

the otherwise histories

the  
disney  
book

by rhett holt  
fourth draft  
(for edit)



*frog haT*

*stink at hEllo*

## the disney book

- GENESIS** 1  
*Blasphemous diatribe spewing from the pubescent mind of male protagonist one; Genesis rewrite.*
- Prologue – Below the surface** 8  
*Lost scene from later in book. We find our hero drowning, very very slowly. There is no dramatic metaphor in that; he is literally under water.*
- Tack 1 - On the 5%** 10  
*Male protagonist one meets male protagonist two: highly boring recount of physical masculine beauty. Gay here does not mean effeminate, or butch, or transvestite, or lesbian, or straight. Wait, the last one is redundant.*
- Elliot 1 – Dragons teeth** 20  
*Flip of perspective to being inside the head of male protagonist two; his take of meeting male protagonist one. Highly abnormal (not) recount of denile. But if the ancient-greek-legend-chapter-title didn't give it away, the warrior has once again sprung from the ground (intended on the dirty side of the entendre ).*
- Tack 2 – Reality ends** 32  
*Flip back to inside the mind of male protagonist one. This is my favorite bit, where the couple meets again, and you just know they will get it on. You can almost hear the 80's parent telling you "Kissy kissy kissy!" There is so much tension in the air, you just want to bite somebody. Not in a vampiric way or anything, more a toey nibble.*
- Elliot 2 – Party Plans** 48  
*Once again flip back to MP2 (got tired of writing male protagonist). Recap the party from the big guys perspective and it is not so bad what he did when forced*

*to empathise. He's still being a jerk, but there is hope that something will happen. And it does.*

***Elliot 3 – While you were sleeping* 64**

*As can be seen, something is missing. It has stayed on MP2 twice. Hint hint. MP2 can no longer ignore the world around him and must finally take up arms; choosing either to throw in with a deadly gay adventure, or battle on in his secretly in his comfortable old life.*

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*Taken from Tack's third grade bible study notebook.*

- Theirs

\_ Mine

## GENESIS

**1** In the beginning God created the heaven (*a.k.a. the deep*) and the earth (*a.k.a. place containing the waters*).

*Quite a lot happened in the beginning. Existence was set in place for millions of aeons. God created all of the foundations; dreaming and the overlap of all things that became the physical world.*

**2** And the earth was without form, and void; and **D**arkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

*Yes God created the canvas for the universe as it is; setting in place the foundations for creation, but then God returned to the deep to establish the constants. As it clearly states (ignoring the capital letter), God left Darkness alone in the deep while reviewing the canvas for the universe. This "Darkness": Phocus in the old tongue. But the indication of timing is stupid. I know books flow, but, the implication of order in this is maddening.*

**3** And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

*Lucifer was brought into existence.*

**4** And God saw the light, that *it* was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

*God split us up in the physical universe. In the deep God made us separate entities; we could still merge to share thought and life, but effectively we were both unique*

*beings. The fact that it was "good" has several problems. Perhaps "well" would have been a better word choice.*

**5** And God called the Light Day, and the Darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

*God did not name us. Sound did not exist. God gave us our identity; similar to a baby learning its name.*

**6** And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

*Here God created many of the other constants; for each constant, an angel was created.*

**7** And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

*God effectively created the confines of the three dimensions; sealing the deep to limitlessness and the earth to space & time. I miss old English. Firmament holds so much more promise than reality.*

**8** And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

*I can see why people get confused here. This point was when God called all of the angels to physical form for the first time. It was quite a meeting; it was the first time any of the angels held physical form. Nobody knew what was happening. Most angels thought that it was just another lesson about existence. Nobody realized God was creating another reality.*

**9** And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.

*"And it was so" meant all of the angels went to work;*



*God used our constants to forge reality into the universal "Eden".*

**10** And God called the dry *land* Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that *it* was good.

*Phocus did stuff up on an attempt at creating; God had to help. It took weeks to isolate the black holes. God thought it was hysterically funny that Phocus' second effort consumed and destroyed all of the work of everyone else; Phocus did not see the joke at the time...*

*Phocus went back to the deep. Many of the angels did, including Lucifer. The early created angels; Arcs, were too powerful to contribute beyond the foundations of the universe. As the building blocks of creation, it was suggested they simply offer their abilities for the manipulations of the others. All in all I don't think anybody was actually aware of what was doing; the whole event was their dreams forming together. They were children, given a first chance to play in the sand.*

**11** And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

*The finesse of what was created here seems lacking with the way it is worded. So many angels merged thought and form to create the most complex and sophisticated beauty; God's will guiding their every move.*

**12** And the earth brought forth grass, *and* herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that *it* was good.

*God made life perpetual. Every angel watched as God*

*spun his own essence into itself. God created a harmony that wrote itself. Phocus lost itself; balance had been taken out of the universe, its purpose seemed mute. It retreated into the confines of the deep; left thought and closeness. The angels forgot, the Arcs wept.*

**13** And the evening and the morning were the third day.

*God found Phocus, forcing his way through the separation it had created. Formless together they floated for a while.*

**14** And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

*As all angels came together to construct the suns and moons, God pulled Phocus back within creation. Gave it a physical body and to oppose its life, God showed it the amassing of another bond. In its heart in the deep, a new Arc rose; a glorious foundation; one only possible once everything else sat in place. It embodied Phocus' own error; it was imbalance incarnate, the opposite of its own purpose. The powers of the empty and nothing; forgiveness. A being appeared clad with an object with physical body. In the deep, the being appeared within Phocus and next to it. Knowledge flowed from the being, a wealth of all that had been and all that would come. With the advent of this being, time commenced; with the object at its side, creation and life could end. Creation at the beginning was finally equaled, justice met chaos.*

**15** And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.

*Together they watched as God called back the angels.*

*Phocus' renewed presence inspired fear and question, as did the new Arc beside. What it, he by the physical form he was given, now realized was the end of his adolescence, marked the beginning of Lucifers.*

**16** And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: *he made* the stars also.

**17** And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,

**18** And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that *it was good*.

**19** And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

*Lucifer recoiled at the new partnership. Taken to loss by the advent of destruction, as Phocus had been by the perpetuity of life. But instead of leaving and isolating, light fought with mighty rage.*

*This is when the war started. If you can call it a war. God is simply allowing Lucifer his adolescence, as God would all. But with the physical realm in place, it has consequences in time. Unlike Phocus'.*

**20** And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl *that* may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.

**21** And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that *it was good*.

**22** And God blessed them, saying, be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.

**23** And the evening and the morning were the fifth

day.

**24** And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after **God**hiskind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after **God**hiskind, and it was so.

*Gender was created by this point, at least male was, and one seems to get attributed to God now. "Godskind" is the balance of life and death; opposed to a rock, a creature has an expiry date, somehow the entry of gender into text lost this.*

**25** And God made the beast of the earth after **God**hiskind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after **God**hiskind,; and God saw that *it was good*.

**26** And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

**27** So God created man in **God**'s~~his~~ own image, in the image of God created **God**he him; male and female created God them.

**28** And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

**29** And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which *is* upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which *is* the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

**30** And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein *there is* life, *I have given* every

## Background

green herb for meat: and it was so.

*I am not sure whether this is a recommendation towards vegetarianism or not. I always forget to ask.*

**31** And God saw every thing that **God**~~he~~ had made, and, behold, *it* was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

## **Prologue – Below the surface**

*What a fetching turn of events. Twenty-two years old. Tossed into a swimming pool. Stark naked. Weighed down by rusty gym weights. And the water tastes like battery acid.*

*Movies demand that life flashes before your eyes about now. Where is it then? Maybe it won't happen until I suffocate a little bit more.*

*Better use the time productively.*

*How can I think productively?*

*At least this is a peaceful way to go. They say you just fall asleep. Maybe I have to make myself remember my life.*

*Nah. What's the point of remembering everything normally? I want the pictorial montage.*

*Three days down here is going to be annoying. God will be impressed when I die.*

*“Hi God, nice to meet you again.”*

*“Didn't I make you immortal?”*

*“Yes. But it only lasted for three days. Then, I died at the bottom of a swimming pool.”*

*“I know.”*

Background

*Boring.*

*Thinking about sex will be frustrating. I suppose they had to tie my hands.*

*Maybe I should try to sleep.*

*“The dreams, Elliot. Trust them,” Tack said yesterday.*

*Good luck. And trust what? What am I supposed to trust? A Neanderthal that looks a lot like me with bad hair making a skin tent out of a mammoth. Tack walking around stark naked with a pair of wings and a rock hatchet. And why does his Neanderthal hair sit perfectly? He probably conjured up some ancient mud replica of product.*

*Tack hasn't addled my brain. If he did he did a thorough job. He couldn't make me feel like this. I could even die happy, right now. How many other people can say that? Pretty nice for an addling.*

*It would have been nice to actually get joined. I was looking forward to the sword fight. All my rugby mates will be there on Tuesday, my family. And I just won't show up. Neither of us will.*

*Tack won't leave me here. He'll find me. He'll fight.*

## Tack 1 - On the 5%

In the middle of my life, if I live to 50, I found myself on a shadowy path; even the description of my place was derivative. It was the end of one path; a fork where experienced climbers could continue up a chained cliff, or others, myself included, could sit on a damp wooden bench and enjoy the inferior one-hundred-metre subtracted view. Debate raged in my head. *The pinnacle beacons*. The walk was five hours; why not climb the final five minutes?

It was then I saw; love-lust at first sight. Catalogue predisposed, my descriptive powers broke him down; *rare Celtic blend; black hair, blue eyes, featureless unobtrusive attire; the Adam, if Adam were made as a buff twenty-something designed to torture twenagers. From my recollection Adam had more hair and was insufferably expectant*. My love-lust was jogging a mountain difficult to walk. *Great legs!*

Salivation. I hated myself immediately. As he disappeared up the chain, I verbally abused myself. The under-whelming couple beside me crouched closer



together. Evidently taken amiss at the seemingly rabid self-talker leering up a chain thinking thoughts of coital rapture. I would never follow; if not for self-glory, I certainly would not be climbing that chain in pursuit of tail. Even a perfectly formed tail with definitive bells and whistles; especially when helicopters had finally been invented.

Gnöthi Seauton; know thyself.

*I am horny.*

Factoids would distract me. *The tree before me is a flame tree named for the fire red bloom at different times of the year; a crow somewhere is imitating a toad to find some lunch; to the Native Dreamers, climbing this mountain to the summit (Mt Warning, aka. Wollumbin) is only allowed for people of spiritual significance. That is **not** why I won't climb to the top. That was a double negative.*

*The reason I did not go to the top is because I know myself. I trust myself.*

*Unacceptable risk. You don't just want to spew for no reason.*

*Sex is on the top of the mountain.*

*He is up there with everyone else; sex incarnate.*

*In my memory - no doubt a memory - I was a philosopher; knowing myself helped me teach. Knowing a twentieth-century self took much longer. A simpleton philosopher years ago - sans the contradiction provided by internet experts – was allowed to ogle men. Even boys. They could not understand this suffering. A rich philosopher with the charge of a king could have clubbed my love-lust, like the Neanderthal he was, and dragged him to his plumbed-water Parthenon.*

*The world now: a quasi-torture-chamber of rules and social psychosis. I don't even have any respectable role models to aspire to. Instead I sit around lusting like a deviate. The devil on my shoulder pleads with me to follow the fine chassis, yet all the while my heart bribes my stomach to evacuate if I even attempted the climb.*

“The foreboding in my stomach – this time – isn't anything to do with the man. My finger just can't namesake itself to a solution.”

*Evidently terrified, the underwhelming couple scurried away down the mountain. I think I just spoke a thought.*

“That's why I gets a capital and a doesn't. People can't even handle an introspective rant these days.”

## Background

*Monologing is condemned to pulped timber.*

An argument with my history teacher came to mind. It felt like a school day. *Sent outside another classroom in my senior year, just because I forgot to self-sensor. The conversation was hypothetical! As usual they just failed to stay contained to imagination.*

*Too much capital in their I's, the history being taught is more imaginary than my banishment-earning ramblings. Maps drawn of cities 3000 years ago by the "better minds" of people at Harvard were wrong. There **was** a coffee shop on the corner of the Coliseum. It wasn't the schools fault it exalted memory. That is what they had been taught to do.*

*The sky seemed clear. Surely my rant was not enough to provoke the Americans again. Sending a helicopter to my school to arrest me for drawing classified pictures of their presidential fall-out shelter was overkill. I wouldn't put it passed them to track me down for spoiling the afternoon of a truly unattractive pair of bush walkers.*

*"Mr Black, we're afraid this is the last straw."*

*"I spoke of fingering the source of a problem?"*

*"Nevertheless, you seem unable to remain silent."*

*“That’s true officer. The black haired boy up the mountain is my accomplice. Arrest him too and have us sent together to solitary confinement for a year or two.”*

*If I could find Newton I would chuck an apple at him too. Only mine would have been a MacBook pro and it would have killed the motherfucker. Self-righteous arsehole! Without gravity I would be up this mountain.*

*Interrogated for being a computer hacker. If I owned a computer with a modem their research would have been spot on.*

Tingling cold seeped through my jeans into my underpants. The feeling moved upward into place in my mind that was very close to the annoyance centre; it sparked memories of garbage trucks at six o’clock on Saturday morning. I stood up, moving to find a slither of sunlight that might provide some warmth. My friends had been gone an hour.

In the last place it would be expected, an early 1920’s telephone ringer sounded. I pulled out my blackberry. The display read: Bryah; my best friend.  
*I need to change the phone book entry. Putting names next to descriptions of the people close to me is cold.*

Background

*“It isn’t cold with thousands of years of history to recall. Surely I couldn’t forget Bryah by now.”*

“You are one hundred metres above me,” I bellowed, “you could have literally called.”

“Yeah, funny,” he replied, “You still down there?”

“No.”

“Ok, just checking. I’m coming down.”

As the phone clicked off, I smiled. When you are a lonely-spinster-man-boy at twenty-five, it is life itself to have found a best friend.

