to get upset.

Jack flinched when the arm underneath him picked him up effortlessly, pulling him up and over to lie on top of Trent, looking directly into his eyes. Trent locked his arms

around his back. He searched his eyes, waiting for the rest of Jack's admission. The look in Jack's eyes was deep shame, Trent looked at him confused.

"And?" Trent replied.

"And I've been doing it after every boxing class," Jack added, joining Trent in confusion.

"That's all?" Trent quizzed.

"Don't be like that. It's a big deal to me," Jack thought.

"It's cool, it makes me happy that you were."

"You're not annoyed?"

"Are you hard now?"

Jack blushed, "Yeah."

"Me too, it's hot you think I'm hot. I have a hot guy wanting to spend time with me and jerking off over me. That's awesome."

"What about the room, you freaked?"

"I was surprised, it wasn't what I expected."

"Oh," Jack looked back awkwardly, "that makes sense."

"I meant what I said Jack, I love you. It took me only two hours with you to figure that one out," Trent laughed, "you're sexy, stacked and smart. A killer combo. The idea of

you being in Melbourne drives me wild; dressing you in suites and showing you off to everyone I know. I can't believe I didn't think of it myself."

"You're as crazy as a loon," Jack joked.

"I'm not the one jerking off over me," Trent mused.

"You'd cream your pants if you saw it."

"Damn straight I would."

"You're just a horn dog!"

"I am! You could do anything you want to me, any time you want. Do it, jerk off, blow your load all over me now."

"Really?" Jack sat back on his haunches.

"No, actually I'd prefer you shoot in my mouth, but what ever you're up for."

Trent reached up and tore open Jack's top, exposing his bare chest. Jack bit his lower lip and unbuttoned his jeans, releasing the demanding mongrel from his jocks.

"You are the most beautiful man I have ever met Jack," Trent lay panting, staring in wonder.

Gaining confidence, but still biting his lower lip, Jack shut his eyes and started pumping his cock. Astonished, Trent undid his own top and pants, watching as the head of Jack's swollen penis appeared and disappeared beneath his foreskin. The lustful expression on Jack's face, made Trent pull out his own dick and begin pulling on instinct. Jack kneeled astride the young boxer, further gaining confidence, adding his second hand to pull on his

cock. Finally opening his eyes looking down at Trent, his eyes jumped in shock, seeing a bulging bicep working furiously on it's own cock; transfixed by Jack. Jack took a sudden sharp intake of breath, exhaling rapidly, releasing powerful streams of cum into Trent's face, chest, arm, penis and the last dribble down his own hand. Trent's eyes contorted closed, his body writhed, launching volleys of cum onto his own chest. Jack watched as Trent contorted in pleasure, letting go of his own cock. Trent continued to pant.

Jack leaned down and licked from the head of his cock up to face of his spent dream man. Trent sharply gasped at the sensation, his cock launching one last strand of cum up into Jack's chin. Jack rested on top of Trent once more, sandwiching them together. He licked their mixed seed of Trent's face and neck. Trent pulled Jack in tightly, their renewed erections were grinding between them again. Trent moved again, licking his own cum off Jack's neck, sharing it in a kiss.

Eventually, Jack rolled off Trent, and they lay together on their sides staring at each other.

"We are really going to have to shower before dinner tonight," Trent announced, examining himself.

"I was going to say that," Jack chuckled.

"Jack, I want you to ask for a mattress to be set up in the next room," Trent stated.

"Why? You can just sleep here?" Jack croaked.

"I will, I just don't want you to come out yet." Trent admitted.

"Why?"

"Whatever you say, you still love Karawara and I think you should take time to make sure I am worth losing it," Trent looked away.

“That’s ridiculous Trent. But ok, if I have to I have to,” Jack replied.

“I can’t be responsible for you losing this place. What if I’m not what you’ve built me up to be?” Trent requested.

“Don’t be stupid.”

“Promise me, you’ll ask for a mattress, then you can trial *us* for a month or so, before you say anything,” Trent requested.

“I thought you wanted to show me off,” Jack looked hurt.

“At home, in Melbourne, where I am out and have been for years,” Trent held Jack’s chin, “Here, your life will change dramatically when you come out. You need to be ready. If you want to announce it, you have to know what it is before you can tell people.”

“Ok, I’ll ask. And, I’ll wait. But, I don’t think I will lose this place. Everyone accepts you,” Jack replied.

“No Jack, they tolerate me. There’s a big difference. You are the only one here that accepts me, even your dad thinks I am bad news.”

“That’s only because he thinks you start fights,” Jack opposed.

“That isn’t the reason. The night I got here he told Pip that I was dangerous; I value other people’s lives before my own,” Trent admitted.

“That doesn’t make sense.”

“Maybe not. Maybe I’ve just been perpetuating it because I isolate myself. I just get the feeling I was some bizarre bet between your dad and my dad and yours lost.”

“Well you won’t be isolated any more,” Jack grinned. “But if you want this bed, you can mess it up each day and keep up the façade. I won’t be helping.”

“Jack, trust me, nothing about being gay is easy. Make it as easy for yourself as possible,” Trent pleaded.

“Ok Trent. I’ll give it time. But I think you’re wrong,” Jack grinned, “Let’s have a shower.”

Jack jumped up and reached out for Trent.

The new bathroom was decked out in blues, light blue wall tiles, royal blue floor tiles, and a striking cobalt blue feature wall. It was enormous, in one corner was a Jacuzzi, a rain simulation shower with no walls and a separate toilet with a second access through to the sitting room. There was even a towel closet and a steamed towel cupboard. Trent almost jumped when he noticed a small wooden door with a tiny glass insert window.

“You put in a sauna!” Trent barked.

“That was all you wanted when you were sick.” Jack murmured

“Oh God, you did all of this for me didn’t you...” Trent realised, “Why aren’t the tiles red and black for Essendon?”

“Your favourite colour is royal blue,” Jack replied.

“But yours is red.”

“I don’t care. It makes me happy when I come in here, thinking it’s your bathroom.”

“You’re such a stalker,” Trent laughed.

“You are completely incapable of taking complements.”

“Well I can’t say I’ve had anything built in my honour before.”

“Drink it in.”

“How did you do this?” Trent wondered.

“I just did. Keep hold of some mystery Trent, wonder is good for the imagination.”

“I love you.”

“I am sticky.”

“Touching” Trent rolled his eyes. “How do you turn this beast on?”

Jack touched a tile on the wall, the shower sputtered to life, raining in the centre of the room.

“How do you change the temperature?” Trent asked grinning.

Jack pointed to two slightly raised tiles on the floor with hot and cold written on them.

“It’s a James Bond bathroom.”

“This is your bathroom you nerd!” Trent smiled. Jack pushed him underneath the water, still in his jeans. “Poofter...” Trent discarded the jeans and stood with his arms stretched out in the downpour. “Join me beautiful.”

Jack stared at the figure he had dreamt of, the water cascading over him made him look like a shampoo commercial. It was the boxer he knew, the one he had watched incessantly on his computer. He was standing in the bathroom intended for him, under the shower bought for him. Jack was lost, he had been here before; his dreams had taken him away so many times, to a land where he was in love. He dreamed his lover was standing ahead of him, basking outside a cave as the rain fell. He was beautiful, his blue eyes shone through the engulfing downpour. It had been Trent all along, the frame, the eyes, the stance, all Trent. Trent stood in front of him, the spitting image of the dream.

“You look like you’ve seen a ghost,” Trent dropped his arms and stared at Jack.

“You ever get the feeling we met on purpose?” Jack posed, glued to the spot. “I remember you, from ages ago, and I can’t believe it. But you standing there now, me here, I’ve had this dream before.”

Trent stood firm, “What happens next?”

“I want to join you in the rain, but never can,” Jack watched.

“Come here,” Trent smiled.

Jack reluctantly moved his feet, one foot in front of the other. The spray from the water hit the floor and splashed his body and feet. He was still in the jeans he had nearly worn into death the night before. He stepped under the warm rain, running a hand over Trent’s chest and behind his back. Jack’s head dropped down to Trent’s chest, the water made it difficult to feel tears, but the sound was unmistakable.

“Don’t cry Jack rabbit,” Trent lifted his hand and ran it through Jack’s hair.

“You’re real,” Jack did not look up, “I’m terrified I’ll wake up alone again.”

“Look at me,” Trent placed his hand under Jack’s chin, lifting it to his own. Trent kissed his mouth softly, “I’m not going anywhere.”

Jack looked up to the ceiling as the rain fell from the massive showerhead. Looking back to Trent, he peeled down his jeans and kicked them over to join Trent’s. Taking Trent by surprise, he wrapped him in his arms engulfing his mouth, vicing their bodies together. For a moment, time stood and watched; they became a statue. A merged form of two bodies, eyes tightly sealed and lips locked. The water was the only indication time of progressing forward.