*Especially a straight one who doesn’t run away after your youthful enthusiasm admitted a secret internal love affair involving masturbation a plenty.*

Ten minutes later, the giant thighs of a German shot-putter scurried ass first down the ‘death chain’; as it was now to be termed.

*Bryah; fit, smart - but stupid to take a death chain for a view - and unaware of it.*

*Falling in love with straighties is a problem that never goes away. Not that there is any social norm, but I*

*assume it is a gay thing; the danger of 'friends' of the same gender. Movies provide no help, other than to encourage feelings of perversion.*

*Most countries have a hundred words to describe rain. I know people have tried to add descriptive words to love. I'm sure for a lot of people that may make life easier. I would never deny anyone that. To a gay man, love is love and there is simply a barrier in the extent you can physically express it: friend; partner. I know I love my best friend now. I also feel sex with him would be disgusting.*

Unceremoniously dropping to the dirt, Bryah continued our conversation. He lead quickly into the freeze-to-death-potential the others found up top. They would not last long. Bryah did not want me to be lonely. In Bryah's words, "Elliot", the Celtic looker, "kept refusing to leave when asked."

I gave Bryah my jacket.

*Everyone has heard the horror stories of getting stuck or lost in the bush and freezing to death. Nobody came prepared. The group even went to the extent of mocking me for wearing jeans and a windbreaker. Knowing farm life shows you a glimpse of a world*

## Background

*'house-folk' rarely see. Consequences get lost in cities. Also, God had written no protection for drunks or fools into the mapping of the universe as wives told.*

The whole conversation shifted to me being too concrete with views on everything. Being technically right was meaningless now I was cold without a jacket.

*Apparently desire for fun is synonymous with stupidity. Bryah is fun bullying. He is entitled to an opinion of fun, and the best method to experience it. Try to switch off.*

I snapped.

A rant: I started in on the problems with his ideas of fun, opposed to mine. He found vagina's fun for instance. I did not. Then, I went into quite an extended soliloquy about the five percent of people who are always forgotten in everything; ninety-five percent confidence intervals being acceptable the world over. Bryah knew perfectly well that he was one of the five percent. I detailed our memberships to the imaginary club of people who never filled out surveys, or if did, filled them out in stupid extremes; people who never would fit into the stiff line of a Likert scale. Some people needed two seats on a plane, how on fucking earth could any series of questions

quantify and categorise the intellectual or social fat fucks. Statistics call those people ‘outliers’. Effectively, a miscellaneous file of humans to be blamed for everything that is not perfectly explicable in science; we killed the dinosaurs, made bees fly, and, cause the liars paradox to unsettle mathematician the world over.

By the time my rant had climaxed twice, the whole group had reassembled at the bottom of the chain. I did not notice them for some time apparently.

Bryah and I walked the five hours down in relative silence. Relative for us; we still rambled a lot.

Ranting tires me.

Bryah is my best friend because we actually like each other, although we rarely admit it. We enjoy arguing.

It was getting dark when we got back to our car.

Elliot introduced himself as ‘Elliot’. I nearly fell down the hill.

*Pete’s dragon is bloody beautiful. I have been shown a dithering idiot. Sex with a dragon. Bliss.*

I managed to maintain calm and chant back my name with a nod.



## Background

“Tack.”

The touch of his hand to mine destroyed my consciousness.

I wondered back to the car.

## Elliot 1 – Dragons teeth

Again. Prattle Prattle Prattle. My phone ringer came through the bathroom wall. Conversation six; all to arrange Sunday afternoon.

*I will be there.*

“What more is there to talk about after car-trip-seating arrangements?” I yelled at the wall.

Finally, the ringer stoped. Familiar vibrations preempted another phone call. Soothing *heavy metal*. Rick was calling. I opened the door to grab my phone off the hall table. A drip trail followed me.

“I’m naked and dripping wet.”

“That’s great Elliot. Still mountaining with us?”

Rick replied.

“Was there ever any question?”

“No, but Mark and Joel punked. We’re headin in to pick up Tack.”

“Alright, Allen’s coming too.”

“It will just be the two of you then.”

“Understood.”

“See ya.”

“Bye.”

As the phone clicked off, vibrations pre-empted another phone call. The prattling 20's ringer was set to announce Tia.

“Tia, I am just out of the shower.”

“Yeah. But I've been trying for twenty minutes, and Sammy won't go to the wharf.”

“Sweetie, you know I'll be in on anywhere you go. Just tell me where and when.”

“But you'll be out of service all day with this *boys only* mountain thing.”

“What if I promise to call you whenever my phone gets out of a no service area?”

“Alright. But only if you promise.”

“I promise.”

“Ok then. Have fun today.”

“Bye.”

I clicked the end button.

*That was too fast. If she noticed she would call back.*

A puddle had formed under me.

Tack's name echoed in my head.

*Tack*: my phantom. I heard that name nearly two years ago and it's owner it had stayed an apparition.

Hearing first and/or second-hand recounts of his effects had been almost frequent. More than anything, he was somebody with chaos in his wake. *Mary Poppins*.

I laughed.

Half an hour after *promised*, Allen arrived. I was sitting in the front seat of my car halfway through the Hilltop Hoods album I had for the trip.

“Great work on the arrival time. Where is your shirt?”

“It is in my pocket Mum,” Allen spat. “No Australian shit,” he announced before ripping my CD out of the player.

After watching him plug his iPod into the stereo I sat and waited. Eventually he looked up at me.

“What?”

“Permission to leave?”

“Fuckin’ go!”

The trip up was silent, almost professional. This trip was a workout in Allen’s head. I did not mind, at least he would push me. As the road started to wind, Allen checked my messages.

“Hey it looks like Prick has left without us.”

“I don’t blame them, we are really late. Don’t call him that.”

Allen huffed into his chair. The rest of the trip was quiet; except for the metal screeches coming from my stereo.

By the time we reached the carpark there was nothing left; cars were parked in every square millimetre of space. Rick’s message said that they had come in Tack’s car.

*I wonder what a Phantom-Mary-Poppins would drive.* It made me grin. As I turned into a partial car space / partial cliff, Allen stared at me.

“What are you grinning about, idiot?” Allen spat as he slammed my door into the car beside us. Pulling myself together, I jumped out of my seat and trotted to the road.

Shirtless and full of purpose, Allen brightened outside of the car. Track technique and pacing spewed fourth. He was an interesting person when you accepted he was shallow. Part of me would have liked to slow a little on the path to see the park. Allen would not have accepted that. Our pace stayed at a slow jog, slower when the rocks were bigger.

Rick had told me that the path up Mount Warning was easy, until you get to the chain. Then you have to use your arms and risk death for a view. When I saw it I understood. It was a guide-rail plunged into solid rock tittering up a sheer hill.

Just beyond the chain entrance; on the flat path, I noticed a small sitting alcove. A couple sat chatting. Another man sat alone using a Blackberry. He stared back. I smiled. He was wearing more designer clothes than I owned; Armani spray jacket, Versace jeans, Revo glasses, and, Nike all-purpose boots. He actually looked prepared for the mountain, in an expensive way.

*No-one else is prepared for anything.* It made me wonder whether I should have checked the weather.

His dark hair offset a chiselled jaw - the spitting image of a Michelangelo statue. I was immediately annoyed.

“Let’s do it,” Allen announced, gesturing at the chain.

With an audible grunt I followed.

Six hand calluses aside the clear sky became easily visible. The grunt and pull up the chain became my

only focus. The chain path could not be long enough and the rock surface was too easy to handle. I needed more.

Allen tried not to use the chain as much as possible.

Without warning, the growth was gone. The summit was bare rock flecked with a few small groups of people.

Bryah's stocky frame was easily visible. Malcom stood next to him making a stark contrast with his constant flutter of picture taking. Rick was taking photos for a small Asian group. A lone dark haired guy walked around the edge. I assumed it was Tack. My annoyance grew.

*He seems so ordinary.*

"Hey!" Bryah called.

Rick saw me and trotted over. Two of the girls in the group watched Allen's shirtless glisten.

"Hey Elliot," Rick smiled.

"Hey, sorry we are so late, we ended up jogging up the mountain."

"No problem. You would have seen Tack on your way up. He wouldn't come up the chain."

"Serious? Why not?"

“Scared probably. He got about half way up, looked visibly ill and just said no. He said he’d wait at the bottom of the chain.”

“What a poof,” Allen snorted.

“Wouldn’t say that in front of Bryah,” Rick smiled.

“Wouldn’t say what?” Bryah asked as he walked over.

“That Tack’s a poof,” I replied.

“Pfft. Tack is a poof. He would be the first to say it,” Bryah laughed.

“Why climb a mountain if you don’t want to get to the top?”

“Probably just chickened out.”

“Nah, I doubt it. He is weird with things like this.”

“What happened to arriving at eleven?”

“Dickhead here came late,” I pointed at Allen.

“Get over it!”

Allen paced off towards the edge. Bryah shrugged and went back towards Malcom.

“So what’s happening?”



“Nothing overly exciting. Tia is planning something for tonight. I know you have a date, but if you want to come after it would make the night easier.”

“Nah, we’ll be *mighty* late. I hope. How many phone calls did you get up the mountain?”

“None. Promised her I would call when I got out of any black spots. Since there are no black spots on the mountain I only had to call her after I drove under the bypass bridge.”

“Clever.”

“Hey, come get a photo,” Bryah called.

Malcom was already taking photos of the two of us. The view did not catch me. My annoyance kept growing about Tack.

*Why had he decided to say below? He needed to be here.*

Something felt wrong. For some reason I had set myself on meeting Tack on the summit. After a few minutes, Bryah pulled out his phone and made a call. He asked whether the person was still at the bottom of the chain, then promised to head down. He was talking to Tack.

Something in me hoped he would go down to help Tack up.

*Why do I care?*

Bryah announced that he was going down to wait for us.

“Wait a sec,” Rick announced, “we’ll come with you.”

My stomach clenched. Tack was supposed to be up here, I knew it.

“No we wont. I want to enjoy it for a while. Tell Tack to get over himself and come up,” I spat.

“Yeah mate. That’ll work.” Bryah smiled as vanished down the chain.

I wanted to go too. I did not know why.

I did not pay much attention to the rest of the time on the summit. I felt angry, right down into my centre. It was a nice view, but nothing new. It was as if I had seen it all before.

There was a mystery at the bottom of the chain. I wanted to crack it. Malcolm left next. Rick started to flirt with one of the girls in another group. Allen stared at him.

After significant coaxing, we were finally able to leave. For some unknown reason, when we all got to the bottom of the chain the others were watching something. Tack stood opposite Bryah. It looked like he was getting a lecture.

Every part of Tack's body was mobilised in an all out assault against the air. The concept of forcing opinions on others was his enemy. He didn't notice me. I was at the point of throwing a tantrum. Bryah wore Tack's jacket. That annoyed me. The goose bumps on Tack's arms betrayed his façade; even with the singlet underneath, he was cold.

*Why give up your jacket just to hurt yourself?*

He was prattling on at the speed of a Gilmore girl, with just as many quotes. It was an interesting rant. And from the sound of it, he could be going all day. I wanted to listen.

*Damn it!*

Allen and Rick wanted to jog. With a near bow, Allen excused himself from the lecture but didn't get far before he realised he was alone.

“Oi! Come on,” Allen Yelled.

At a light canter we continued down the hill, I found myself stopping to point out things to Rick and Allen. For some reason, it was important that Tack notice me. Obviously, my body hadn't done a thing to help. I figured I could suggest a wait at the car to cool off. Then change cars home. Before I could even settle on my argument Rick asked to come back with us.

*Leaving my car with Allen would have looked odd anyway.*

The thick air felt good against my lungs. I sat down next to Rick to wait.

The first sign of the other group was the sound of taunts between Bryah and Tack. Both of them were smiling happily staring at each other. Tack's teeth were perfect. Someone once had said they were secretly a couple. They weren't. I always knew that.

As Tack approached, his locked eyes on me. I stared too much. Rick introduced us and I flew up to shake his hand.

My pulse went through the roof as we touched.

I felt dizzy and wanted to sit back down. From what I could tell, Tack did too.

Instead of speaking, he wandered shakily down the hill. I found myself in the middle of the street watching him. I made myself stay as Rick walked after them.

*Rick went down with them, I can too.*

At the car, Rick reached in and took a bag from the back door. Tack's hand dropped onto Ricks shoulder before he could leave. He asked something, starring up at me. Rick nodded and walked back towards me. A sigh escaped my lips. I held myself back with everything I could. I had done enough. Tack was obviously not part of my world. I suppressed my anger as Bryah took the drivers seat and they drove away. I turned back towards Allen. Rick took over me and suggested anther short walk. Allen agreed.

Kicking the gravel, I followed Allen and Rick to do another walk.

## Tack 2 – Reality ends

Bryah drove home.

*That impressive display of sheer stupidity wreaked of the impudent crapulence of putrid female teenagers.*

My internal rant had broken the volumous word barrier and now knew no bounds.

*As simple as a pretty set of eyes, and a perfect arse, calves, hair, face, neck, teeth, arms, torso, stomach, knees, feet... STOP you blithering idiot! I bet his penis is perfect too.*

*You have gone to ribbons over a man. Pretty colourful decorative ribbons like the ones that could curb the seats at our... Kill yourself now for that thought. I cannot stand the humanity of this feeling. He is occupying my entire thought process and I am powerless against my own pathetic... I think I thought of never washing my right hand again. Punish your self for that too!*

*Oh God if I ever did you anything worthy enough for an almighty favour. Make these thoughts go away!*

Reality ends

*“NEVER IN A MILLION YEARS!”*

*Damn it! I think I could just suicide.*

*“YOU WON’T” God announced, “AND DON’T TRY TO THREATEN ME WITH SUISIDE.”*

What felt like a minute was actually an hour. Apparently, I spent the time autistically humming ‘it’s not easy’ from Pete’s dragon. Pete’s dragon; named Elliot. My mind was full of filthy, fantastic and fucked images of life with him.

*Bryah sees it. Not in the bestiality sense. Not that Disney would ever imply that. Imagine the kids Belle and the Beast would have had had she kissed him a minute too late.*

This was why I was not allowed to drive home. In reality Bryah had no idea. He just got a thrill from driving my car; compared to his shitbox.