Trent emerged from the bathroom, a towel for a skirt and fuzzy wipe dried hair. He thought for a moment, and discarded the towel. Jack walked out, his caramel eyes stuck dumb by the prostrate Athenian on his bed.

“All you’re missing is a sword,” Jack smiled.

“I want to tell you something.”

“I’m all eyes,” Jack grinned.

“I’m serious, sit here,” He patted the bed next to him and sat back on the headboard. Jack walked over and flopped down, resting his head in Trent’s lap.

“Yessum?”

“Do you remember the day I came off Bill into the water?”

“Yes,” Jack nodded, his mind reframed to the now serious conversation.

“If you hadn’t come in for me, I wouldn’t have tried to get out,” Trent shut his eyes and clenched his jaw to fight back his tears.

“I thought it would be the best thing for everyone, if I just went away,” Trent went quiet and played with Jack’s hair, “When your dad was speaking to Pip, I realised he was trying to protect you from me. I’m scared he might have been right.”

“Trent,” Jack sat up, crossing his legs and looking into Trent. “Never say that again.”

Trent went to speak and Jack cut him off, “I get that you don’t think you’re worth much. But I do. I think you’ve spent so much time alone you can’t remember being alive. I read in this book I ordered: *only magical people get talked about*. It’s true. You’re the only thing anyone here seems to talk about, and that’ll be the same for fifty years after you leave. You’ve given me a mirror to look at myself, and I have had my head in the sand. You were alive, and you arrived to a place that was dead, and it tried to take you with it. Stop doubting yourself, you’ve had a bigger impact here than the thousand workers before you put together.”

Trent still refused to look at Jack, clenching his teeth firmly to fight back his emotions “That’s just it, I can’t ever just be normal, everywhere I go I mess things up.”

“Everything here is better than ever. And your family miss you terribly, dad gets an email every day from some member of your family asking about you. Why don’t you just call them?” Jack placed his hand on Trent’s neck. Trent nuzzled it and began to cry openly.

“I didn’t know that,” Trent fell forward into Jack, balling his eyes out over his shoulder. “They didn’t even call for my birthday.” He blubbered.

Jack scoffed, “Have you even tried checking the mail room?”

“Mail room?” Trent whimpered.

“You are this upset and you don’t even know about the mail room?” Jack balked.

“No,” Trent whined.

“Get your clothes on and I’ll take you.” Jack shook his head. Trent brightened quickly. The turn was almost manic. He went from sobbing to bouncing off the walls in the time it took him to don his underwear.

Trent and Jack came walking back from the mailroom in the workers house loaded. Three care boxes, with strange rotten odours pouring out, 53 letters and one very large create on wheels. Trent was beaming, he fumbled around trying to open letters on the way back, each time he’d finally open one he’d drop something else.

“Bloody hell. Stop! Just wait two more minutes,” Jack yelled as Trent struggled behind.

Jack walked back into his room, putting two reeking boxes on the floor and huffing onto the bed.

Trent came in looking like a child on Christmas day. He tore into the packages, gasping or whining that food gifts had been spoiled. Each letter contained the thoughts of a different family member. Events were varied and usually there was a retelling of some crisis, from all different points of view. Finally, Trent tackled the create. After spending an hour figuring out how to work the lock, he remembered a letter mentioned something about a password. He opened it. The box was filled with a sea of different wrapping papers. Trent took out each one, shook it and blasted away the wrapping paper.

18 pairs of new underwear.

18 shot glasses.

18 different bottles of alcohol.

18 DVD's.

18 skin care products.

18 items of clothing.

The final box in the create read *One offs*. Containing:

A Mac laptop.

A new ipod.

New headphones.

A Cartier watch.

And a solid gold brick with 18 embossed on the top.

Trent laid his score out on Jack's bed.

"Holey fuck!" Trent sighed as he finished.

Jack was stuffing all of the wrapping paper back into the create, "This is intense man."

"I know. They must all think I've just ditched them," Trent gasped.

"Maybe you should give them a call." Jack suggested, walking over to Trent to inspect the bed. Jack picked up the gold brick, turning it over. "Trent check this out." The bottom of the brick had a set of car keys imbedded in the bottom. A plaque of writing above it.

It read:

To our beloved baby boy,

We have loved you since before you were born, and will love you long after all is gone.

Remember this day, because you are now a man.

You are our hero, pride is a pittance to what you bring to our lives.

With Love

Your Mum and Your Dad

Trent began to cry. "I have to call them."

"There is a phone in there," Jack smiled.

Trent walked away sniffing.

The phone call started out slowly, Trent sniffled and gasped his way through an explanation of what had happened, and began a continuous barrage of thanks. With his parents and sister all on the conference, Trent delved into the story of the past five months, the new relationship included.

Trent's father and mother were aghast by the revelations, his depression and his isolation wrenching them to tears. Four hours later, Trent walked back into the bedroom exhausted. As he entered, Jack came through the outer door with a single mattress.

"Jack!" Trent went to greet him. Jack stopped him with a waive of his hand, he looked back confused. The base of the mattress poked through the door, followed by Tom.

"Trent. Heard you're moving back in. I'm glad to see you're out of the boxing hall, Jack said you got quite a haul from the mail room." Tom bantered.

It took Trent a minute to get his bearings, "Um, Yeah." He shook off the surprise, regretting the idea that Jack keep them quiet. "I had to lay it all out to get a good look. See." Trent gestured towards the pile of presents camouflaging the bed.

"Jesus Jack, you weren't kidding," Tom gaped.

"We go a little overboard on special occasions," Trent added.

“They bought him an Audi and set the keys in a gold brick,” Jack announced. Tom picked up the gold brick and read the inscription.

“Wow, this is amazing,” Tom stated, looking at the writing and back at Trent, studying him yet again. Tom looked back down at the bed, “That is Cartier, that’s not just a watch Jack, that’s probably worth more than the car. May I?”

“Sure,” Trent replied, Tom immediately snatched up the watch.

“It’s so light. Who’s it from?” Tom commented.

“I was told to read the back.” Trent suggested.

“The best people never breed. Gramp Jack,” Tom read.

Trent laughed, “What does that mean?” Jack quizzed.

“My Grandpa Jack has all of these sayings, mind how you go, get them before they get you, Anton’s famous baked beans. You know,” Trent chuckled out.

“Yeah so what does it mean?” Jack repeated.

“When I came out to my family, the first person I told was my Grandma Myrtle. We’ve always had this great *hang out* club, we get along well easily. Anyway, I told her and she told me she wished she could be a lesbian, but she’d miss penis too much. Grandpa Jack walked in right after that and mocked *are you wishing you were a lesbian again*. Her reply was *yes, and Trent gets all the luck*. Hats off to him, he spun around, thought a second and said *the best people never breed*,” Trent smiled, “It was never brought up again, they just changed to *do you have a boyfriend yet?* And that was it.”

“He’s right you know. The best people never do breed, I suppose that’s why the world can be such a shithole,” Tom remarked.

“Dad, maybe we should get the bed into the other room,” Jack prodded.

Tom handed the watch and the box back to Trent and proceeded in with the bed.

“Tom, let me.” Trent argued.

“Wouldn’t dream of it, almost at the end now,” Tom retorted.

Silence seemed to consume the room as Jack and Tom closed the door to set up the bed. Trent stood still, he had not noticed before that from here there were no noises from outside, upstairs or anywhere else. Jack opened the door from the other room and came over.

“Why is it so quiet in here?” Trent asked.

“Insulated, had it put in when I redid it. If the doors are shut you can’t here a thing,” Jack winked at Trent. Tom came through the door.

“Well your all set. I’ll see you at dinner boys,” Tom announced in stride towards the door.

Tom left. Jack went to follow but Trent grabbed his arm. “Jack, these rooms are incredible. Why did you go to so much trouble?”

Jack stood for a moment, “I said it before, when I started it was because I figured I’d be spending the rest of my life here and I didn’t want to do it alone. Now I don’t.”

“Why?”

“I’m going to be wherever you are,” Jack replied. Trent stood still for a moment.

“You said before that *only magical people are spoken about*. I’ve heard that somewhere, where did you get it?” Trent queried.

“Maybe your grandad. We’re both Jack’s,” Jack answered.

“Seriously, it was from a *Holding the man* wasn’t it?” Trent assessed.

“Yeah it was. A guy online told me to read it. So I ordered it a month ago, finished it in a day, so I read it twice,” Jack admitted.

“That was the book that made me want to come out,” Trent sat on Jack’s bed thinking.

“Me too,” Jack admitted, placing his hand on Trent’s shoulder. Trent looked up at him, Jack leant down and kissed his lips. “Don’t you think this bed think is stupid?”

“Check all of the presents.”

“What?”

“Check them for anything from my other grandparents.”

“Why? What does this…”

“You wont find anything, and yes they are both alive.”

“So, what does that have to do with me coming out?”

“They disowned my dad when I told them. He hasn’t heard from them since.”

“Oh.”