I do not like to gloss over periods of time. But the next few weeks were dull. It was tax time. It was busy at work. I was a lonely-cold-spinster. Again.

My memory rushes to Bryah's birthday. One hop, skip and four jumps forward. Two boring months later I walked into the party. Elliot was there. Elliot Moore. Two days after the bush walk, I Facebook stalked him; only delayed due to sleeping 36 hours that night. The Native Dreamer people were behind the extension; punishment for climbing their mountain without permission. Had I gone all the way to the summit I may have Rip Van Winkled the naughties.

*Luckily I didn't! Yeah tell yourself that you idiot!  
You still missed out on great sex with Elliot. Right on the  
summit!*

Images came to my brain like American pie. I saw the conversation with Elliot in a thousand different scenarios. Elliot suddenly stood before me.

“How did you shape up after the walk?”

“I died.”

“That's a shame, do you like veal?”

“I do. Want to have sex with me?”



Reality ends

No. That would never work. Elliot suddenly started walking over.

“Hey space cadet. You have been standing there in oblivion for about five minutes.”

“I have an epilepsy disorder.”

“Really?”

“No. I lie when I’m nervous. Want to have sex with me?”

No! These scenarios were all leading to me having a sudden onset of terrets. Elliot then yelled across the room.

“Tack!”

I looked across. Hoping I was back in reality again. Elliot waved at me to come over.

It all seemed real enough. I was still clothed. Elliot seemed to lack the lustre my imagination would add.

*No enormous erection.*

I still had not moved.

*Cue your feet to fucking work! That’s your job!*

My brain screamed at itself.

Elliot stared at me quizzically. Excusing himself from the group he walked over. Sauntered. Swagged. Whatever it was, it was mesmerising sex. Walking sex.

*Get me out of here you horny idiot.*

*I'll just cloud the room with pheromones.*

*If such a thing were possible, I might have a chance at escaping in the fog.*

*Why not just hold your breath and faint.*

*Great help you are.*

*If my legs were actually working you know I would help you.*

“You ok?” Elliot asked.

*No!*

“I seem to be suffering from the affliction of a teenaged girl. I am enamoured with you.”

*I just said that.*

“Easy tiger. Saying things like that might scare me off.”

“Best I scare you off now before I announce that I am in love with you, after one meeting. I'll get hurt otherwise.”

*I just said that. Legs wont work but mouth is an overachieving chatterbox. Who the fuck has control of you?*

“That would be a mistake.”

“Not if it is true.”

“True or false, I would have to be gay to make it relevant.”

“You are!”

“Am I just.”

“You died when I touched you at Woolumbin the same as me.”

“That was...”

“Terrible grammar. Sorry. But this is...” I interrupted, “Going to be some diabolical rationalisation.”

“I’m not rationalising. I admit my head swam some. And that I am diabolical. And that I am somewhat taken by your mystique. But it doesn’t go beyond anything normal between mates. If they were really objective about their feelings, all men know they attracted to the men they choose to hang around.”

“Freudian. Am I any good in your sex dreams?”

*I have terrets.*

Elliot simply nodded, turned, and walked away. I had just completely blurted out everything in my mind. I felt abused. Being in the centre of the room, alone, felt conspicuous. The only option came to me. Eyeballing the room, I found Bryah. In three steps I had him by the arm on the way to the closet.

“What the hell are you doing?” Bryah gasped, straining at the grip.

I pulled opened the closet door and slung Bryah inside. I closed the door behind me and stood silently in the darkness.

“Care to tell me why we are in the cupboard?”

“It has finally happened.”

“You’ve decided to do some vacuuming?”

“I’ve snapped.”

“You were always bent to the point of snapping. It was unavoidable. Your life’s natural condition is a series of insurmountable obstacles on a road to imminent annihilation. Fortunately, God has your back.”

“True as that may be. I am afraid God is controlling my entire body like a marionette.”

“Run with it.”

Reality ends

“It felt close to insanity. The betrayal of my entire personality was just achieved in three sentences.”

“You are in love.”

“Rot, this is not love. I am on the crest of 80 words spoken with him.”

“What did your grandma say about your family?”

“Bullshit!”

“The only way your family survived was for love to steal your control. You are thinkers. You like too much control. I read your book on her. She said the exact same thing about herself. You go to water over a pair of goeey eyes. Or you go goeey over a pair of watery eyes. Something.”

“Bullshit. I wont accept that.”

Flinging the door open I made to leave the closet; intent on heading home. Directly outside the door I slammed straight into a giant back. Elliot’s Back.

*Now to just make it happen in quick succession.  
3000 more times.*

“We were just in the closet discussing you,” I announced.

*Oh crap.*

“How much have you had? And of what?”

“He’s had nothing,” Bryah grinned, emerging from the closet. “And the closet was purely platonic, you two are free of guilt to have each other.”

“Apparently my family loses cognitive control around people they love. Fuck shit balls! I’m leaving.” I stood still.

“You don’t appear to be,” Bryah chuckled.

*Please legs, I have been good to you. I never run on you. Run for me now.*

Elliot smiled broadly. Bryah put his hand on my shoulder. I could not move.

“This is nerves because you are around me?” Elliot enquired.

“Perhaps I’ll leave then,” Bryah took his hand off my arm and walked.

“Oh *please God*. Stay!”

Bryah stopped and smiled.

“It is my birthday, and I now have seen what can be my gift. Tack Black, broken.” Bryah smiled again and walked away.

“Then you can give the watch and stethoscope back!” I yelled.

Bryah stuck his middle finger up as he continued away.

I looked at Elliot.

“Is this the guy?” A pretty blonde asked. She planted herself at Elliot’s side.

“The one and the same.”

“I’m Tia, Elliot’s *girlfriend*,” Tia said, extending her hand.

“Oh, you’ve got to be kidding. Were you hiding behind him?”

“No. And No. We’ve been together for six months.”

“I don’t mean that.”

*Oh crap*

“I mean you. Clearly you are his handbag.”

*Oh crap.*

“What does that mean?”

“Something good, Burken bag standard! And it would have to match the outfit.”

“I didn’t mean that! I meant I am not a handbag.”

“Yes you are. You look like have been beautiful your whole life. Which means you don’t need to do anything to get what you want. Elliot is a trophy. And

you can only ever be Elliot's trophy wife. You are choosing that life right now: Handbag."

*Best just to go with it.*

"And you could do better!" Elliot stated.

"I don't need to prove anything to you Elliot." I replied. "You know. The straight attempt will fail. You can feel it coming on now.

"You are screaming inside. Right now. You haven't even offered token resistance. You even develop manipulations on truth to avoid having to talk to her.

"You're being an actual prick. You're using her. If you are going to be objective about your male attractions, be objective about your female attractions. Or lack thereof."

Tia turned her eyes on Elliot for the first time.

"She knows. Look at her."

Elliot forced his eyes to Tia.

"Listen Tia, find yourself a soft lovable nerd. You deserve to be adored. Elliot is a dragon. He needs a knight."

Elliot's fist suddenly arrived in my face.



*Sweet silence. The heinous sound of my own stupid voice cut off mid-rant.*

The sound of Bryah's voice was the first thing to make sense.

As my eyes blinked open, beholding the blocky white of the ceiling cornice, my left cheek made its presence known. Throbbing insistent aching. Bryah was standing above me, holding a bag of peas.

*Some time has passed.*

"This birthday is turning out brilliant. Elliot has never been in a fight. You even caused it. I love it." Bryah bent over me and placed the peas on my face. "You never fail to make an event fun. I thought you couldn't get hit?"

"I let him," I groaned. "Seemed like the only way out of that conversation."

"I think you got out of it a little late; Tia dumped Elliot while you were out."

"Great!"

"How is that great?"

"Where is he?"

"Out the front, waiting for a lift."

With more effort than I thought I was capable of, I forced myself up.

“Where are you going?”

“Where do you think?”

“Tack, just leave him now, you have done enough for today.”

“You think I have any choice in this?” I replied as I pushed past him towards the door.

“Please don’t let him hit you again,” Bryah called.

My arm wrenched the door open. As the cold air hit my face, my cheek seared. The deserted patch-grass front yard looked uninviting. My stomach churned.

Against my will my legs lurched forward towards the road. There was no sign of Elliot.

“Hey fuckwit,” the back of a car mumbled.

My vision unblurred for a moment revealing a small human shape hunched behind a ford laser. My stomach chose that moment to evacuate itself.

Before my head hit the grass, I knew I had a concussion. Elliot’s touch came to my shoulder. I passed out.

Through blurry episodes of wakefulness, I found myself in a car with Elliot and a woman. Her colourful sound seemed quite angry with Elliot.

I could see the florescent lighting of an emergency room ceiling.

“You’re staying with him!”

“I know,” Elliot resolved.

The sound of shuffling slippers left. As I opened my eyes, Bryah was not there. Elliot’s distraught face filled my vision.

“You’re beautiful when you’ve been crying,” I slurred.

*Fuck!*

“What the hell is wrong with you?”

“I’m in love.”

“Stop saying that.”

“I can’t. I don’t have any choice.”

“Why are you doing this to me?”

“You are the most beautiful creature I have ever seen.”

“Shut up!”

“You can’t fight me Elliot, I won’t attack.”

“Bryah always said you were strange. I can’t believe this.”

“Bryah loves me a lot. You love me more.

“No, I don’t. I’m not gay.”

“Yes you are. Don’t worry about all of this either. I can handle a lot.”

“You aren’t that badly hurt.”

“Yes I am. Physically, I’m as hurt as I have hurt you. But we’ll be ok. I promise. Just get through the next few days.”

“You haven’t done anything to me.”

“I couldn’t make the summit. I don’t know why. I had to follow the feeling.”

Elliot’s eyes started to well.

A thought crossed behind his eyes.

Elliot stopped as the sound of slippers returned. A dark storm of a woman loomed at the doorway. She was beautiful, even wearing pyjamas.

“The doctors will scan him and you will wait. I am getting a cab home. Drive yourself home once *he* is safe at home. Promise?” Elliot’s mother threw a plastic dongle towards him.

Reality ends

“Yes Mum, I promise,” Elliot and I replied at the same time.

With a long suspicious stare at me, she turned on one tattered slipper and strode out of the room.

I felt myself passing out. Elliot turned to look at me. The last thing I saw was his face change to fear.

A strange rhythmic thumping was around me. As I opened my eyes I was confronted with a beige wall inches from my face. I felt like a hot dog.

“Remain still please. You are in an MRI scanner. Mr Black.”

“Any news?”

“We aren’t certain yet sir, we need more pictures. Please remain still.”

I passed out.

## Elliot 2 – Party Plans

Bryah’s birthday was just around the corner. I had a feeling in the pit of my stomach; excitement and fear. I realised I needed to speak with Tack. It hit with a lingering warning that the choice to speak with him meant trouble.

*What could he actually do to me?*

I arrived on time, Tia in tow. She was already complaining; ‘rocks on the footpath’. Only three other people were in the house. None of them were Tack. Bryah teetered up to greet us.

“You two are the first non-family to arrive.”

“And you’ve been drinking already.”

“I told him a birthday RSVP was not a promise to arrive exactly on time,” Tia replied.

“Happy Birthday.”

“Thanks.”

“That’s a great watch. Who gave you that?” A new Tag Heuer watch gleamed around Bryah’s wrist.

“Tack. At 12:01 this morning.” Bryah feigned annoyance. “And an engraved stethoscope. Hey, you

should do what he does, he replies with the exact time he plans to arrive.”

“Is he here?”

“Nope. At Eight. He and Dad stand off on a few points. Last time he got here early Dad didn’t sleep for two days.”

“What?”

“Long story.”

“Why do you put up with him?” Tia asked.

“You don’t choose who you love.”

“So you *are* a couple?” Tia replied quickly.

“In a way, but we only have mind sex and I am allowed girlfriends.”

“That isn’t a couple then,” Tia reasoned.

“Can I have a look at your watch?”

“Sure,” Bryah smiled as he struggled to unclasp the watch from his arm.

*Sleek, simple and unique.*

On the back, engraved in tiny letters ‘Truly, the greatest masterpiece of creation is friendship’, Bryah beamed as I read it aloud. I handed the watch back to him. It made it back onto his wrist faster than my eyes

could see. I doubted it would spend more than essential moments off him.

Frustration grew within my gut. I wanted to speak to Tack. Whatever the trouble was, I accepted it.

“You two sleeping over?”

“No, I’m driving,” Tia boasted.

“I know people are heading out afterwards. We probably wont.”

“Rick will be disappointed.”

“Yeah, he is.”

Bryah’s mother called from outside. Bryah sighed.

“I’ll talk to you later. Get yourself drinks and snacks. The TV is playing through the Lord of the Rings extended versions in the other room.”

Bryah smiled at us both before walking towards his mother’s voice.

“That is so lame.”

“No it isn’t. It’s a good idea. People can watch and talk. Some people aren’t comfortable socialising. And it will give us something to do until more people arrive.”

“I hate Lord of the Rings.”



“Why did you see all three of them then?”

“Because you made me.”

“Stand here alone then. I’m getting a drink and I’ll be on the couch.”

As I walked an inch Tia followed.

An hour later the house was pumping. Tia was off with her school niche. Probably complaining about being seen here. My feet itched; I wanted Tack to arrive. The only condolence was that Rick had started ridiculing random behaviours. He was trying to make me laugh.

The group suddenly changed; like a street lamp had switched off as I drove. I felt it happen. The room seemed to shift direction. The clock on the wall was about to strike eight.

At the stroke of eight Tack wandered through the door.

*I knew I’d like this guy.*

Watching people with fascination, he eclipsed the room like a prince. As his gaze moved towards me I smiled. My mouth was so wide it made the corners of my lips hurt. He smiled back briefly and then became unresponsive. He had the look of a security guard. His

gaze seemed to slip across the crowd, his mind somewhere completely different. I gestured for him to come over.

He did not move. He stood like a statue, glued to the floor, eyes glazed. I felt like a dinosaur had entered the room - everyone knew - but they just went about their lives; trying hard to pretend it was not happening.

“Tack!” I called, waving.

He still refused to move.

As Rick started another story, I raised my hand.

“I’ll be right back.”

Rick frowned at the interruption. Ignoring him, I walked towards Tack. Rick continued his animated conversation with the rest of the group. As usual Rick had them entranced.

As I walked towards him, Tack’s eyes changed; the force of Tack’s focus on me made moving forward difficult. The five strides to him felt like eternity.

“You ok?” I asked, already exhausted.

“I seem to be suffering from the affliction of a teenaged girl. I am enamoured with you.”

“Easy tiger. Saying things like that might scare me off.”

“Best I scare you off now before I announce that I am in love with you, after one meeting; I’ll get hurt otherwise.”

“That would be a mistake.”

“Not if it is true.”

“True or false, I would have to be gay to make it relevant.”

“You are!”

“Am I just.”

“You died when I touched you at Woolumbin the same as me.”

“That was...”

“Terrible grammar. Sorry. But this is...” I interrupted, “going to be some diabolical rationalisation.”

“I’m not rationalising. I admit my head swam some. And that I am diabolical. And that I am somewhat taken by your mystique. And your timing. But it doesn’t go beyond anything normal between mates. If they were really objective about their feelings, all men know they attracted to the men they choose to hang around.”

“Freudian...”

“Am I any good in your sex dreams?”

I nodded politely, turned and went to find Tia. When I checked back over my shoulder, Tack was gone completely.

*Is it possible I just had a stroke.*

I walked back to where I had been standing. There had not been enough time for him to get out of the room. I looked around figuring he would just have found a group to stand with. Tia came over from her group.

“You look psychotic. What are you looking for?”

“Nothing. I just... Nothing. Where have you been?”

“Out talking with Jackie. I think we’ve been here long enough to be polite. I want to go.”

“Tia, it’s only been an hour. I spend hours at every little function your friends have.”

“Yeah, but my friends are fun. This is just a gathering. It is dull.”

“Tia, suck it up! It is what you do in a relationship. Get used to it”

“Shut up. All you do it talk to Rick.”

“Actually, I just got completely ditched by this mate of Bryah’s after being hit on.”

Suddenly, something ran into the back of me. My nose filled with the scent of roast meat and breakfast.

*Consider: your back is to a wall.*

I turned to find Tack shrinking like a scalded dog. Bryah was standing behind him in a cupboard disguised as a wall panel.

“We were just in the closet discussing you,” Tack announced.

“How much have you had? And of what?”

“He’s had nothing,” Bryah grinned, emerging from the closet. “And the closet was purely platonic, you two are free of guilt to have each other.”

“Apparently my family loses cognitive control around people they love. Fuck shit balls! I’m leaving,” Tack stated.

Both Bryah and I stood waiting.

“You don’t appear to be,” Bryah chuckled.

My face broke and I couldn’t contain a smile. Bryah put his hand on Tack’s shoulder. He seemed glued to the spot.

“This is nerves because you are around me?”

“Perhaps I’ll leave then,” Bryah took his hand off Tack’s arm and walked away.

“Oh *please God*. Stay!” Tack was pleading.

Bryah stopped and smiled.

“It is my birthday, and I now have seen what can be my gift. Tack Black, broken.” Bryah smiled again and walked away.

“Then you can give the watch and stethoscope back!” Tack yelled, avoiding eye contact with me.

Bryah stuck his middle finger up behind him.

Reluctantly, Tack looked at my eyes.

“Is this the guy?” Tia planted herself at my side. Her sudden appearance took me off guard.

“The one and the same.”

“I’m Tia, Elliot’s *girlfriend*,” Tia said. After passing her eyes up and down his body, she offered her hand.

“Oh, you’ve got to be kidding. Were you hiding behind him?”

“No. And No. We’ve been together for six months.”

“I don’t mean that.”

“I mean you. Clearly you are his handbag.”

“What does that mean?”

“Something good, Burken bag standard! And it would have to match the outfit.”

“I didn’t mean that! I meant I am not a handbag.”

“Yes you are. You look like have been beautiful your whole life. Which means you don’t need to do anything to get what you want. Elliot is a trophy. And you can only ever be Elliot’s trophy wife. You are choosing that life right now: Handbag.”

“And you could do better!” my mouth demanded.

“I don’t need to prove anything to you Elliot.

“You know.

“The straight attempt will fail. You can feel it coming on now.

“You are screaming inside. Right now. You haven’t even offered token resistance. You even develop manipulations on truth to avoid having to talk to her.

“You’re being an actual prick. You’re using her. If you are going to be objective about your male attractions, be objective about your female attractions. Or lack thereof.”

Tia turned her eyes on me.

“She knows. Look at her,” Tack announced.

I knew I had to look at her. It shouldn't have been a hard thing to do. I couldn't. My hand seemed to move without an order from my brain.

“Listen Tia, find yourself a soft lovable nerd. You deserve to be adored. Elliot is a dragon. He needs a knight.”

Seeking the source of the sound, my fist arrived to block it out. My fist suddenly made contact with Tack's face. Blissful pleasure crossed my skin as we made contact. Then came the pain of the punch.

He fell backwards, ironically, into the closet. I could feel my own face throb. It started to burn instantly. My fist stung. The relief on Tack's face was serene. My heart wanted to explode in my chest.

I had to leave the room.

Bryah ran over as I started to back away. Tia stared at me. The room stared at me. I turned and made for the door. The looks on the faces were afraid.

Outside the cold air made my face feel worse. I stormed out onto the pre-landscape. The door behind me



told me that Tia had followed. She caught me near an old ford.

“You know, I would have to agree with him.”

“With what?”

“You have never liked me.”

“What?”

“See, I always thought it was because you were better looking. But it is why you are better looking.”

“What rot, he was being... “

“Being what?”

“Just shut up for a change.”

“No. For a change you are going to actually listen! I know you never do. He is dead right, you are a prick, but only to me.”

“Have you ever thought that you ask too much?”

“Maybe I do. But that is me. I am high maintenance. I can be if I want too. There is nothing wrong with being who you are.”

“Being who you are?”

“Yeah! Being *who* you are.

“Admit it Elliot. Who you are doesn't want me. And never did. You were always a little bit too interested in Bryah's gay friend.”

“You all were interested too.”

“Not like you. From the day the first picture showed up on Bryah’s facebook. I remember it. Prick. Sorry, Rick, picked up on it straight away. He was mocking you about your sudden bromance.”

“It wasn’t that bad. They went to a nude beach together. It was different.”

“Yeah. But where is it now?”

“You see. Maybe there is enough blame to go around. I mean. I do want you. Did want you. You meant the perfect future. And I admit I am looking for my future. And I have too. I have to cash in who I am for all I can. That is all you liked about me in the first place; business sense.”

“That wasn’t all I liked about you.”

“Elliot stop. It’s over. I know.”

“There isn’t anything to know!”

“Yes there is. And I will do you one favour. Give you some time to process. I’ll shout at you and leave in a huff. Then you can say you were dumped for fighting when you get back to footy.”

Tia nodded at me. I stared back through my brow. I couldn't speak.

“FUCK YOU! Find your own way home!” Tia had decided her new life right before me. She stalked towards her car, then turned back.

“Oh, I'll come round to pick up my stuff tomorrow,” Tia whispered. Opening her door, Tia climbed into the car and slammed the door theatrically.

I heard a gong resound inside me.

A moment later, Tia was gone. I was not sad about it. I was sad. I could feel my eyes betraying me. I sat down behind a Ford Laser and dialled my Mum.

“Hello,” my Mum answered.

“Hi Mum. Can you please save the questions and come and get me from Bryah's place?”

Rick wandered down from the house and sat next to me.

“Sure honey. I'll be there in 10 minutes,” Mum replied. I ended the call and dropped the phone into my lap.

“Bad day friend?” Rick asked.

I snorted, resting my head against Rick's shoulder.

"Ding dong the witch is dead?"

"We aren't there yet," I shook my head against him.

"What's the issue?"

"I just got dumped."

"Well you hit somebody before that happened?"

"I needed him to shut up."

"So he hit you first."

"He said I was gay."

"Are you gay?"

There was only one answer.

"Yep."

"Wow," Rick nodded without changing his tone.

"Yeah, I know," I sighed.

"The answer doesn't matter to me you know."

"It's nice to hear that. Annoying at the same time."

Rick's arm draped around my back. I didn't want to be comforted. My face still hurt. The cold ground was not helping. I wanted to be hurt back.

I needed to be alone. I needed to ask for a moment off. I did not want to hurt anyone else tonight.

“I need to be alone please.”

“Alright. But remember you need to apologise. You may have hit somebody for telling the truth.”

Rick patted my back, then stood up.

“That, is at least something you should punish yourself for; being how you are isn’t.”

Two different people had told me the same thing in rapid succession. Rick grimaced at me and scuffed away. I listened as his feet crunched on every rock all the way to the door. Part of me wanted to stand up and ask him back. The tearing inside me blocked out the pains in my face. I started to cry. I had not cried since I was five. I could not put a reason to the tears.

It felt good to cry.

### **Elliot 3 – While you were sleeping**

Light streamed from the open door of the house. I wiped my face. A trickle of water had puddled on the ground between my legs.

*Minutes into gayness I have cried a river.*

Steps approached from behind the car. They passed me. The guy was looking for someone. As he turned, I caught a glimpse of his profile in the moonlight. It was Tack.

“Hey fuckwit,” I called to get his attention.

He turned towards the sound. I could tell he was still addled. He managed to focus on me for a second then doubled over and vomited on the ground. I jumped out to catch him.

In the light of an approaching car, I managed to grab him just as his head touched the ground. My brain trawled through television campaigns on the effect of punching somebody. The hug of his flesh into my body stole me back from panic. Touching him was hypnotic.

Before I knew it, the car had stopped in the driveway. It was Mum's car. Still in her pajamas, she flew out of her seat and was next to me before I could blink.

"No way I am having some drunk kid, vomiting, in my car!"

"He isn't drunk Mum. I think he is really hurt."

"Why would he be hurt?"

"I punched him. He hasn't had anything to drink."

The statement took a moment to settle on her.

"Why Elliot?" Mum asked as if I had hit her.

"It isn't important. We need to get him to the hospital."

"Elliot, that is not the person I know."

"Mum. I know. I'm not. Please just take us to the hospital." I started crying again.

"Fine. Fine. Yes yes. Can you get him to the car?"

Forcing my arms under his body I tried to lift. He would not move an inch. It was like his whole body weighed a tonne.

Changing positions, I draped his arm over my shoulder. An electric surge coursed my veins as his bare skin hit mine. It travelled through my *whole* body. I tried to lift again. He moved. I walked him across to the car.

Fumbling with the dongle, Mum unlocked the car. Apparently she had protected it against any attempt to get a vomiting drunk in. In the time it took to open the door I realised that it felt like I wasn't lifting anything.

Placing Tack across the back seat of the car, I climbed into the undersized smart cabin; never breaking skin contact.

Between the barrage of questions from Mum, I managed to get some minor responses out of Tack. He didn't seem to be slurring and his face looked normal. At least it didn't look like he was having a stroke.

The hospital had never felt so far to drive.

Calming smells of cleaning agent and sickness wafted through the electric doors. I had hoisted Tack's sculpted torso over my shoulder. Carrying him across the carpark was almost like walking alone. His armpit was against my neck; pheromone central. The intense smell was causing violent waves of impulse from the instant I lifted him. My body was betraying me. His body was perfect.

By the time we entered the Emergency room my entire body was electrified.



In a sudden flourish of red hair, the woman behind the counter all but exploded the second we made the entrance mat. She vaulted over her counter towards us screaming.

“Tack!” She yelled. “What happened?”

“I punched him in the face.”

Arriving at my side, the woman - Liz by her nametag – checked Tack’s face. Apparently she hoped to glean his state from his countenance. Looking up at me she glared with venom.

“At least you were polite enough to bring him here.”

“He was out for a while. Then when he got up he was disoriented. And then he just started vomiting.”

“Here, quick get him on a gurney.”

Liz ran towards a trolley bed near the counter, her red hair billowed over her white uniform as she moved. With Tack laid safely on the trolley, Liz pointed towards a room beyond the entrance.

“Take him in there. I will get a nurse and call a doctor.”

Knowing I was acting against some level of hospital ruling, I pushed the bed towards the room. The

wheels squealed with protest and the bed ground to a halt.

I was no longer touching Tack.

Both Liz and Mum stared with expectation. I moved to one side of the bed; where Tack's hand lay over the side. The only other alternative was to grope him like a pervert. Once again, as soon as I made contact he was easy to move.

With the bed carefully positioned inside, I turned back to find Mum behind me. I had forgotten she would follow.

"Everything that happens here is on you," she announced.

"Yes Mum."

"I am going to call his family. That woman should know them."

"What are you going to tell them?"

"The truth."

"Please wait until I can. I want to apologise myself."

"I am not adding to this with lies."

"Maybe I should talk to them. I have my mobile."

"You're staying with him!"

“I know, I have my mo...” I started.

Mum threw her arms out; telling me the conversation was over. Turning her back on me she left, her old slippers shuffling as she moved. The stupid old things would fall of if her feet lifted too much. She would never let them be replaced.

Turning around I found Tack blinking awake. His face relaxed and calm, he looked content.

*What did I do to this man?*

Suddenly his eye’s were opening. The easily visible emotion flickered from interest, to concern, to happiness.

“You’re beautiful when you’ve been crying,” he smiled lazily.

“What the hell is wrong with you?”

“I’m in love.”

“Stop saying that.”

“I can’t. I don’t have any choice.”

“Why are you doing this to me?”

“You are the most beautiful creature I have ever seen.”

“Shut up!”

“You can’t fight me Elliot, I won’t attack.”

While you were sleeping

“Bryah always said you were strange. I can’t believe this.”

“Bryah loves me a lot. You love me more.”

“No, I don’t. I’m not gay.”

“Yes you are. Don’t worry about all of this either. I can handle a lot.”

“You aren’t that badly hurt.”

“Yes I am. Physically, I’m as hurt as I have hurt you. But we’ll be ok. I promise. Just get through the next few days.”