“Just be very very sure Jack. Enjoy being in while it lasts, once you’re out you’ll be that way for a long time.”

“It’s not your fault I’m gay you know. I was avoiding women well before you arrived.”

“At least you were happy,” Trent shrugged.

“I was in a coma. Now I’m happy.”

“Enjoy it for a while then,” Trent stood. “Do you think you might want to set up my laptop for me?” Trent asked in a coy voice, his pinkie in his mouth and a toe screwing into the floor.

“I’ll do it, just never do that again,” Jack stared at Trent cockeyed. “You don’t wear ballerina skirts or enjoy animals do you?”

Trent laughed, “Can’t say it’s a major hobby or anything.”

“Good. I’ll suppress the vomit and get your laptop going,” Jack stopped, “I wont say anything for a month, but I’m not going to lie if I’m asked.”

“Lie to Pip,” Trent demanded. “I think he has a few usual ‘friends’ including Jeff.”

“Oh,” Jack laughed. “I wasn’t really talking about the workers though.”

Chapter 11 – Lying with benefits

Blinking awake at 4:45 am, Jack felt a languid arm across his chest. A warm sweet smelling breeze was on his neck. He looked to his left, Trent's face was next to him sharing the same pillow. Jack smiled, rolling over into Trent's body, encircling him with a leg.

"Gotta wake up big dog," Jack whispered.

Trent made no sign of recognition. So Jack leaned across and bit his left ear lobe.

"Gotta wake up," Jack growled affectionately.

Trent twitched slightly, his mouth falling open. Jack kissed down his jaw line, and tasted his mouth and lips. Trent flinched violently backwards.

"Grr, Yuk," He shook his head and nearly fell backwards out of bed. "Go brush your teeth, you taste like off milk."

"Thanks. Now at least I know how to wake you up," Jack stood and went for the bathroom.

"I have to wash my face, the smell is all over me," Trent jumped up and scuttled to the bathroom.

"How is it that your breath is so sweet?" Jack demanded, following Trent into the bathroom.

Trent's face was down in the sink splashing water around his face, "Next time you make fun of my toiletries, maybe you should do a little research first."

“What, you have some product that keeps your breath sweet overnight?”

“Yep,” Trent replied standing. “And I drink enough water.”

“Stop saying that, I drink plenty,” Jack defended as he hit the tile on the wall and stepping into the shower.

“I drink plenty... You barely make a litre a day. I drink more milk than that.”

“Fine, I’ll pack more water.”

The sun was still rising as the boys headed across from the homestead. The other bed was freshly messed, teeth were cleaned and they had breakfasted. As they made way for their first day together, Jack worried that people might notice the change. Trent’s reply had been that *he could wear a ballerina skirt with the jackeroos and it would take them a week to notice.*

Jack walked up to Jeff, pushing his way through the throng of workers at the breakfast table.

“Jeff, I want Trent to come with me to the northern wall,” Jack announced.

“I have Trent scheduled for fence survey, I need him to check the rabbit proofings.”

“I need him at the wall.”

“Jack he’s a worker in my team, his jobs are set as part of the schedule.”

“Jeff, Trent is working with me.”

Jeff sat back into his chair, startled by Jack's assertion. "Yes sir, whatever you say sir."

"Good, the northern wall will be piped by this afternoon then," Jack turned and almost walked into Trent on his way out, "Let's go."

Trent stepped aside and followed.

"Trent has himself a boyfriend," Pip hooted.

"Don't start Pip," Trent glared at the dwindling mechanic. Turning back, Trent grabbed another piece of toast and then followed Jack.

As the door slammed behind him, his stomach lurched, both at the sudden influx of toast, and at Jack's conversation with Jeff. Once again, his existence was causing trouble for the people around him.

Along the impaired grass track to the stables, Trent walked silently, his thoughts lost in the accuracy of Pip's jesting. Looking out at the plain ahead, the morning sun crossed the auburn earth and struck him again as it had when he first arrived at the drop-off. Without meaning to, his feet stopped and he stood still staring into the vista. The hues of orange and gold, flecked with red sitting flat beneath the rich blue morning sky, gave off an intoxicating aroma. The crystal clear water was perfectly tranquil and almost seemed non-existent; simply inspiring a blur in the red rock below. All signs of green life were lost among the glared intensity of amber reflection. The sky went on without end dwindling Trent's once proud ego to notice the petty limitations of his skin bound mass.

"Hey, you awake?" Jack chanced.

Startled by the sudden intrusion, Jack's features materialised before him. Trent shook his head, blinking quickly. The honey smooth features somehow blended seamlessly into their gargantuan surroundings.

“Sorry, Jack, my brain just stalled for a second,” Trent stuttered.

Jack walked closer and kissed Trent’s fumbling lips. Searing self-awareness tingled a track across his skin, itching and shivering at once.

“Jack!” Trent spat, pulling away.

“What?”

“You can’t just go kissing me in full view of the universe.”

“I have wanted to kiss you while you were spaced out since I met you. Today was the first time I could. I’m not going to give up opportunities like that for anything Trent.”

“Oh...” Trent’s mind went blank again. Before he knew it, Jack’s lips were upon him again. This time Trent relaxed. Placing his hand on Jack’s neck, Trent embraced his mouth and savoured the trace of pineapple lingering from breakfast. Finally breaking for a breath, Jack stared at Trent’s lengthy intake of air.

“That proves it. I’m a fag,” Jack nodded.

“I need better lung capacity,” Trent inhaled again.

“Can’t you breath through your nose?”

“I don’t like to.”

“Oh... Why?”

“I don’t like it, it makes me feel sick.”

“What were you looking at?”

“This place just gets me sometimes,” Trent frowned.

“I get the feeling that you know more than everyone else sometimes.”

“Why’s that?”

“I don’t know how you just do things.”

“Like what?”

“The way you stop when you need to take something in. Or like with Bill, when you took to him on instinct.”

“Oh.”

“Even the way you see things in people. How you deal with me. And, how you ended up finding the only other actively gay man on a farm in a day?”

“That isn’t something to be surprised at. And he isn’t the only other gay man. There are 200 staff on this farm, there have to be more than 3 gays guys. But, you don’t want to be envious of my *instinct*.”

“Why’s that?”

“It comes from not caring about the ramifications if I’m wrong.”

“What do you mean?”

“I survived the last three months, because it was no different to my life at home. I slept, I worked, I boxed, I ate. My father sent me here, because when you’re completely alone, you have nothing connecting you to the world. I believe in god Jack, so I would never kill myself, I don’t think my dad knows that, but I wasn’t alive anyway.”

“That’s not good Jack.”

“What?”

“That’s what my dad says to me when something goes wrong.”

“Oh, ok.”

“So what about now?”

“I’m suddenly getting everything I ever wanted and I don’t know why.”

“Why do you need to know why?”

“I don’t. I once had a fight with my best friend at high school, who I think was in love with me and I ignored it, and something was said that has never left me. He said, *be careful of the day you choose to love someone more than yourself*. The fight was over me being narcissistic and we never have spoken again. But the point was clear, I loved myself so much that to do that to another person could kill them.... I am terrified that I might put so much weight on you, I’m going to, now, cause you more pain than good.”

Jack stood still next to the other highest point for three kilometres. I starred at Trent as Trent had starred at the land. His soft pale face was wrought with shame. His scruffy blond hair had grown slightly out of control over the last few months. But the untamed ruggedness suited his frame, and set off the rich blue of his eyes in a way that seemed to intensify the pain he was obviously feeling.

“You don’t and I doubt you ever did love yourself. You hate yourself Trent. You hate yourself so much that you let trained fighters take the first few hits, and then you beat them from boredom... I used to watch you fight, and I knew that if you had found a strong enough competitor, you would have provoked him to destroy you. Then you would have let it happen without defending... For all the things there are to love about you, you only see what you want to... Who’s picture are you failing to live up to? Yours or someone else’s?”

“I don’t know.”

“Maybe you just don’t give other people enough credit... I see the bad in you Trent. I knew all of this before you said it. Dad has told me enough about you to sink a battleship, but I have learned more than that. I know who you are. That’s the man I want. I don’t want you any other way. I’m not in this for my chance to fix you, or for your benefit. I want you for me. For my own. So you should take from me what makes *you* happy, because I am getting what I want too.”

Shocked, Trent resumed walking with Jack towards the stables without saying anything else. Jack had managed to sum up his entire existence in a monologue. The profound individual he had considered himself had just been made as banal and small as he was to the landscape.

Bill did not take to this reverie well. He headbutted Trent the moment he was close enough.

“Hey,” Trent said, rubbing his forehead. Bill simply snuffed with annoyance.

“I am allowed to be pensive when I want,” Trent yelled angrily at Bill. Bill nodded happily. Apparently he was proud of himself for bringing his master back to his senses.

Before they knew it, a whole day in the field had past without talking. Jack had asked for several tools and had explained their task, but nothing more had been said. Trent was completely quite. On the ride back to the stables, Jack pulled Bree in close to Bill, tying her reigns on Bills saddle.