“You haven’t done anything to me.”

“I couldn’t make the summit. I don’t know why.”

My eyes started to well.

For a moment everything in my life aligned. Standing next to Tack, the whole universe had a purpose.

The sound of slipper carcass’ broke the moment. Mum arrived at the door.

“The doctors will scan him and you will wait. I am getting a cab home. Drive yourself home once *he* is safe at home. Promise?” Mum knew she had me trapped. She then threw me the dongle to her new car. Nobody else had ever driven it. She wasn’t telling me something.

“Yes Mum, I promise,” I replied at the same time as Tack. I held perfectly still; hoping she hadn’t noticed.

Mum stared past me at Tack. The reaction to Tacks’ imposition was about to surface, but instead, Mum softened. Her face almost smiled before she turned to leave. Obviously she had missed my fear, or else I looked so upset already it wasn’t visible. The shuffle of her slippers suggested she was walking away from the room quickly.

When I turned - hoping to re-find my last thought - Tack’s body went progressively white, then limp, then unconscious.

“Out of the way,” Liz commanded, suddenly at my back with a small army of staff.

As I stepped aside a doctor appeared; the stereotypical stethoscope around his neck gave him away. I wondered if a friend like Tack gave it to him, then died the same day.

He started working; squeezing Tack’s hands, blinding him with a torch, calling out his name like a psychotic sail boat captain.

Another doctor tapped me from behind. She asked me exactly what had happened. I told her exactly; sparing no detail, including my own personal revelations.

*I am out.*

The first doctor called to the one talking to me. They mentioned something about a blood clot, and then an MRI. I knew that was an expensive test, which meant the outlook could be bad. And a blood clot. Something about Tack's words echoed in my head. It didn't make any sense. *He was hurting as he had hurt me.*

Where he was now sounded like me. The look on Mum's face hurt. I couldn't imagine taking my children away from her now. Not that I ever promised to have children. But the effect would be the same. Nothing in me wanted that.

Without a word, they took Tack from the room and disappeared. The whole night had been too much already.

Once again, I dropped to the ground and cried.

*Fag!*

I don't know how long I sat on the floor of the examination room. The panic from before touching Tack came rushing in; wave after wave of terrifying images.

Who I was, and who I wasn't, was about to kill somebody.

“Tack told me my husband was using me until someone better came along,” Liz announced from next to me. I had missed her sitting down. I must have been making a lot of crying noise. I had no idea how long I had been on the floor.

“Tack said my husband was under the impression life owed him a fantasy for the scores it had taken over the years,” Liz continued. “I wanted to hit Tack too. Instead I just screamed at him in front of a party of people.” She stopped talking on purpose; waiting for me to buy in.

“When I spoke to him a few years later I asked why he told me that way. He looked at me and smiled. I don't have any choice. He said. Sometimes, some times make me the bad guy.”

“Do you regret yelling at him?”

“No. If he had died from it I might have. But he wouldn't. He gave me my reaction, and encouraged it to be aimed at him. Because he can take it and he doesn't have too.”

“How do you know?”

“Time tells. But don’t worry he will get through it. It will look bad to you for a while. Really bad, but it will be a trip you need.

“Being gay doesn’t come naturally to men anymore. And, coming out of it with Tack in your arms will be quite a triumph.”

“What?”

“Oh please. It isn’t difficult to figure out this situation. Tack is one of the best fighters, if not the best, on the planet. He let you hit him for a reason.”

“I don’t even think I like him.”

“That’s because you are trying to think your way there. May I offer one piece of advice?”

“Sure.”

The sound of Mum’s slippers shuffled towards the room. Liz helped me stand-up with her. Mum’s sad face rounded the corner as Liz whispered in my ear.

“Do it all at once. Humans are designed to only feel a certain amount of pain.”

I pulled away from her as Mum walked in. Liz forced me in and kissed me on the head. Mum watched



suspiciously as she walked away. She looked back and winked at me before she vanished around the corner she.

“I thought you were taking a cab home?”

“I have some bad news Loty. Tack has been taken into surgery. They think he has a blood clot in his brain.”

“I know.”

“I have spoken to his family. They are coming now.”

Feelings overwhelmed me.

“I’m gay Mum. I hit Tack because he told me and I didn’t want to hear it.”

Mum lurched forward, suddenly unbalanced. I could not move. She stepped over to a bench to steady herself. She stood like that; silently gripping the Formica bench, for a long time. Every possibility of rejection coursed through my head. But the time mum was moving again, my head had me living on the street in a fridge carton. She let go of the bench, brushed her pyjamas flat and looked me in the eyes.

“You would have made a great father,” Mum stared past me at the wall as if my never-to-be history was written there.

“I don’t know that I wont still.”

While you were sleeping

“Is this Tack your boyfriend?”

*Yuk. Boyfriend.*

“No. And don’t call it that.”

“Sorry, is Tack your boyfriend?”

“No. I didn’t mean that. I meant the word.

Boyfriend sounds so twilighty.”

“Partner then? Crimony Elliot, it is just a word.”

“No.

“I think so.

“I don’t know, I want him to be.

“We’ve only spoken twice.”

“Twice? I remember your grandmother telling me she was ready to marry your grandfather when she saw him the first time.”

“I was ready to die...”

“What?” Mum demanded, suddenly alarmed.

“Now I’ve killed him.”

“Elliot, what have you done?”

“I’ve killed him. Just because I was afraid.”

“You have not.”

“He said he couldn’t go to the summit, and apologised. He should have been there.”

I was crying again. Or had been all along.

“What are you talking about?”

“I don’t know what would have happened if he had climbed the mountain to the top.”

“Elliot, you’re not making sense.”

“He apologised for not being there. But that man that was there, I thought he was Tack and got angry at him.”

“Elliot. You need to come home with me. You’re overloaded.”

“No. I need to stay here.”

“You promised.”

“I can’t leave until he is safe!”

“You need to get your bearings. Come home, get cleaned up and come back. You can still be back to stay the night.”

“I promised.”

“Elliot, if it is love, you will be here regardless of where you are physically.”

My face must have shown something I was not aware of. Mum launched in and held me. Her reasoning made sense.

“I need to tell Dad and Phil.”

“They won’t care.”

“I need to.”

Mum looked up at me.

“You are really that sure?”

“I am now. We need to get to the summit on our own before we can go together anyway. I will be a father too. That was never an option.”

“Really?” Mum asked from beneath my chest.

“I’ll tell Tack there is no choice in the matter.”

*Where did that come from?*

“He better be a good Dad.”

Mum moved to my side keeping one arm wrapped around my waist. She urged my feet towards the door.

As we walked towards the emergency exit I saw a small cluster of people, each carrying some trait I had seen in Tack.

“Mum wait. This is Tack’s family.”

“How do you know? I thought you only spoken to him twice.”

“I can just tell,” I replied.

Mum let her arm drop from around me. I walked towards the group. They laughed at some dry comment before I could completely hear it. It seemed strange that they were laughing in a hospital.

“The Black’s?” I asked.

The Dad - Tack’s face shape and smile - turned to me first.

“Are you the one that has gone and killed my son?”

“Slate!” The Mum - Tack’s hair and eyes - cursed. “It is difficult enough. Torture him once we know him.”

“We get it. You hit him. We’ve all wanted too. It’s just like him to go and snap the brain just to get attention.” The sister - Tack’s stance and speaking style - added. The little baby girl in her arms started to gurgle. “Oh, yes Lor. These stupid lights are annoying,” she coddled.

“My guess is he left a bigger bruise on you,” Tack’s Mum touched my arm. “It would be just like him to go and die to make a point.”

“He is in surgery, he has a blood clot in his brain,” my eyes betrayed me again.

“We know,” Tack’s Dad replied. “It is terrible and heinous. We know. He’ll be fine.”

“I, um, need to go home to get some things. But will you give me permission to stay with him?”

While you were sleeping

“Sure. I’ll fill out the forms with you as the defacto,” Tack’s Mum replied. “That’s they only way to get the space,” she whispered discretely, buttoning it with a conspicuous wink.

“That would be fine,” I nodded.

*I just agreed to become a husband.*

“Well then, this is great. I get another son tonight. Who would have thought? He looks like a footballer too,” Tack’s Dad added.

“What’s your name, brother?” The sister questioned.

“Elliot Moore.”

“I am Beth,” Tack’s Mum answered, “this is my ex-husband Slate, my daughter Laura, and her daughter Allaura.”

I gestured over to my Mum.

“This is my mother Deborah.”

Mum slowly shuffled to my side.

“We spoke on the phone,” Mum smiled, placing her arm around my back.

“Yes, I recognised the slipper shuffle” Beth replied smiling. “This is my daughter Laura and her

daughter Allaura, and, my ex-husband Slate.” Everyone nodded in turn.

“I am sorry about all of this,” Mum added solemnly.

“Not at all,” Beth replied, “there is no fault. We will have to meet again after this is all over to discuss a grand-parenting agreement.”

Slate snorted, then moved over to play with Allaura in Laura’s arms. My whole body tensed.

*Something is wrong with these people.*

“Excuse me?” Mum asked.

“Well with Elliot officially on our forms as our son’s defacto, he will be bound by my agreement with Tack to have grand children before thirty.”

“Um, defacto?”

“I’m sorry,” Beth replied, “So Elliot can stay in the hospital, we will register him as the defacto. I was making a joke.”

“Oh. Um. Yes. But you obviously already have one grand child. I think arrangements should hinge on the proportional number of grand-children already in the family.”

While you were sleeping

“No. I am afraid it doesn’t. Grand-children per child *is* the formula.”

Mum laughed loudly.

“Well with the emotions of two boys, I’m sure negotiations will happen soon enough.”

“Try seismic fate reorientation. But you’re correct anyway.”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

*I think I was just betrothed.*

“Elliot should be back in an hour or two. It was lovely to meet you all.”

Mum nodded curtly. The Black’s waved goodbyes. Mum pulled me around and we shuffled away.

“If this lasts with this Tack. I will be on the back foot forever as the woman in the pyjamas. Now you just think about that Elliot.”

I sighed.

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Dad and Phil had gathered in the lounge at Mum’s shouts. I sat opposite them. Feeling like a ruined



creature. I battled with possibilities of opening words. Irritated, Phil fidgeted on the couch. Mum glared at him from the doorway. Six eyes stared, waiting for me to start talking. I could still get out of this; for all they knew I was here to tell them I wanted to ice dance. Except for Mum.

The silent room intimidated me for the first time in my life. Movies had given me the expectation that for a scene to be built with atmosphere, there is at least *some* music; unless the scene was of an extra that was cast to add a visual to the feeding habits of monsters. Not even the lights were dimmed - they could not be – and they should have been. I could feel the change in myself like a smashed dam. This well-lit-tastefully-decorated living room held no circumstance.

“Tonight I punched a guy at Bryah’s party. He is in hospital probably having surgery for a blood clot in his brain,” I fired. I stopped to collect myself. Dad’s face was horrified. “That’s not all.”

“What else could have happened that needs to be added?” Phil interrupted. “You don’t even hit bugs with

your car. You're a big pansy, where did this masculinity come from?"

"Phillip!" Mum scolded.

"The reason I hit... it's beca... he said I was gay. And in love with him."

I paused to breath. My eyes let loose.

"I didn't want it to be the truth. But it is... And now he might die." Tears fell freely onto my legs. For once in my life, crying did not change the tone of my voice. I forced myself to look up.

Dad's severe-rugby-torn face furrowed; the light flecks of grey in his hair seemed to make him more intimidating.

"What are we supposed to do with this?" Dad asked. "If it is true. Why aren't you at the hospital?"

"I wanted to tell you myself."

"Who cares? Go back where you should be," Dad stood. "If you are going to be a man, and a partner, you go back to the hospital. Now! Don't waist time trying to unbake a cake. Accept you fucked up and deal with it."

*Dad just swore.*

"I can't believe I missed the start of the game for this. You're a pansy. I've said that since you were three.

Maybe you're actually adopted too." Phillip stood and headed out the door. Dad followed him. From the other room Phillip called, "hope he pulls through and all that."

Mum stood at the door silently, her eyes almost rolled into the back of her head. With the slightest drop of her chin, she shrugged at me.

"You aren't adopted. But they're right. Get up stairs and get your clothes."

Mum walked out towards the family room, presumably to watch the game as well. I sat alone in the living room for a second.

My family had just given me free reign to be gay. For the briefest moment there was no weight on me. I felt like I had been born again. The feeling of freedom was like having everything in the world within reach.

The question of what I wanted from the world brought me back immediately. It was so simple. Since hearing his name, the one and only thing I had ever really wanted in my life was Tack.

My freedom vanished. And replaced itself with freezing-cold dread.

After practically flying up the stairs, I whirlwinded through my room and bounding back downstairs within a minute. For once in my life I knew my purpose.

PROTECT TACK.

Less than ten minutes later I was running up the halls of the hospital with my bag. I felt elated, and under the circumstances, I felt very guilty about it too.

“Elliot!” A familiar voice called.

I spun on my heel to find the origin. Tack’s sister Laura glided up the corridor, baby in arms.

“Where are you going?”

“I was looking for you.”

“Well, you’re doing a bad job. We are all over the other side of the hospital.”

“What?”

“Well I’m not.”

“What are you doing?”

“Walking Lory to sleep.”

“Oh.”

“According to the hospital she’s your niece now. Want to try to get her to sleep?”

“Um. I really think I should get to Tack.”

“Don’t worry about him. He is in surgery still.  
You did a real number on him.”

“Oh. Um. I...”

“Stop worrying. You need to settle. It’s OK.

“Here take her.”

Laura pushed the wriggling-worm-bag-of-cloth to me. I had no idea what to do.

“Just hug her into your chest. Let her snuggle in.”

For a moment, her tiny head struggled against my chest.

“Relax.”

With a deep breath I let my chest loosen. Allaura responded instantly, bunching her hands beneath her face then huddling into my chest and neck.

“She likes men. I think it’s the heat.”

“She’s beautiful.”

“Yeah, we know.”

I could not help laughing.

“Let’s walk,” Laura nodded forward. “I guess you are a rugby player.”