“That is very dangerous you know,” Trent said flatly.

“Who taught you that?” Jack smiled.

“You,” Trent replied.

“Did you know I applied to study psychology at Melbourne?” Jack asked.

“No I didn’t,” Trent looked at him in surprise.

“Trent, you’re a bigot. And what’s worse is that you are what you’re bigoted against.”

“What are you talking about, I came out when I was 15,” Trent spat.

“I know, and that is a bit of a botch, but I think there is more in it. I think a lot of people can’t stand gay’s, and then to actually be one of them would be awful. So most of them pretend to be normal. But you, you came out, almost to punish yourself for being what you hated. You lost all of your friends, and you refused to be friends with anyone else that was openly gay. Which is exactly what you think you deserved. But you don’t deserve it. Being gay is powerful; we are in ancient stories as the greatest warriors, and in the bible too, as heroes. I think you need to come to terms with your own race, beyond the effeminate stereotype that is stuck in your head.”

“And who the fuck is my race then genius,” Trent mocked.

“I am,” Jack frowned.

Trent looked at Jack, deeply hurt. Trent could not bear the scrutiny of Jack’s gaze and looked at Bill to speak.

“You have no idea what it is like to be becoming something you hate, and being completely powerless to stop it.”

“Especially when you are the ultimate man without it?” Trent looked back to meet Jack’s eyes. The horses continued to walk without their guidance.

“I worked so hard Jack. I was top of my class in everything. I was junior sports captain. Everyone loved being around me. Just because I am gay, I have to take the back seat in everything now.... I can work even harder and I can never achieve the top now, because people can blow me off as a fag.”

“But what does it matter?”

“It’s who I was. I *was* the best, son of the best. Being gay made me a shadow, and I’ve been stuck here ever since.”

“Does being gay make me a shadow?” Jack posed, placing his hand in the back of Trent’s hair. Trent thought for a moment and looked down at Bill.

“It makes you incredible,” Trent whispered.

“Why me and not you?”

“Because in this place no-ones watching. No-one hopes you’ll loose because of who you are.”

“Of course they will. The word *homosexual* was made up by people who couldn’t compete with us Trent. You’re confusing distain with envy. We loose if you accept that we can’t be at the top. We’ll be at the top Trent, you and me, and people will hate us. But who cares, we’ve both gotten this far without those people. Why include them now?”

“I need time Jack. This is still so new, let me fumble and be a teenager at it for a while.”

Jack nodded, a smirk creeping into his mouth. Bill was obviously displeased by the emotions occurring in his master, Trent noticed him inching his head towards Jack.

“Bill!” Trent scolded.

Bill snorted loudly, content that Trent was back in control.

“This horse is shithead!” Trent smiled.

“That’s why I choose him for you,” Jack smiled, leaning across and peaking Trent’s cheek. “He had no choice in loosing his balls either,” Jack shot, untying his reigns.

“Oi!” Trent barked as Jack kicked Bree into a gallop.

Trent kicked into Bill and tried to catch him. Bill however, was not in the mood to gallop and simply farted at the squeeze to his sides.

“Bill go!” Trent bellowed. The command resulted in a sudden jerk forward from the horse and acceleration beyond expectation.

Bill was catching Bree easily. When Jack turned around to check for Trent, he was surprise that the other horse was closing fast. Kicking slightly, Bree was unable to offer anymore speed and Bill soon overtook them both.

“So much for you being the top of anything,” Trent yelled he passed.

The stables were now visible in the distance, the sun setting brilliantly at its flank. Trent pushed Bill until they were inside, quickly taking him into his stall before Jack could arrive. By the time Jack cantered inside, Bill was saddle free and devouring a bucket of fresh water. Trent was gone.

Arriving home alone, Jack was surprised to find the door to his room closed. He knocked on impulse and turned the knob to enter. Trent was lying stark naked on his bed.

“Do you always knock before you go into your own room?” Trent smirked.

Jack quickly locked the door behind him, never taking his eyes off Trent.

“Care to partake in a mouthful of the best?” Trent smiled broadly.

“You seem brighter.”

“I am about to prove to you that I have two *working* balls!”

“We’ll just have to wait and see about that.”

Jack ripped the front of his shirt open, splaying the buttons around the room. Stalking across the room throwing the shirt to the floor, and ridding himself of his singlet, Jack nearly dove at Trent. A huff escaped Trent as the extra weight dropped onto him. Jack Crawled the extra foot towards Trent’s mouth and stopped at an inch away from a kiss.

“Deep breath baby,” Jack grinned.

Chapter 12 – Not exactly a great month

Over the next week in the stables, no-one would even look at Jack, not that Trent had ever watched him in the stables before. But the corps was now obviously ignoring him and their behaviour was only becoming worse. Every day Jack would move Trent onto his roster, the jackeroos would become more obtuse. Eventually Trent snapped. The only reason for the viscous atmosphere would be gossip. The only person that could possible be responsible was Pip.

It took him four days, but Trent finally caught up with Pip late on a Monday afternoon outside the main house.

“Any gossip I might be interested in Pip?”

“Nothing you’d be interested in,” Pip returned.

“Well, that means there is something you’ve been talking about then.”

“Of course I talk, can’t say I’m a mute. Maybe you’ve been hit in the head too many times to remember that.”

“Maybe you’ve been talking to people during your *inspections*,” Trent scorned. Pip was impotently outraged.

“I see you and the bosses son are quite cosy in his new digs.”

“You should really be careful mouthing off. I’d have thought nearly getting a fellow *team member* stabbed would have shut you up.”

“I can’t really reply to that, can I? You seem to have more than just the boss’s ear nowadays.”

“Oh really. So that’s what you’re on. You think that I have someone above who you have,” Trent slurred. The fire behind Pip’s eyes grew.

“You should really be careful city fag!”

“I’m not trying to threaten you Pip. Jack is my friend. If this crap doesn’t clear up soon, I might have to make a visit to the garage,” Trent announced, “or maybe speak with Jeff about the results of the last *inspection*.”

Pip went pale, his face lost all traces of fury. His stomach was churning and he eyes darted for escape.

“Yeah, that’s right. I know. And I keep secrets well. But those pictures we took on my phone would be hard to refute, and I’m not above blackmailing you to protect Jack.”

“I’m not going to take your orders fag!”

“It isn’t an order, it’s a threat. Just leave him alone,” Trent requested.

Trent stood staring at Pip for a moment, watching for a sign of agreement. It took a long time but Pip reluctantly nodded.

“Maybe tonight if you can finish the foot work hour, you can start on a bag tonight,” Trent offered.

Walking away to the house, Trent left Pip to think alone in the failing sunlight. Pip knew he was trapped. Even after years of use and denile, he was in love with Jeff. If anything about them got out, Jeff would leave, Pip would not see him again.

That night Pip's new bag became his new counsellor and he went to bed with bleeding knuckles.

For Jack, the next two weeks were not any better, but they did not seem to get any worse. Trent watched as Jack's days would bring him no solace. He watched him lose enjoyment in his work and in the farm. It started to eat at Trent.

Jack seemed to withdraw; content with just his families company and the nights alone with Trent. As an observer, Trent would sit at the family table slightly jealous of the family connection within the house. Not that he would admit it, but Trent was missing his parents more than ever.

August came with the coldest night on record. Jack fell asleep with Trent lying on top of him still panting. Trent rolled off to his side and lay thinking with Jack sleeping in his arms like a teddy.

The door banged loudly at around two AM. Jack woke suddenly, arms and legs entwined around Trent. Jack writhed as much as he could to wake Trent.

Eventually Trent blundered awake, "What?"

The door banged again. As Trent scurried to get out of the bed his feet got caught by the sheets. He smacked down on the floor with a thud and fumbled around for a moment, before hopping slightly to get into the other room. Jack wrapped himself in the doona and opened the door.

"What's wrong?" Jack mumbled to his perturbed dad.

“Bill’s gone skitz, he’s vomiting and won’t let us near him. Wake up Trent,” Tom ordered.

Trent appeared at the inner door completely naked, “What’s wrong with Bill?”

“Don’t know, get dressed the car is out front,” Tom announced.

They arrived at the stable in the four wheeled drive, Trent flew out of the back door before the engine had stopped. The cold air bit into his ears and there were bizarre sounds coming from inside. The putrid smell was overpowering at the stable door. Ignoring it, Trent ran inside to Bill’s stall. Finding the stall floor coated with a viscous liquid, Trent’s eyes widened when he saw the suffering horse.

“Bill!” Trent yelled. Bill looked to Trent, his eyes pleading for help.

Trent opened the gate and walked slowly across. The vet moved to stop him, but Jack had arrived and held him off. The vet stood wide-eyed, staring in anticipation as Trent approached the animal. Bill then vomited out a sea of lumpy threads.

“What do we do?” Trent begged.

“I can’t get near him, check his eyes,” the vet ordered.

Tom came walking in holding a shotgun.

“They look weird,” Trent panicked when he noticed Tom.

“Weird how?” The vet returned.

“All clouded and unfocused,” Trent looked back, “he’s wet from sweat.”

“It could be colic, or he’s been hobbled,” the vet announced to Tom.

“What do you mean hobbled?” Trent demanded.

“Poisoned, did you see him eat anything strange today?” The vet questioned.

“No, just grass and water. Could a snake have gotten him?” Trent begged.

“You’ll have to check for wounds,” the vet ordered.

Trent ran his hands over Bill’s body and legs. Bill proceeded to vomit again.

“There’s nothing, no bites, not even a scratch,” Trent announced.

“Look. Bring him outside, if it’s colic you’re just going to have to keep him walking.”

Trent led Bill outside. The cold air hit his skin as soon as he exited the stable. He looked back at Jack who was noticeably upset. Tom had an arm around his shoulder.

“Leave!” Trent commanded.

“What?” Jack balked.

“Give me the rifle and leave,” Trent replied.

“To do what?” Tom asked.

“I’ll stay with Bill. I don’t want to have to deal with this Jack.” Tom looked questioningly at Trent. Trent could feel a familiar scrutiny he had gotten from his dad many times. Trent refused to break Tom’s gaze.

“Yeah,” Tom said carefully, finally looking at Jack, “ok. You can deal with this Trent. Jack, come back with me to the Homestead.”

“No. I’ll stay here.”

“Jack, there’s no point. The vet is here, and you have to be alert for the irrigation test tomorrow.”

“I don’t give a damn about the irrigation system!” Jack yelled. Tom, as if electricity had shocked his body, jumped at the statement. Once he had regained his composure, he realised that Jack had said it.

“Go back to the house Jack,” Trent demanded in a slow measured tone.

“Why?” Jack shot.

“If it comes to it, I’m not going to let you watch me kill Bill,” Trent replied.

“Jackie, come back to the house,” Tom requested, “This is Trent’s horse. I think you should let them be alone.”

“Please..” Trent begged.

Jack’s feet reluctantly shifted and Tom squeezed his shoulder.

“I know this is Brax’s dad Jack, but you gave him to Trent. What would you have wanted?” Tom asked.

“Ok,” Jack accepted.

Tom walked to Trent and offered the butt of the shotgun.

“If you need it, it’s loaded,” Tom frowned, placing a hand on Trent’s shoulder.

Trent steeled his countenance and accepted the shotgun.

As the four wheeled drive pulled away, Trent looked at the vet and frowned.

“Is there anything you can do?”

“Look, if it is colic, you can’t let him lie down. But the time you spend is up to you. Bill is in pain, and if it isn’t colic you’ll know in a few hours. You have to decide.”

“Alright,” Trent nodded, “Can you please leave?”

“I’ll be up in the workers house if you need anything. Do you have a sat phone?”

Trent nodded. The vet slowly turned and walked back towards his own car. As he was about to shut the door, Trent thought of something.

“Sorry! Could someone have done this deliberately?” Trent yelled. The vet looked up with a grave face and stood up again.

“I am afraid so, poisoning is the only explanation if it isn’t colic.”

After the vet left, Bill vomited several more times. Trent tried to force him to drink twice, but bill would not. At dawn, the vomiting had reduced, but Bill was still glazed and fretting, his legs had become terribly weak. All of the jackeroos had come down for their

horses at five, most of them stopped to speak with Trent. The vet woke at six and came out to see Bill.

Checking his eyes and mouth, and feeling around his stomach, the vet took a deep breath before he looked at Trent.

“I am sorry to say this boy, but this can’t continue,” just as the vet spoke, the horse dry wretched again.

“I can do it myself if you like. I have the serum in my car.”

“No,” Trent replied, “I’ll do this with him.”

Watching until the vet had disappeared inside the stables.. Trent looked at Bill, his eyes filled instantly.

“Geruff,” Trent grunted and wiped off the tears. He sternly looked at Bill.

“See that. No weakness here Bill.”

As Trent stared at the suffering horses face, the pain seemed to disappear for an instant and Bill seemed to nod once. Trent imagined him saying *‘that’s as it should be Trent’*.

All too quickly the pain returned to Bill’s eyes and he started to lose his balance. As Trent raised the shotgun the idea that anyone could have done this to an animal discussed him.

Several kilometres away, 120 jackeroo’s looked back towards the stable as the shot rang out across the downs. When they all arrived home that evening, Bill’s stable cleaned and empty. The sign that had been on the stall door since before many of them had started was also gone.

Trent finally left the stables in the afternoon. A sickening suspicion sinking in that this could be backlash from his argument with Pip. Unable to comprehend the act, Trent walked quietly up to the homestead, packed his bags and called a car service to collect him. Once he was done, he sat and waited in their room for Jack to return.

As Jack walked in his face lit up to see Trent.

“Hey bud, cold night?” Jack beamed.

“I’ll send you my nose and ears in a package when they fall off.”

“Just give them to me, save on postage,” Jack grimaced.

“I’m leaving,” Trent frowned.

“What? Why, what’s wrong?” Jack’s jubilation left him, he stopped still staring at Trent.

“Bill’s dead.”

“Oh,” Jack’s energy seemed to evaporate. He sat on the bed next to Trent.

“Someone poisoned him.”

“What? How do you know that?”

“The vet checked him... This is hate intended for me and instead of me they attack an innocent animal.”

“Just tell dad that.”

“No!” Trent paused, “I won’t do that. Since I got here I have only meant trouble for you, and I’m poisoning this place now too.”

“That’s insane.”

“You hit your head on my first day here. I nearly drown on the second. I get attacked at a bar. I nearly get killed in a storm and almost take you with me. And, *my* horse gets poisoned. Has any of that ever happened before?” Trent listed.

“That isn’t fair. You have brought this place back from the dead,” Jack attested.

“The only time you’re happy now is in this house or at boxing. You’ve stopped talking to the workers, and you don’t seem to care about Karawara anymore.”

“Isn’t that my choice?”

“No. Because the next time we might not be so lucky.”

“No. You don’t decide this, we do, you’re not leaving.”

“You’re not telling me what I’m doing. I’m going! I came out here to this incredible place, that you *love*, and I’m destroying it all,” Trent fumed.

“Trent,” Jack pleaded.

A horn sounded from outside.

“That’s for me,” Trent stood abruptly and walked away to grab his bags from the next room. He returned with his jaw muscles sternly flexed..

Jack looked at the bags as if they were the foulest most offensive images he had ever beheld. Anger welled in his stomach and he froze. “I love you Jack, but I can’t like myself if I destroy Karawara for you. Maybe with me gone everything will go back to normal again,” Trent gave Jack one of Bill’s best nods and walked out. Jack did not move.

The front door clicked shut, a boot slammed then a car door clunked. Jack’s decision was made. He bolted out of the house to the driveway, but he was too late. The car was already at the bottom of the hill.

He thought for a moment then headed back into the house. The family was already sitting at the dinner table waiting to be served when he came inside, “Guys I have to tell you all something.”

“Ok sweetie, sit down, we’re just about to eat dinner,” Isobel smiled.

Jack went to open his mouth, but nothing happened. It was a lot harder to say that he was gay than he thought. In frustration, he flopped into his chair.

“Is Trent coming to eat?” Georgia giggled.

“No he’s not, he just left,” Jack replied to his hands.

“What, why, how?” Tom looked suddenly alarmed.

“Because someone poisoned Bill to get at him and it worked,” Jack shot.

“That sounds a little paranoid,” Tom replied.

“No the vet told him, someone poisoned Bill. Trent had to put him down this morning.”

Tom deflated considerably as he sighed.

“That’s ridiculous, who would do that to a horse?” Isobel announced.

“Someone who hates fags,” Jack replied.

“Jack McCoach, that is not a word I ever thought I hear from you,” Joan scorned.

“It’s ok grandma, a fag can use it whenever he wants,” Jack rebutted.

“What?”

“I’m gay.”

“Since when?” Isobel scoffed.

“Probably a long time, but physically, I started living with Trent a month ago.”

“You’re serious?” Tom questioned.

“Yes. We are dating. We were dating. I’m gay. Serious,” Jack felt no better with the words out, “I’m leaving Karawara as well.”

“What? Jack this is ridiculous,” Isobel replied.

“No mum, I love him. I have to go, I wont go back to they way I was before. I’m leaving as soon as I can get packed.”

“Not yet you’re not,” Tom smiled. “Wait here, I have something for you.”

Tom exited the room, leaving Jack confused. Isobel looked perturbed, Grace took her moment to cut in.

“What are his arms like to touch?” Grace questioned.

“Grace!” Isobel barked.

Jack snorted and decided to thrill his little sister, “Awesome, his back feels like he could lift an aeroplane.”

Grace beamed a brilliant smile back looking highly devious.

Tom walked back into the room with an armful of supplies, noting Grace’s face.