“Yes. Just as a hobby while I’m at uni. I have the option to try for more. What do you do?”

Laura stopped at an elevator and pressed the down button.

“I’m a psychologist. I worked for a firm before I had her.”

“A shrink?”

“Not exactly like Dad is. But I still re-habilitate.”

“Is that why you handle this so easily?”

Laura pulled me into the waiting elevator and hit the ground button.

“No. We handle this, because it’s Tack. If you haven’t figured it out yet, you will.”

The elevator chimed on the bottom floor. Allaura jumped slightly.

“Aww. it’s ok Lor,” Laura soothed, stroking Allaura’s bald head.

We walked along a coloured surgical line that - according to a table in the lift - led to the trauma waiting room.

“Has Tack had many b..partners?”

“Why do you ask?”

“You just seem easy with me holding her.”

“That has more to do with you. And no. You are the first. I think you are the *first person* he’s ever even

spoken of. Other than historical icons he doesn't remember modern names well."

"He spoke of me?"

"Talked about meeting Pete's Dragon on a bush walk."

Laura gestured down a small corridor. The Pete's dragon reference suddenly made sense.

"And I am named Elliot."

"I can see what he likes."

"What's that?"

"A complement, not an opening to fish for more."

I laughed out loud, jolting Allaura enough to illicit a chirp of protest. I recognised two of the three people standing in a small alcove. Beth and Slate were talking to a man in scrubs. I froze. Tack's blood covered his side.

"Come on kid," Laura encouraged. "Here's a moment in your life where you find out who you are. It would be a shame to learn you are a coward on the night you may go to prison for murder. Prison sodomists can smell cowards."

I laughed again awkwardly, this time Allaura stayed silent on my chest. Her breathing reminded me to

inhale. Placing one foot before the other, I made the short distance to the family.

“It is possible we got to it in time, but so far we have seen no reaction. Again, the amount of aesthetic we had to use was extreme so we cannot be certain. The *only* thing we *know*, is he is stable yet unresponsive.”

“Can we see him?” I asked.

“I’m afraid ICU policy will only allow a significant other to visit.” The doctor checked his clipboard. “In this it indicates a defacto, *Elliot*.”

“That’s him,” Beth pointed definitively.

The man turned and looked me up and down. His nametag read ‘Dr Phelps’.

“The child will have to remain here,” the doctor glared, turning back to the family. “Homosexual preference should have been indicated on the form. There is protocol for high risk patients.”

“They did. You don’t name a girl Elliot!” I goaded with a verbatim Disney line. Laura grinned.

“He is no risk. He isn’t sexually active,” Slate explained.

“He will be soon,” Beth added viscously. “Would you like that indicated? Imminent risk?”



“No. I.”

“How soon will be up to me,” I found my mouth saying.

“Perhaps you two can liase and we can square away the risk with minute-to-minute updates?” Beth suggested.

“No! Just for future reference...” Doctor Phelps trailed off. The glaring from all around him held mass. “If you will follow me *Elliot*.”

“Wait,” Beth called. She walked over to me, kissing me on the cheek. “Give him that. He will like it all the more coming from you. And I will de-niece you. Here.” Beth took Allaura from me. It was sad to loose a purpose for my arms.

Doctor Phelps clicked his heal against the floor. I leered at him. His eyes smouldered.

“Lead the way,” I commanded.

He spun on his heal and headed through a large set of double doors. Trying to be as passive aggressive as possible, he forged ahead; allowing the first doors to close before I got to them.

Through the second set of doors, the calm of the waiting world was replaced with bustling efficiency.

Nurses moved like a ballet between rooms and surgeries.  
I could smell Tack already.

“In there,” the doctor pointed as he passed the room.

“Wait!” I called, suppressing an urge to grab.  
Doctor Phelps stopped facing the other direction.

“What?” He called over his shoulder.

“What’s your name?”

“Dr Phelps.”

“OK. Of what?”

“I am a surgical inturn.”

“Turn around.”

Doctor Phelps turned to face me. A nurse at the counter tapped her colleague, nudging towards us. Both took up position as if it were a play.

“Do you have a problem with gay men?”

“No.”

“If somebody was to check your case history, would it be devoid of service on gay patents?”

“Not... No.”

“How do the gay staff regard you?”

“I would not hazard to guess.”

“I am detecting a problem. I guess others would have too. If it were checked?”

“Mate, it’s just been a long night.”

“I don’t think so. I want you to do the paperwork to have yourself removed from this case. Bring it to me when you’re done.”

“Mr... Sir. I am sure that wont be necessary. I was taken aback by the forms lack of information.”

“It’s Elliot. *Elliot* if you prefer.” I spat the t as he had.

“Elliot. You have just caught me on a bad night. My guess is that it is a bad one for you too.”

“Alright...

“I know how careers can be effected by black spots. I’ll give you a chance. But think how it will look if I have a body to back me up.”

“Would you like me to come in with you?”

“Does two men kissing make you uncomfortable?”

Doctor Phelps paused.

“Yes it does.”

“Then don’t come in,” I smiled.

He regarded me curiously. I nodded politely and walked into the room. Somehow, it felt like I had needed to say that my entire life.

I stopped at the threshold, I could feel that he had not moved. His shadow on the floor beneath me confirmed it. Tack's smell had filled the room already. With it around me, my strength seemed to be growing by the second; every step I took spurred it on. The room was not dark. Light streamed through what should have been a fog of scent. I could make out every nuance. The anticipation of seeing him again burned.

Forcing myself into the honey of scents, I felt like a man who had been caged indoors. I arrived at Tack's side. Deathly still, I stared. His hair had been covered by cloth and tape. Machines connected like tangled reeds to every visible part of his body. He looked like I should have felt.

I placed my hand on top of his, as if I had been doing it for centuries. I heard Beth's voice in my mind. I had promised to pass on a kiss. I wanted too.

I bent over him, placing my lips on his cheek.

“That is from your Mum. And this is from me.”

I moved my lips to his. But instead of the fireworks of cinema, the room waited silently. I felt like a criminal.

“You really have pulled a swiftie,” I announced, lifting my head slightly. “You are missing all of the biggest things in our relationship. And, I can’t even be angry about that.”

I put his hand down and rested my forehead against Tack’s shoulder. It felt much better than I deserved.

“Ten hours ago, I was excited to get to finally talk to you. Now I wish I’d never met you. At least then you’d still be walking around.”

For the fourth time in the night I cried.

As if timing the touch of my tear to his arm, Tack arched his back. In a chain reactive cacophony of screeching machines, his body convulsed against itself. Alarms screamed overhead.

Doctor Phelps ran up behind me. He checked one eye then another. Nurses streamed into the room. I backed away towards the wall.

“Call the surgeon back,” Doctor Phelps yelled.

I stood with my back to the wall watching them work. Tears continued to stream down my face. A small army of staff had surrounded the bed within seconds. With one person to each machine, slowly the bed and all of its attachments were rolled away.

The room became silent and dark. Doctor Phelps stood in the desolate centre, again studying me with a curious look.

For a man who looked every bit a clone of Paul Walker, his mere presence inspired rage in me. I had never believed people who claimed just to see red. I did now.

Doctor Phelps walked over to me. And even placed a hand on my upper arm.

“We’ll take care of him,” he held his gaze with mine. His eyes seemed genuinely ashamed.

“I saw your story in my head as we spoke. As if I was watching myself on a videotape. I have never been so ashamed.”

I stared at him. It was as if he had killed my family and I needed his blood to pay for it.

“I watched you as you... It wasn’t uncomfortable.” He tried.

Rage had filled my heart to bursting. My face and body burned red. The fresh tears on my cheeks dried immediately. In the moment where I knew I would act, a thought broke through.

*Tack lay on his side under the white sheets of a bed in a blue room. His face stared down at me, a brilliant smile spread across it.*

It was a picture that had ended every one of my dreams since climbing Mount Warning. I needed to talk my way out of where I was.

“I need you to not be my enemy. Don’t ask me why, it’s a stupid feeling.”

“What do you mean?” Doctor Phelps asked, suddenly alarmed.

“I think you are a threat. And if you are a threat, I can’t let you leave.”

“Are you serious?”

Without another word, I had him by the scruff of his shirt and was holding him a foot off the ground.

“You have no idea how serious,” I growled.

Like it did with Tack, lifting Doctor Phelps felt like nothing. My mind screamed at my body to stop. He stared at me in shock.

Slowly, my hand lowered him to the ground. As my hand released him he eyed the door with hope. Returning his eyes to mine, he seemed to suppress his fear.

“My name is Marty Phelps. If I had friends, I’d want them to call me Marty; like Back to the future.”

The knots in my stomach started to release.

“I’m Elliot Moore,” I replied, my teeth still clenched.

“I haven’t apologised to anybody in fifteen years Elliot. Right now an apology will look like I am protecting my career or that I am protecting myself. So I won’t apologise now, but you should know that I am ashamed. If you can’t see it clearly, take this.”

He pulled a business card out of his pocket.

“That is my hospital card, but on the back is my mobile and home number.

“I’d say Tack needs another surgery. But his reactions then were a good sign. His brain works still. I have to leave the hospital soon because I have been here too long. But if you need anything, if you want me just to check progress, call.”

I stared through him at my memory of the dream.



“Why *if* you had friends?”

“I don’t think that needs explaining.”

“Do you want to be my friend?”

“I don’t need pity.”

“You wont get any. I need more friends who know I’m gay. I only have the one so far. And none here. I haven’t actually even told Tack yet.”

“I just watched you kiss him?”

“And in an annoying way he already knew, but, in the real world, we’ve only met twice.”

“And you’re defacto’s?”

“Yeah. To the world I was straighter than you this morning. I only told my family I am gay an hour ago. Myself an hour before that.”

“You don’t waist any time.”

I shook my head.

“For what it is worth. I am sorry for what I did to you before,” Marty sighed.

“That’s OK. It’s my fault you had the chance.”

“Yeah?”

“I was the one who hit him.”

Marty stood silently for a moment.

“We’ll thanks for just lifting me off the ground.”

I snorted a response.

“Does his family know?”

“I’m not certain they’re entirely with it. I told them it was me. They don’t seem to even acknowledge Tack is in surgery.”

“Maybe it’s shock.”

“Maybe... They’re acting like it’s a joke.”

“Why did they put you as the defacto?”

“It’s the truth.”

“How does that work?”

“It’s Tack.”

Marty nodded casually.

“You should go.”

“I don’t have too.”

“I need a moment before I go back out to the family. Let us know when he is out of surgery hey.”

Marty nodded. He stared at me as if I had just given him a prize. As I moved away, he yelled behind me. “Um, Elliot. I had Tack’s room assigned permanent. There is a spare bed that won’t be filled because of his insurance. Room 742. I will have them find you there when we know something.”

My eyes would not relent. Tears streamed down my cheeks again as I walked through the hospital; it was like a salt detox. Laura smiled the moment she saw me. And when I was close, she pulled me into a hug. She held me there. The silence of the waiting room hurt. I sobbed what had happened into Laura's shoulder, including the details of my chat with Marty. They all chuckled at my reference to them as 'not all there'.

Before I knew it, I was huddled at Laura's side walking towards the ICU wing. Thanks to our earlier walk we knew where to go. We walks slowly and silently. It felt as if they were acting solemn to pander to me.

The full moon rising over the flat ocean drew me away from Laura into the room. I was at the window in the dark before the others came in. The serene patience of the ocean seemed to make sense; a force that could cut rock with time. I heard the lights flicker into brightness overhead. The sound of a door locking caught my attention. I turned to find Tack's family shoulder to shoulder. Suddenly the room had a professional air.

"Front and centre," Slate stated at me.

The warmth of Tack's family was still there, but there stance forced my survival instincts to kick in. I walked towards them cautiously.

"Exactly what did Tack do tonight?" Slate asked.

"What?"

"Elliot, this may seem intrusive but you need to be honest," Beth added. "Just tell us vaguely what he did."

I thought for a moment. The word vague stuck out.

"He kept telling me things I didn't want to hear. So *I* hit *him*."

"Did you notice that the hit hurt?" Laura tried. "Not just your hand."

I stood silent.

"Tell us what he has done *to you*?" Beth asked.

Looking suddenly concerned the Black's realised something. At the same time, all of them moved back and sat down. Still waiting on my response, Laura raised her eyebrows. The room felt no different with them sitting.

I sat on the opposite bed.

"Yesterday afternoon I went to a party with my girlfriend. All I could think about was another chance to

“speak with Tack. He showed up and told me he was in love with me. He told my girlfriend I was a dragon and that she was a handbag. Not that dragons wear handbags. But anyway, he told me I needed a man. Then I punched him and she left me.”

“Since then,” Laura encouraged.

“I told my best friend I am gay. Tack told me we’d be a couple; that I would love him if I didn’t already. Then Liz told me what happened to her. Then I came out to my family. Then I came back. You know the rest.”

Slate turned to Beth.

“Too much,” Beth warned.

“He should know better than that,” Slate replied.

“I have a feeling it wasn’t a choice,” Laura suggested.

I had no idea of what was going on, but felt compelled to contribute.

“When I asked, he said that he didn’t have a choice in saying what he was.”

Slate almost snapped his spine to look back at me.

“You asked why and still are here?!” Laura balked.

“Yeah.”

“Dr Phelps, the Moore family, the girlfriend and Elliot, plus he had started the change already. Call everyone we know!” Beth ordered.

Slate pulled out his phone and dialled, his eyes locked on me.

“Yes. Burr holes. Whatever it takes.”

Slate clicked his phone off.

“Six hours,” Slate stood shaking his head.

“Within six hours,” Beth stood. “Laura, we’ll go. Can you...” She gestured at me.

Beth and Slate had their things and were gone without another word. Laura started rocking Allaura.

“My brother is an idiot. Yes he is, yes he is,” Laura coddled to the baby.

I sat feeling even less comfortable than I had earlier. Questions that made sense were not important. It somehow all made sense. It seemed familiar, but without reason.

“What is going on?”

“That is up to you,” Laura placed Allaura on the bed between two pillows. She took her time arranging her then sat up straight; her presence seemed to fill the room.