“What have I missed?” Tom queried.

“An ode to Trent’s arms and back,” Isobel shrugged.

“Understood.” Tom sat again, “alright let me just check everything’s here.”

“What’s going on?” Jack was still confused.

“You’ll need supplies to get to Melbourne,” Tom announced.

“Tom, what are you doing?” Isobel balked.

“Issi, he’s finally told us, he’s happy and he’s alive. And Trent is what he wants,” Tom returned.

“So now you are sending him away? I think he should think this through,” Isobel argued.

“I don’t. I think he should run after him and he’ll need our help to do it,” Tom returned.

“You’re not upset?” Jack turned to Tom.

“Upset? Ha, mum, tell them for goodness sake,” Tom shot.

Jack looked across confused, “Jack, Teresa isn’t your great aunt, she’s my partner, has been for sixty years,” Joan announced.

“What, but what about grandpa?”

“He was a lovely man, that loved lovely men too,” Joan smiled.

“What the hell...”

“Jack!” Isobel slapped him on the shoulder. Grace and Georgia sat enjoying the show.

“How didn’t I know any of this?” Jack was now terribly confused.

“Because until about five months ago, you were a boy in a bubble. Trent was probably the first thing you spoke about with feeling in five years,” Teresa chimed in.

“Mum’s right Jack,” Tom smirked, “this last month in particular. You haven’t been as bright or paid any of us as much attention since you were a boy.”

“Trent made me take my time in coming out. I suppose it forced me to wake up to myself,” Jack reasoned.

“Then we owe him a lot,” Isobel smiled, “I hardly think as much as surrendering you, but I suppose. I you must.”

“Wait a second. I just told you all I was gay.”

“We’ve moved on dear,” Teresa announced.

“Jack, focus,” Tom ordered. “Supplies; the new Prado is yours, Pip finished inspecting it yesterday. Key’s.” Tom handed over a pair of keys. “This is what is called an ATM card, get Trent to show you how to use it. Your password is your birth year,” Tom handed over the plastic.

“Wait, what’s it do?”

“It accesses your savings account at the bank.”

“I don’t have one,” Jack replied.

“Yes you do, I opened it when you were Twelve. It has your pay in it.”

“Dad, you’re not supposed to pay me!” Jack scorned.

“Jack just take it! You work harder than everyone else and you had to be paid. There is also the money from your irrigation project.”

“DAD! That was a gift,” Jack yelled.

“Shut up Jack! I am the parent, you’ll do as you’re told,” Tom boomed. “This is Trent’s details in Melbourne from the files and here is some cash until you work out the card. You have to keep the password secret. You’re going to have to pick up a street directory on your way through.”

“Dad!”

“Look Jack, stop whining, if you leave now you might be able to beat him back to his own house. It’d be romantic,” Tom trailed off

Isobel grabbed Tom’s hand and grinned.

“Pack cold clothes, Melbourne is an ice box this time of year. But you’re going to need to buy a lot of new gear, you wont get far in Melbourne wearing flannel.”

“Jack, what are you going to do there? I think we need to address this,” Isobel added.

“Well, the truth is I was thinking about Melbourne a while ago. Trent was leaving in November anyway. So I put an application into Melbourne uni. They said I can start in January,” Jack admitted.

Isobel’s eyes filled with tears.

“Mum, don’t cry. Please.”

“I’ll cry if I want to, my baby is leaving home,” Isobel wailed.

“Jack, take everything and get packed. Give us a minute to process and come back when you’re ready to go,” Tom quelled.

Jack bounded out of the room.

Chapter 13 – The romantic gesture

Jack sat on the Newell Highway. In what was now his new black Prado. His bags were in, his mother had packed him a weeks worth of food and his Ipod blared through the speakers. He had not yet let leaving Karawara sink in. A large sign on the left of the road approached, *See you soon, you are now leaving Queensland - the sunshine state.*

Jack's eyes welled up until the road was a complete blur, he pulled over onto the shoulder and parked. Everything that had just happened registered. His mother *This room will be exactly the same when you come back. Georgia and Grace, could you send us some photo's or convince one of his mates to come here. Joan and Teresa Well be down to visit in a few weeks, haven't seen Melbourne in years. Tom hit him the hardest, Jack, let Karawara go. It will be fine. Find your dream now, because I never should have let you get lost in mine.*

Jack cried onto the steering wheel for over an hour, leaving home was never on his mind before, now it was all he wanted to do. He eventually got back onto the road, driving all night to make it back to Melbourne before Trent.

He made it to Melbourne by 4:00pm the next day. But his street directory led him astray. He finally pulled over in Swanson Street next to a Hugo Boss store to ask directions.

The shop keeper eye'd him immediately. He stuck out like a sore thumb.

"Sir can I help you," the young woman said.

"Yes please. I am trying to find St Georges Road in Toorak," Jack looked around, realising he was in a clothing store "And I could use a change of clothes."

"What for?"

“I’m surprising my boyfriend. He’s never seen me in anything but this,” Jack announced, gesturing towards his clothes.

“I think we can find something to blow his socks off,” the woman replied, slightly disappointed.

She wrote out exact directions to Trent’s house and decked Jack out in a pair of shoes, jeans and a hooded sweater.

“I’ll freeze in this,” Jack announced.

“Don’t worry, it’s just for the first impact. Then put on the jacket,” she handed him a leather jacket.

Jack left the store with the new clothes on and his old clothes in a bag. The second he got into his car, the shoes were tossed into the back and his boots were back on.

“If Trent want’s stupid puffy shoes I’m leaving,” Jack murmured to himself.

He drove haphazardly out into the traffic. Which resulted in serious honking. Jack did not really notice, his Ipod was still beeping. When he finally arrived at the address he had been continuously checking. He set up camp in the car to wait for Trent.

The wait didn’t end up lasting very long, within minutes a long black town car containing Trent approached and stopped at the intersection in front of him. Jack jumped out of the car and scuttled to the driveway before the Trent could see him. He tossed the Jacket and took up position in the centre of the gateway.

Trent had an awful trip back, most of the car trip to the station he spent in tears. The train had stopped twice because someone had suicided on the track, and he could not get a plane until the middle of the next day. Staying overnight in Brisbane was like a kick in

the teeth, he sat the whole night in the hotel room doubting everything. Four weeks ago his parents had suggested he come home, now he was nearly there he wasn't sure it was where he wanted to be. *There has to be a way for it to work*, then his father would enter his mind talking about prejudicial black kettles and eating cakes. Trent started to wonder whether he was returning to the same dead life Jack had been so scared of. *Jack, my Jack. I walked away from one person who really cares about me. I'm only eighteen what do I know.*

Waking up before four the next morning by instinct, Trent found the city empty. An empty city was a strange prospect in itself, nothing was open, no-one was around. It was quiet, almost like riding back to the homestead after work. Trent didn't want to admit it, but leaving Karawara was awful, when he and Jack finally got together he felt at home. *An eighteen year old can't know what is best for him.*

Trent wondered the streets alone until 10:00, when he figured he should head to the airport. *What about Bill, no-one can look after him.*

Arriving back at Melbourne airport, Trent meandered his way up the concourse, thinking about how much had changed since he walked down that same ugly carpet six months ago. *You don't meet someone like Jack every day, you're already eighteen and you've only met one of him so far.*

Trent collected his bags and found his dad's driver waiting at the exit.

"Only the three bags Mr Masters," Dave asked.

"Yeah," *Shit I've left my toiletries bag in the bathroom.* Trent begrudgingly handed all his bags over and sat into the seat behind the driver.

The city which once meant possibility, looked dry and mechanical, the streets seemed over-crowded and lifeless. Trent watched people as they drove; goths walked along next to businessmen, women were plentiful.

As the familiar surroundings of his suburb and street began to appear, Trent sunk to a new low. He approached the same street lights he'd seen a million times, the intersection where Dave would press the remote so the gates would be open when they arrived. Sitting in a trance, waiting for the inevitable *welcome home*, the car stopped with a jolt. Dave wound down the window.

“Get out of the way you stupid boy,” Dave yelled.

Trent glance forward through the windshield, all he could make out was a body in a hoody in his driveway.

“I want to speak to Trent,” Jack announced, Trent could not place the voice. Annoyed he opened the door and stood up.

“Wh...” Trent froze. “Jack!” he gasped. *I'm hallucinating, I've gone completely insane.*

“I'm not letting you go Trent, I love you,” Jack announced.

Trent felt the urge to scream rattling through him, his eyes started to flood. *No, I hate crying and sentiment. But Jack has never actually said he loves me before.*

Trent slammed the car door, “I'll walk from here Dave,” he said.

Trent walked up to where Jack stood. Jack stepped across allowing Dave to drive on.

“This city isn't half bad,” Jack shrugged.

“How did you get here?” Trent whispered.

Jack pointed at the filthy black Prado parked down the road, “My new car.”

“What are you doing here?” Trent wondered.

“We’re a couple Jack. You moved back to Melbourne, and forgot to pack your toiletries and your boyfriend,” Jack held out the toiletries bag.

“Are you sure?”

“I’ve spent too long in love with a place. You said it yourself the first day we met, you were worried you would be bad for Karawara, and in six months, it started to fall apart. Karawara could never stand up to you and it’s only fair that to the victor go the spoils,” Jack posed and flexed his arms at Trent. “I’m the spoils,” Jack trilled.

Trent encircled Jack with his hands and took a deep breath. They kissed. They continued kissing, until Trent noticed goose bumps on the back of Jack’s neck.

“Let’s get you inside before you freeze again,” Trent smiled. “There are a couple of people I want you to meet.”

“Don’t worry about me, I have a jacket,” Jack walked to the car and pulled out his new jacket.

“This stuff looks like Hugo,” Trent laughed.

“That’s where I got it. With my card,” Jack smiled.

“Oh dear,” Trent punched a code into the gate and it rolled open.

“What is an ATN?”

“A what?”

“For these plastic cards,” Jack produced a credit card from his pocket.

“The ATM maybe,” Trent tried.

“That’s the one.”

“Well you put that into the ATM, type in your code and you get money out,” Trent explained.

Trent and Jack walked into the grounds of the Masters home. Jack stared for a moment.

“This is nice, wouldn’t expect this in a city,” Jack stared at the tennis courts, the stream, the enormous mansion in front of him. “How many people live here?”

“Just the four of us. Five now I suppose.”

“I was thinking we should try living alone together somewhere,” Jack asserted.

“Alright, but for now can we stay here?” Trent replied.

“I love you,” Jack announced.

“I heard you before.”

“You didn’t say anything back.”

“I was in shock.”

“What about this time?”

“Not sure.”

“You couldn’t even ride a horse on your first day.”

“That’s true. But I figure I am around a thousand points up on you, I’ve been telling you that for a month.” Trent grimaced.

“Tell me again.”

“I love you Jack.”

“That’s better,” Jack kissed Trent on the lips, then punched him in the stomach. “And that’s for leaving!” Jack bolted away up the drive.

Trent stood for a moment with his hands on his knees ready to vomit. “I am going to pay you back double for that. When you least expect it!” Trent yelled after him. Jack roared with laughter, once he was a good two hundred metres away.

Chapter 14 – Mr Masters’

It had never occurred to Jack that a Teutonic mass like Trent could run at speed. The punch to the stomach was unsuspected and had great effect. All too quickly Trent had recovered and sprinted forward in pursuit. The warm feeling of a hand around his back leg was his only warning. Jack’s body lurched in mid-air as he unsuccessfully tried to continue running and he was presented with the surreal experience of watching the cold green grass engulf his vision.

Trent rolled him over by the legs and nuzzled his head in under the hooded sweater. Running his tongue up the middle of Jack’s stomach, passed his chest and towards his neck; the strain of the fabric around his back started to pinch. With the sound of fabric tearing, Trent’s head suddenly popped through the neck. Placing his hands on Jack shoulders he pushed upwards, annihilating the top in the process.

“There is your payback,” Trent smiled, planting his lips on Jack’s.

As Trent panted in kiss recovery, Jack shook his head.

“That was brand new top,” Jack said, “and this grass is freezing.”

“Good,” Trent blinked at him.

“Take it like a man,” Trent bellowed, after slobbering his tongue all over Jack’s face.

Beaming brilliantly Trent jumped away, prepared to run for the front door. All of a sudden Darcy was standing right in front of him when he stood. Trent nearly broke his neck. Stunned he fell flat on his arse.

“Are you actually going to come inside and greet your family, or shall we join you here on the lawn?” Darcy raised her eyebrows.

Jack stood sheepishly, still wearing the tattered remains of his jacket.

“Mum! Don’t *do* that,” Trent shook to regain his senses.

“For goodness sake, stand up,” Darcy shook her head.

“Sorry mum,” Trent stood hanging his head.

Then Darcy almost knocked Trent over with the force of her hug, “If you ever leave again, it will not be without me.”

“I’ve missed you too mum,” Trent mumbled.

After finally releasing him, Darcy examined Jack and looked back to Trent.

“Is this some vagrant reprobate that broke in and you just felt it necessary to ruin his clothing as punishment,” Darcy eye’d Jack viciously.

“No, this is Jack. He deserved it,” Trent announced.

“Nice to meet you Jack,” Darcy opened her arms for him to come forward. Jack inched his hand out to her.

“Hello, Mrs Masters,” Jack squeaked, as Darcy crushed his body in an embrace.

“Darcy please, and we hug here Jack. But if you hit me in the stomach I will rip more than your shirt.”

“You saw that,” Jack asked through his teeth, “sorry, it’s just. It *was* deserved.”

“I’m not angry, it was wonderful, I haven’t laughed like that in months,” Darcy smiled.

“Hey,” Trent shot.

“Quiet. That’s been coming since you decked your father. Get inside,” Darcy turned and walked away. Jack in tow, Trent trotted up to the hill while sliding his hand into Jack’s back pocket. Jack looked down with a smile. At the entrance to the house Jack stopped in his tracks.

The front door opened into a foyer that was four stories high and looked up through a glass ceiling. The double staircase spiralled up to four landings and disappeared into each floor.

“The family is all here in the back atrium, but your father and sister are in the front lounge,” Darcy announced.

“Ready or not, your about to meet forty Masters,” Trent sung.

“Please don’t let go of me?” Jack whispered.

Trent squeezed his hand tightly as they walked through a set of double doors. Meg and Mike were standing there waiting.

“It took a moment to pry them apart,” Darcy announced.

“My god he’s the Marlborough Man!” Meg gasped.

“Meg!” Mike shot. “Pleasure to meet you, Jack is it?” Mike checked, glaring back at Meg.

Mike extended his arms around Trent. After a moment he moved across to hug Jack, albeit awkwardly. Meg showed no fear. She first jumped onto Trent then did the same to Jack, holding on slightly too long to the latter.

“Nice to meet you,” Jack smiled shyly.

“As my whole family has forgotten their manners. Jack this is Mike and Meg,” Darcy cut in.

“He figured that mum, I do occasionally speak of you,” Trent mocked.

“Well, they could really be anyone, what if he thought your Dad was the gardener,” Darcy covered.

“How in god’s name did lurch get you?” Meg demanded.

“Meg! Stop it,” Mike silenced.

“How was the trip, Trent didn’t mention you were coming with him?” Mike queried.

“I drove, he forgot me,” Jack answered.

“Oh, I see. Chalk another one up to the drama’s of young love I suppose,” Mike smiled.

“I like the way you put that,” Jack smiled.

“Before we all head in, would you boy’s be up for dinner in town tonight. Once we manage to extricate ourselves from the in-laws?” Darcy posed.

“I think we need to go upstairs and change first, then we’ll let you know,” Trent controlled.

“That sound’s like a good plan,” Mike nodded.

“It’s a pleasure to finally meet you all,” Jack grinned.

“See you shortly,” Darcy nodded.

Trent and Jack turned back to the foyer, still hand in hand. Meg attempted to follow them.

“Meg!” Darcy boomed. Meg slumped and stopped still.

After Jack and Trent had changed into leftover clothes they found in Trent’s cupboard, Jack agreed to a short dinner with his parents, but the dark circles around Jack’s eyes begged sleep.

They walked into the atrium together. Inside there were over fifty people were milling around. Jack gulped as he saw them.

“Are you certain we couldn’t get out of this?”

“It’ll be like a band aid. And the benefit is you’re half asleep, so you probably won’t even remember it.”

Jack smiled ruefully, then spent the rest of the time reciting the same tale fifty three times, four times alone to Trent’s great aunt. At the back of the room, Jack’s new fan club arranged themselves, whispering and giggling behind their reigning president; Meg. Each member of the family insisted on getting a kiss from the country boy before machine-gunning him with inane questions.

The last of the family left at 8:00. Jack's face was pale and pleading for rest, Trent's was not any better. Jack walked over to Darcy, who was sitting on a settee holding a glass of wine.

"Not trying to be rude, but is there any chance for a raincheck on dinner?" Jack asked.

"I cancelled an hour ago sweetie," Darcy smiled.

"Great. I am about ready to double under," Jack huffed.

"What time would you like breakfast?"

"5:30?" It was a little late for Jack's liking, but he figured an hour would be alright.

Darcy almost spat into her wine glass, "I don't think you'll find any one up quite that early, sweetie."

"What early?" Meg walked into the conversation.

"Jack was just proposing breakfast at 5:30," Darcy grinned.

"Get fucked!" Meg gaped.

"Meg!" Darcy warned,

"Sorry. Um, what time is good?" Jack returned.

"Ten?" Darcy suggested.

"Yep, that sounds good," Meg replied.

Jack looked around waiting for the joke.

“That’s lunch time tho?” Jack requested in confusion.