“You have championed every word Tack has said already. And your senses are already about you. It’s costing him. But you do have the choice. You can stay or you can go. It can end here.”

“I can’t leave. I promised my Mum. I’m stay until I can drive him safely home. And after if he’ll have me.”

“Surely you realise more is going on here.”

“What more?”

“Elliot. People don’t come to terms with themselves in six hours. People don’t give up their whole lives in a night to be married to somebody they have just met. What do you think is going on?”

“Nothing. Of course people do.”

“And you have always had the strength to lift grown men of the ground with one arm?”

“People do strange things when they are under pressure.”

“OK. Try this one. Why do you think nothing happened at Mt Warning?”

Again the mountain.

“You’re asking me?”

“It seems so.”

“I don’t know. I saw Tack at the bottom of the chain. When I got to the top I found out it was him, and that he had refused to go. I felt like he was supposed to be there. Before, he even apologised for not being there.”

“That may have saved his life...”

“If this had happened up there?”

“Tack has a definite skill for survival. Among others. What happened after?”

“I was disappointed. I was angry on the way down.”

“Nothing else?”

“We finally were introduced when we got back to the cars. We shook hands, that was it.”

“How did that feel?”

“Awesome.”

“Tell me why?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then Guess!” Laura demanded. Suddenly her whole body seemed to resonate the words.

“Because he was supposed to find me on the summit.”

“But you’d never met before.”



I gasped; an actual sudden intake of air. The answer was simple.

“Tell me. Even though it is insane.”

“We planned it.”

“How did you know it would sound insane?”

“Because it is insane.”

“How do I know it is true?”

“You don’t. It just feels right.”

“It does... What are you?”

“Not tonight...”

“Why do you care who I told?”

“It makes us understand why he is this bad.”

“Are you sure he’ll be OK?”

“Sleep Elliot Moore.”

I looked at the clock, it was 4:00 in the morning. My eyes seemed to close themselves.

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The sun streamed through the room. I opened my eyes to a view of Tack lying asleep. His head was completely

confined in a metal box. Screws seemed to travel through it like a magicians trick. I was sure it was Tack; the smell was unmistakable.

The clock on the wall read 8:00. Mum would be furious with me for not updating her. Patting my pants, I found my phone and pulled it out of my pocket. It was dead. I tried the power button. It did not even flash. The battery life was nearly a week and I had charged it to go to Bryah's birthday.

As if on cue, Bryah walked through the door.

"Morning sunshine."

"Morning," I yawned.

"You've done very well indeed."

"How's that?" Bryah smirked.

"It's Thursday," Bryah sat in the chair near my bed.

"It can't be."

"Don't worry. I called your Mum. She offered to bring your charger. But I fended that off until today. We'll have to go and get it."

"I am starving," I lifted my arm, a tube connected to a drip was in me. "What the fuck is this?"

"You needed water."

“What happened?”

“You tell me.”

“Last thing I remember was Laura telling me to go to sleep.”

“She did. Tack needed the rest. He was in over his head.”

“You know...”

“He is my best friend,” Bryah smiled. “You’re handling this better than I did.”

“Handling what exactly?”

“Nice try.” Bryah smiled.

“It isn’t a dream you know. And, they aren’t kooks either.”

“I know that.”

“Get up. We need to get you some stuff.”

“Why?”

“Because you have been lying in a bed for over a week.”

I sat up.

“I feel fine. Just hungry.”

“You should. The Black’s have been looking after you all week.”

I pulled the drip needle out of my arm. As I looked over Tack, I noticed a mound in the middle of his crotch. Bryah followed my eyes.

“The doctor said it was a good sign. I’d say he can smell you,” Bryah snorted. “Laura has given you three hours. You need to eat, get your stuff, shower, and get back here.”

“What if I want a say?”

“Tack will die. If anything bigger than wind happens to you...

“Are you going to behave? Or you could just sleep for the next few days.”

“Ok?”

Bryah stood

“I’ll drive you home.”

Bryah came over to help me stand. Other than stiffness, I felt normal... Except much bigger than I remembered. Pushing Bryah aside, I walked over to Tack and took his hand. The touch was more intoxicating than I remembered. I felt my head actually swoon.

“I actually don’t think I should leave,” I breathed.

“Your Mum needs to see you. And, you made friends with *Doctor Phelps*. He has been asking questions. We need you to walk past him.”

“Oh.”

“Time doesn’t even wait for a sleeping man. It seems RipVanWinkle must just be a fairy tale. Unless Tack knew him at some point.”

“Let’s get this done quickly.”

Bryah ushered me out as fast as he could. Marty was happy to see me. He talked endlessly about his week as if we had known each other for years. He gave me a lecture on how to make and keep friends, as well as a hard copy of Homer’s ‘*Odyssey*’. A present; he still felt “wrong” about our first meeting. ‘The greatest warriors were the gays back then,’ he told me as he handed me the book. Bryah, fidgeted obviously enough to force him off. As we walked away, he called for me to plan something we could do together.

Bryah drove, figuratively and literally. He filled me in on everything that had happened while I slept. Even the story of what I was “doing” if anybody asked.

The world seemed more constructed than I had ever noticed before – even in the way the trees grew – I could almost see brush strokes. Streets seemed like cartoons.

As we approach my house, my driveway looked as though my family had a car yard. Bryah parked the car two tires on the curb, just to get a space.

Stepping out of the car was like losing a dimension. Home felt empty.

After only two steps Mum flung open the front door. She ran towards me so fast that she blurred. Before I knew what had happened, I was inside a massive hug. She nearly lifted me off the ground.

“Where the hell have you been? Why did you arrive when I am just leaving?”

“Sorry Mum. Tack is still in the hospital. He hasn’t woken yet. I’m just here to get my charger.”

“So you can finally call me?”

“Phones aren’t allowed to be used in the ICU. And there is a massive decontamination process if you leave. Tack’s skull has to stay open until he wakes up.”

Bryah’s words flooded out of my mouth.

“Oh. Well I suppose that makes sense.”

*Luckily it was true.* Mum always knew when I was lying. Dad was easier.

“I have to get to work. Your brother has the remnants of a football team inside. It smells like a barn.”

“I’ll watch myself.”

Mum hugged me again and with a lingering touch to my chest, she walked away to her car. Her eyes never left me. After climbing down into her car, she wound down her window.

“You’re bigger. Much bigger?”

“Really?” I looked to Bryah, he nodded, “Maybe a week of rest gave me time to recover? At least something good may come out of this.”

“Give the boy my hopes. Remind him I saved his life as soon as you can,” Mum smiled while looping in reverse around cars like a racing driver.

“Yes Mum,” I called as she finally made the bitumen.

“Bye Lotty,” she called as her engine gunned away. I sighed, it was as if I had left more than a week of time.

Inside, the house smelled like a mixture of a high school locker room and open sewer. Six people were asleep around the living room floor. I went upstairs to find myself completely alone. My room was untouched. Clothes and my charger were where I had left them. But, for some reason my pyjamas were not in my room. A shadow of warning seemed to whisper inside my mind.

*Mum probably found them and washed them for stink sake.*

I shook off the feeling and headed downstairs. Bryah was talking to my brother in the kitchen as I walked towards the back door.

“Pick up the pace, it takes an hour to get through the decontamination thing,” Bryah called.

“I’m just checking the clothes-line woman!”

The clench of a vice hit my stomach as I stepped outside. Three of my brother’s football mates were smoking near the clothesline; my pajamas were passively smoking right next to them.

Ignoring my gut, I walked along the path quietly. I ignored them as I unpegged my Pyjamas. I had met two of them before and hoped to escape without wasting time. My neck prickled as I put the pegs away.



When I turned to leave, Jared stood on the path to the door. The other two had not moved.

“Hey Fag.”

“Hey,” I replied, moving to walk around him.

“I hear you have news?” Jared asked, stepping in front of me again.

*Fuck Phillip.*

The other two still hadn’t moved.

“Really what’s that?”

“That you like the showers after the game a little too much.”

“Can’t say that’s true,” I tried to step around him again.

“You want to lie to me?” Jared demanded, grabbing my arm.

“Not really Jared. I just don’t know what you’re talking about. I have to go,” I stared at my arm.

“Back to your homo?”

I pulled away from him and headed towards the door. Jared struck at my back.

I ducked to my palms and the fist sailed passed my head. Spinning on my left hand I kicked at his legs. Jared fell. I made for the door.

A searing thump ignited in my back. I dropped to my knees. The snapped end of the garden rake dropped next to me.

With every ounce of strength in me, I turned and slammed my fist into the stomach of the person standing behind me. His body collapsed around my fist and dropped to the ground.

I could hear the effort of somebody swinging behind me. I braced myself.

Two clenched fists together hit my left shoulder. I let my knees buckle to take the blow. On the ground I felt dizzy.

A foot hit into my back. Another into my stomach, I grabbed it and lifted. I was satisfied to here a thump. The garden rake handle careered towards my head. I was looking up at the sky. It struck across my forehead.

I could taste blood. More hits came to my sides than I could count.

The back door slammed. In a blur, Bryah flew at Jared. Without Bryah appearing to move, Jared dropped with a thud. The back door slammed again. The other guy

appeared and dropped next to Bryah as fast as Jared. Phillip appeared next to me.

“Out of the way,” Bryah commanded.

Phillip stood. I felt arms brush over the burning on my body. Impossibly, I lifted completely off the ground.

“Get my car!” Bryah commanded.

Phillip disappeared. I felt like a bride, but I could not make my eyes stay open. A phone rang below me. Bryah answered.

*With what hand?*

“What the hell is happening?” I heard the speaker yell.

“Three guys attacked him at the fucking clothesline. He is a mess.”

“I don’t care how many laws you break. Get him back here now!”

“I am.”

I felt myself touch down onto cushion. The fabric burned. I could not scream.

The hospital entrance arrived too quickly.

Voices yelled. Stinging pain ignited my body again. Water was pouring on me. Someone was taking my clothes off.

“You can’t take him in there like that,” a woman screeched.

“Watch me,” Bryah replied.

I felt a towel touch me, again it burned. Drips fell on my face from above. I forced one eye to crack open. My eyelashes stuck together. Bryah was standing above me saturated.

Monitoring alarms were beeping all around me.

“Keep his clothes off, lie him next to Tack,” Laura looked down at me. “You were supposed to be watching him!”

“He was at a fucking clothesline.”

“You know better than that!”

I felt my body lower. I felt cloth, then skin.

Ecstasy.

I felt my head gently rest against a bare shoulder, body against arm, legs against leg. The only covering between us was a towel. I instantly felt fine. The alarms stopped. I felt a hand on the back of my neck.

“Sleep Elliot Moore,” Laura announced.

### Tack 3 – Post haze

Pain. Sharp throbbing pain. It was strange that the sound of light snoring woke me up and not the pain. You'd think the pain would be the thing that killed a R.E.M cycle. Instant and awful. I could feel it through my toes and in my head. I opened my eyes again to see morning light reflected on the stucco ceiling of a hospital room.

“Yuk!”

“Tack?”

*Bryah's voice asked that.*

“Are you ok?”

*Elliot's voice asked that.*

“My head hurts? What's this around my head?”

“You had blood clot in your brain.”

*Elliot's voice.*

“See what happens when you let yourself get hit.”

*Bryah's voice.*

“Well I guess that is what I get for my big mouth.”

*Speaking hurts.*

“Any lasting damage?”

*Bryah's voice.*

“You’re a dick. Elliot is sexy. My name is Tack...  
On occasion. My Mum will be pissed off. Work will be  
pissed off.”

“It’s been two weeks.”

“Great.”

“You look better bald.”

*Bryah’s voice while smiling*

“Shut up.”

“You have some serious explaining to do,” Elliot  
sighed. I could feel the sigh.

*Elliot is lying against my side. He sounds  
exhausted.*

“Why?”

“I’m gay now. You’re parents are weird. I can lift  
people off the ground with one hand.”

*Elliot was definitely touching me.*

“Maybe when my brain doesn’t feel like it has a  
poker is in it.”

“The swelling will only last a little while,” Bryah  
explained.

“Maybe we could call a nurse now,” I asked.

The sound of sneakers, Bryah's sneakers, walked out of the room. Instantly they returned, followed by slippers.

*Dad has been here pulling strings.*

A gnarled face popped up over me. The white collar and hospital imprimatur marked her as the day nurse. Not that she was not attractive in her own way, but she had really let stress give her a hefty snarl; it was difficult to pick her as female. Her face smiled in the box of vision allowed by the, apparatus, that was holding my head.

"G'day sunshine. We've had bets on when you would wake up. Your honour guard here has everyone talking. How do you attract such pretty boys?"

"Make them try to kill me.

"My head feels like a bug on a windshield."

"Your skull is still open. We kept the burr holes open to anticipate any further clots."

"Are you expecting more?"

"You've had three. The most recent was almost a week ago."

"Great."

“Being awake is a good sign. We should be able to close them now.”

“When will the doctor be here?” Elliot asked.

“Should be in any time now. Hoping for some morphine?”

“I just want the tests over and sleep,” I replied.

A pinprick sent my foot flinching towards my chest.

“That is one test over then.”

I sighed, staring at the pitiful ceiling.

“Any chance at a TV on the ceiling?”

“I am sure your honour guard will keep you entertained.”

An overwhelming urge emerged to close my eyes; seeing felt like a chore.

“Tack! Try to keep alert. It wont be too much longer.”

Scuffling sounds came from outside.

“What is happening?”

*Elliot's voice asked. It seemed muffled.*

“He isn't clotting again?”

*Elliot's voice demanded.* His head lifted off my shoulder slightly. *Elliot's been hurt.*



“Where the hell is the doctor?”

*Bryah’s voice demanded.*

“Don’t worry boys.”

*My voice, slurred.*

“Good boy, stay alert,” my Nurse popped over again and smiled.

When the doctor finally arrived, I was just holding off sleep. He asked various, albeit obvious, questions. He checked my eyes, touched various body parts. His face then appeared above me with a smile.

“You can sleep now. See you tomorrow.”