Meg snorted with laughter, Darcy smiled.

“On the weekend we generally don’t get up before nine.”

“Oh, ok,” Jack tried to smile.

Trent was still across chatting with Grandma Myrtle.

“Trent,” Darcy called.

Trent dutifully trotted over, “Yeah mama?” he asked draping himself over Jack’s shoulders.

“We were just discussing breakfast,” Darcy announced.

“Don’t worry about it, we’ll eat at five when we get up,” Trent replied, kissing Jack on the cheek.

Meg snorted, “We. You usually complain about ten o’clock!”

“Used to,” Trent corrected.

“He whinges at five,” Jack grunted.

“Not when you’re friendly about it,” Trent grinned.

“TRENT!” Jack, Meg and Darcy cried together.

“I think it’s time to get some sleep,” Jack yawned.

“I’ll stay a little to answer to the inquisition,” Trent smiled.

Grandma Myrtle left the room and Mike headed over to the group.

“Don’t blame me if I’m asleep,” Jack yawned, resting his head on Trent’s shoulder.

“I’ll be quiet when I come in. Can you find the way?” Trent whispered.

“I’ll manage,” Jack smiled and kissed Trent.

“You too,” Trent felt a warm tingle along his spine.

Jack left, nodding goodnight to the family.

“What is this?” Meg demanded the moment they heard Jack hit the second flight.

“What is what?” Trent replied

“All of this. That isn’t the Trent I know,” Meg stated.

“I’m not the Trent you know. Exile worked well,” Trent shrugged.

“As much as Meg lessens your change, it is quite obvious,” Darcy said.

“Well I suppose six months of near death experiences help you get your values in order,” Trent replied.

“What is going on with Jack, why didn’t you leave together?” Mike asked

“Me being at Karawara was causing him trouble, so I left,” Trent answered.

“And he obviously followed?” Mike added.

“I didn’t ask him too, I tried to give him back his old life.”

“It is nice to know you haven’t lost your self importance,” Meg shot. “And then Trent inspired amnesia, and he saw it and he saw that it was good.”

“Can Meg be sent away next?” Trent requested.

“Meg quiet. Tell us what is going on,” Darcy commanded.

“If he hadn’t shown up here this morning, I don’t know where I’d be now. Since the day I met him, he’s the only thing in my life that matters,” Trent replied.

“When I met your mother I felt like I was losing my mind. It was an insanity. I did things I never considered myself capable of. Maybe that’s love,” Mike replied.

“One night when he walked me home from the football. He gave me his jacket because I was chilly and walked me home for an hour. He then kissed me at the door and got a taxi to the hospital. He was in there for a week with hypothermia, I thought he was blowing me off,” Darcy added.

Trent’s mind raced back to the night of the storm.

“Trent, I shouldn’t really say this to my eighteen year old son. But, you aren’t a small man. Can he handle you?” Darcy held Trent’s arm.

“Ew mum, grosse.”

“I meant your personality. You are difficult to resist sweetie, saying no to you isn’t something many people could do,” Darcy added.

“What are you saying mum?”

“Leaving to protect someone is quite a grand gesture, he may have had no choice but to come.”

“I don’t think that’s the case Darc,” Mike asserted.

“This is a valid point Mike! He has made someone leave his home.”

“Darcy, you’re just inciting doubt, this isn’t a trial. Nothing here is not undoable. Besides, I am quite sure that even though he has been awake for two days and has driven 2000 kilometres, he’ll be waiting up.”

Trent sunk his head forward onto his fathers shoulder, resting shortly.

“You have changed, you’re not the son I sent off to Queensland,” Mike ventured.

“Who am I to you now?” Trent asked.

“Who do you want to be?”

“I’m him,” Trent replied.

“That’s sensational boy. How is Tom handling Jack’s news?”

Trent looked up to Mike in shock. Since he’d been gone his father can’t have changed this much.

“I don’t know, when I left Jack hadn’t told his family yet. I told him to wait until he was ready.”

“I am happy to hear that. When I first spoke to Tom about sending you, he said told me that Jack was as lost as you were. Then two weeks ago, he told me that Jack had come to life again, and that he needed to find a way to thank me for the idea.”

“What idea?” Trent asked.

“Sending you, putting two lost boys together in hopes that they might help each other. Granted I never thought you would become involved with each other, but it astounds me how much impact this has had on you.”

“I’m sorry I hit you dad,” Trent attempted to smile.

“Trent, there is only so much rain steel can take before it rusts. You were, as I was told Jack was, drowning when you left: you in self-loathing, Jack in his dad’s dreams. All we did was hope that you might inspire each other, and instead you have created a new world for yourselves. It may sound strange, but in a similar way, Tom and I were in the same boat. Had our sexuality been compatible, we could have possibly been where you are in thirty years.”

“I didn’t realise it was so obvious,” Trent sighed.

“What you will realise in a few years, is that hiding your emotions is something that improves with age. Teenagers suck at it. It was obvious you were in pain. What you might not understand is that it was agonising for us to watch it.”

Trent thought about Bill and a tear fell down his cheek.

“I understand now,” Trent mumbled.

“Tom told me about Bill this morning. He also told me the news about Jack coming out to the family. He said they were all ecstatic.”

“Really?” Trent looked up, his eye’s pleading.

“Do you want to know what else he said?” Mike asked.

“Yes,” Trent nodded fervently.

“He said it is sad that it is so hard for gay men in Australia, and that he hasn’t been able to stop reading Clancy of the Overflow all day. When he read it to me, I agreed with him. If you listen to the words in that poem, it seems there was more in the relationship of the writer and Clancy than they could express openly. It seemed sad if that is true, the two men forced straight lives on themselves, even when love was available to them. Your Clancy is upstairs, probably awake waiting for you. Embrace it, don’t let the morose failings of the world settle on you. Both of you are amazing strong men, but if you let the moister surround you, you will rust. Go to bed kiddo,” Mike moved over and hugged his son.

“Goodnight dad.”

Trent stood and hugged each of his mum and sister, each moment that passed seemed to put further weight in his legs and eyelid’s. Trudging up to the four floors, he listened as the rain started to fall outside, echoing tranquilly on the tin roof. He smiled to himself, remembering the changes in his life since the last memory of that sound.

Jack lay awake under the sheets waiting for Trent to get there, “I didn’t want to go to sleep before you got here,” Jack mumbled.

“I didn’t want you to either,” Trent smiled.

“Really?” Jack smiled.

“Yep. I have a lot to tell you tomorrow,” Trent grinned broadly.

“I like the sound of that,” Jack replied quietly.

“I think we should go for a run in the morning,” Trent announced, “I’d like to show you around a bit.”

“I’d like that,” Jack grinned.

“Wake me up when you get up?”

“Always do.”

Trent turned away to smile and walked into the ensuite. Jack kept himself awake, listening as the shower turned off and the rain reasserted its dominance. Trent walked dried and naked over to the drawers.

“I get why you like this sound so much.”

“What are you wearing to sleep in?”

“Same thing you are now.”

Trent grinned and stopped his fishing in the drawers. Slumping down onto the bed, he wriggled his way underneath the covers and snuggled into Jack’s side.

“I love sleeping when it rains,” Trent whispered.

“I’ve never been able to hear it before.”

“If it keeps up, I think even you will want to sleep in.”

“I think our house will have to have a tin roof.”

“Was there ever any doubt?”

“At the leaving Queensland sign.”

“What?”

“It all caught up with me.”

“At the leaving Queensland sign?”

“I never knew I wanted anything else. When I saw that sign, it told me what I was actually doing. I cried for an hour.”

“We don’t have to stay here you know?”

“That isn’t the point. I didn’t want to go back to Karawara.”

“Oh...”

Jack pulled his pillow down and placed it between his knees, taking half of Trent’s for his head.

Rain saturated the city that night, and continued well into the day. Trent dosed awake to the feeling of warm breath on his neck. Jack was still asleep, a first in Trent's recollection. Still listening to the rain, Jack stirred against Trent's chest, opening his eyes to a sly smirk.

"Guess who was first up?" Trent grinned.

Extending his body, Jack yawned, "It's about time."

"What do you want to do today?"

Jack bounced around to face Trent, "Um...." He smiled. "Shower."

"And after that?"

"I need a feed. What time is it?"

"No idea," Trent slapped his hand over to the bedside table, grabbing his watch. "Holey shit!"

"What time is it?" Jack attempted to take the watch, Trent held it away.

"11:30" Trent grinned.

"At night!?"

"A.M. Jack rabbit."

"You're shitting me?" Trent allowed him to take the watch.

"Holey shit! You need to leave some curtains open."

“We’re not on the farm. We have a lazy day anyway.”

“That’s not the point.”

Trent pushed off the bed and extended his hand back to Jack.

“Come on, let’s have a shower then surface for some breakfast,” Jack rolled his eye’s and punched Trent’s hand.

“Don’t be gay,” Jack said as he heaved himself up.

The end