I could not bring myself to answer. I felt a hand take mine. The touch was electric. *Elliot.*

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Sun streamed through the window igniting the boring roof in a blinding glare. I could feel something pressed against my left side. It seemed warm, and was moving. It had an erection pressed against my thigh. The snore from the corner of the room I knew; from a dozen holidays sleeping in the same room.

“Bryah! Wake up.”

My head was not hurting.

“Bryah.”

“What is it?” Bryah’s voice mumbled came from the corner of the room.

“Is somebody touching me?”

“It is Elliot,” Bryah yawned.

“Dude you have no underpants. Do you want a cushion?” Bryah exclaimed.

“I don’t care. I’m happy it’s still working.”

“It has been working all week. The doctor took it as a good sign you were recovering.”

“Diagnosing neural decline through morning glory,” I chuckled. “Sounds like a research paper to me.”

“You must have been dreaming a lot; it wasn’t just morning.”

Elliot’s body started to move. I could hear stretching sounds, then a low guttural moan.

“What time is it?” Elliot asked.

“Six o’clock,” I replied. I could just see the corner of a clock near the roof.

The sheets shuffled. Elliot head left my shoulder.

“Whoa!.” Elliot yelled, followed by a thumping sound of a large human shaped object hitting a floor.

“Ow!” Elliot whined.

“It isn’t the first time you’ve woken up with two snakes in your bed,” Bryah laughed hysterically. “He’s only scared because you’re awake.”

The sound of scuffling came from the ground. With a lurch the bed pulled downward as if it were taking on a lot of weight.

“Don’t worry Tack. Elliot has one of his own too,” Bryah laughed.

“Shut up man,” Elliot hissed.

“It isn’t fair. He can’t see.

“Under circumstances where you hadn’t tried to kill him, he would be able to notice it himself,” Bryah added.

“I was startled.” Elliot replied. I could hear a grimace in his s.

“He was just acting out; still hasn’t gotten over his scripts.”

“You’re not sore?”

“My ego is, in my dreams you don’t jump away. I felt the offending member by the way, but thanks.”

“I didn’t try to kill him. I punched him for various reasons. And what scripts?” Elliot seemed to be further along than I realised.

“Just a joke, shesh. It’s all Tack’s fault anyway, he knows that.”

“I don’t agree with that. And what scripts?”

“Straight scripts. And you’ll agree eventually.”

Bryah was grinning.

“What?”

“How you’ve learned to act to appear straight; straight scripts.” Bryah answered.

“Do you want a cushion or something?” Elliot asked. I assumed to me.

“I don’t care. What have you been doing for the last two weeks about it?”

“Nothing, it’s funnier this way,” Bryah laughed.

“Do you care Elliot?”

Lack of a sound suggested somebody had nodded, or shook their head.

“Would it be easier if I left for a while?” Bryah asked.

“Yes”, “No”, Elliot and I said at the same time.

“I need the bathroom anyway,” Bryah was grinning again.

“Don’t think you have too,” I replied.

“If you could see what I can...I’ll knock,” Bryah’s voice sounded further away. A door closed and the room became silent.

The sound of scuffles increased and the inner springs compressed closer and closer. The expectation of contact slowed time to a crawl. Suddenly, a forehead rested against my bare shoulder; hair tickled my arm; a body pressed back against my left side.

After an eternity of silence, a knock came at the door.

“Ten more minutes!” Elliot yelled. His tone was vicious.

*That’s a growl I remember.*

“Fine,” Bryah’s muffled voice whined.

The creeping trickle of water tickled across my shoulder. A second drop splashed the remnants of the first.

“I’m going to wed you Elliot.”

*That was my voice. Bloody-shit-balls MY VOICE!  
You’d think a few blood clots would have stopped this.*

“Those are tears, obviously I’m a little vulnerable, what’s wrong with you?” Elliot asked, but his head stayed on my shoulder.

“I can’t explain what it is.

“Imagine you couldn’t help saying the fleeting shit that betrayed your inner mind.

“Trust me, it is scarier from this end.”

“I’ve never had marriage thoughts about anybody.” Elliot replied. “Until now. But maybe that’s just because *you* come out with it in every sentence.” Elliot finished.

“I have never shown anybody so much of my mind. With you I don’t get a choice. Usually, I think of every disgusting possibility and choose the most probable. Now you hear uncensored anything. It must be punishment for something.

“I hate the thoughts that I have sometimes. They’re evil. Things you would never want to think about.”

“Can’t fight who you are.”

Tears continued to pour down my arm.

“That sounds like a abrupt lesson.”

“More than you can imagine.”

“Do you still want to be who you weren’t?”

“No.”

“Do you hate me?”

“Why would I hate you?”

“For taking away your life. For pulling you into my screwy life. For histrionically hospitalising myself after one punch.”

“No. But my old life looks like a cartoon thanks to you. So you better not get sick of me.”

“I haven’t gotten sick of you before.”

“Before... Does Bryah know everything?”

“Not about you.”

“What?”

The pressure Elliot was putting on my body had increased. He was almost holding me too tightly.

“You’re pretty special.”

“Why?”

“Because you were made that way.”

“You need to stop talking in riddles. I want to know what...”

A knock sounded moments before the door swung it open. Elliot did not move from my side. His face nuzzled further into my neck.

“Mr Black. How is the recovery?” A strong male voice asked.

“I don’t know, you tell me. I feel great.”

Bryah’s smell had returned to the room.

“Your burs have been closed. You’re on the mend.”

“How much time has passed?”

“After your efforts Friday, the decision to close your skull was made within the hour,” another male voice added.

“What day is it?”

The room went silent for a moment.

“Monday,” the second male voice announced.

“Actually, we should be able to take off the head gear,” the strong male voice announced.

“Great.”

Elliot’s head left my neck. A moment later the touch of skin left my left side. The protests of the mattress announced that Elliot was leaving the bed.

“May I help?” Bryah asked.

“I think it will have to be the day nurse and me, mate. Insurance will cover *us* if anything broke,” the second male voice replied.



The sound of footsteps padded towards the bed.

“When can he go home?” Elliot asked from near Bryah.

“In a few days. We will have to monitor him to make sure there is no fluid build up.”

“Just because you promised your Mum you’d stay until I was safe?” I asked.

“No,” Elliot replied.

“My guess is to get you alone. He already got fired from his job,” Bryah trilled.

“That’s not fair,” the second male voice replied.

“They said they were going to fire me if I missed another shift. That was a week ago.”

“He has a rich boyfriend now. What does he need a job for?” Bryah shot.

“Shut up Bryah,” I called.

“I could see if the hospital has any casual work?” The second male voice attempted.

“I think I will just wait until everything calms down for now. But thanks Marty,”

Slowly, with the occasional soft scream of metal, my head started to feel free.

“I best be on my rounds. Doctor Phelps will look after you Mr Black.”

“Thank’s...” I trailed off.

“Doctor Reeves,” Elliot whispered.

“Thank’s Doctor Reeves.” I yelled.

As my head became mobile again, pain started to flair in my neck; it was stiff as a board. Soon the metal contraption moved off the bed and I finally saw the people in my room.

The male voice; Doctor “Marty” Phelps, was the spitting image of Paul Walker. The nurse was the same gnarled woman from the first day. Her badge read Jean. Turning my head was difficult, like pumping an old well. As I moved I found Elliot standing meekly in the corner near Bryah, his check badly bruised. Through the thin fabric of his white shirt his body showed signs of damage. Bryah was standing next to him, the signs of a fight fading from his knuckles.

“Were you two in a fight?” I asked.

“Not with each other,” Bryah quickly replied.

“How is the neck feeling?” Doctor Phelps asked.

“It is a little stiff. But it will be fine,” I dismissed him with a wave. Elliot and Bryah both smirked.

“I will come back later in the morning,” Doctor Phelps nodded.

“Thank-you doctor.

“What happened?”

Bryah stepped closer to the door. Doctor Phelps smiled at Elliot and walked out. Bryah closed the door behind him.

“I took Elliot home to get some clothes on Thursday. His brother had some friends over. When he went out back to get some clothes from the line, three of them that were out smoking took offence at Elliot’s new found gayness.”

“I was doing alright until one grabbed the garden rake. It was lucky Bryah and my brother came out when they did.”

“Your Dad is pretty upset about it, I think he is wants to press charges,” Bryah smiled at me.

“Wait. My Dad?” I asked.

“Yeah, your whole family loves Elliot more than you. Lora has thrown up on him twice.”

“We have spent a bit of time together...” Elliot grimaced.

“Sounds like you have spent more time with my family than I have spent with you.”

“You forget, you were technically here for all of it,” Bryah laughed weakly.

“If Dad is in the suing space, then he likes you. How are your parents?”

“Not bad really, they know,” Bryah replied quickly.

“This sounds like an interesting few weeks? Maybe Elliot would like to tell me what happened to you Bryah.”

“Shut up, I haven’t been able to talk to you for weeks either. You aren’t getting rid of me just because you have a boyfriend.”

I rolled my eyes and smiled.

“Elliot can lie next to you, I’ll talk for a while, then I’ll leave you alone.”

“I’d like that. You sap,” I replied.

“Well go on then,” Bryah prompted Elliot.

With a brilliant smile, Elliot bounded across to the bed. The jolt of his body on the bed twinged my neck. It forced out a flinch. Elliot jumped backwards. For the first time, I really took time to look at him. He seemed a

little downtrodden, but a strength had grown in his eyes. His body had also grown by an inch in every direction.

“Sorry?”

“No problem.”

Slower than the first time, he crept towards me and nuzzled into my side. Bryah started his monologue from the party. Various social slurs were added to provoke me. I still lacked the strength to step up.

Bryah stayed and prattled about everything for an hour. Then as my family started to trickle in, he left and Elliot took up the chair in the corner. Still not sold on his place at my side. Having slept on me for over a week now had not actually been his choice.

First came my sister and niece. Followed by my mother. Then after work, my Dad. It was interesting to see them in a situation when I did not get to decide when I could leave. It felt a bit like being a little boy again; I got in trouble consistently.

It took a long time between Dad announcing his goodbye and him closing the door. Throughout his whole closing speech, Elliot discretely creped closer and closer

to the bed. When Dad finally closed the door, he was standing at my side.

Looking at me in question, with my nod he was immediately onto the bed and nuzzled into my side. It seemed impossible that he could make himself so small.

“This has been a hard day,” Elliot sighed as he laid his head on my side.

“Because I am awake now,” I replied down to his wavy hair. I wanted to touch it. I realised I was not held down any longer.

The first touch of his hair in my hand sent fire through my body. It was like life itself.

“I haven’t seen your face since before your first surgery. Before I even cared what it looked like,” Elliot sighed, keeping his head down. “I was hard all day. I want to look at you first thing in the morning and last thing at night from now on.”

“Then why did you have to say that to my shoulder?”

“Because I was embarrassed, and I want to kiss you. But your head looks like a bruise salad,” Elliot looked up smiling.

“One first kiss wont hurt me.”

“We already did that.”

“You took advantage of me in a coma?”

“Of course.”

“Can I have one that I will remember then?”

“Are you sure?”

“I am certain. Have I been able to lie to you yet?”

“You are very beardy...”

“I thought I felt itchy.”

Elliot sat up, supporting himself on his hands. Leaning, head out, he tentatively placed his lips against mine.

Fire engulfed my entire body. My senses melted into just a pair of lips. I felt a tongue move. I had a tongue too.

Elliot’s arms gave way and his whole weight landed on me. Against my will, I yelled out in pain.

Like a scalded cat, Elliot pounced off the bed and stood back; staring in for any damage. As the pain in my head subsided, I opened my eyes to find Elliot standing terrified.

“I am so sorry. I just suddenly forgot how to control any part of my body that wasn’t touching you.”

His bruises were all gone.

“I’m not. I’ve never kissed anybody before. That was amazing.”

“Are you sure you’re ok? Maybe I should get the nurse.”

“No. I am sure I am fine. Sit back down. We need to talk. Maybe we will have to hold off kissing until I am a little better.”

Elliot nudged onto the bed again: lying sideways to use as little room as possible.

“Elliot. Come closer. And get comfortable, this wont be quick.”

From scalded to Cheshire, Elliot’s teeth looked like they might crack open his head.

“Come on. Come over.”

Elliot slowly flex his arms to pull his snuggle in close. My body came alive. I reached around to the mirror attached to the bed and reflected it down towards Elliot.

“Take a look.”

Elliot looked at his face.

“What is missing?”



Elliot's face changed. Sitting up he checked his arms, then, taking off his shirt he stared at his torso.

“You swore you wouldn't leave until I was safe? Well you don't need to worry. I am perfectly safe. You can leave right now. Your promise is filled.”

Elliot got off the bed.

“What are you saying?”

“I don't want you here from obligation.”

“I'm not! I love you.

“I don't know how, or from where, but, it is true. I have spent weeks with your family – or at least as much as Laura would let me - and you through them. And even without that I would be absolutely certain. Now, tell me what is going on? I want in. I want the trouble. I decided that the night of the party. Before I even got there. So you can stick your obligation up.. wherever you want. I'm in.”

I smiled.

“I'm not human Elliot. Not in the same way that my parents, or your parents, or Bryah are.”

Elliot stood still. His eyes checked the closed door. With a deep breath, he sat back down on the bed

and went back to his cuddle. It hurt my neck to look at him, but I didn't care.

“Tell me more.” Elliot stared into my eyes as he spoke. His smile reminded me of a naughty child hearing about a hole in the school fence.

## Elliot 4 – Finding Out

“Not in the same way that my parents, or your parents, or Bryah are,” Tack finished.

My head still was tingling. A kiss had never felt like that before. Just to touch Tack was electrifying. My whole body had disappeared. All except my mouth. I felt stupid for falling on him. But nothing could stop the electricity from my lips.

Sitting against Tack’s shoulder gave me the feeling of perpetual déjàvu. Instead of sending a single shiver down my spine, my back was on fire.

“Tell me more.” I felt like naughty child hearing about a hole in the school fence.

“First, how much worse were you hurt than I saw?”

“I don’t know,” I replied. “Laura put me to sleep lying right where I am now. That was weeks ago. They woke me up to go home, and the idiots happened. I’m sure I had a broken nose. That was maybe a week ago. She woke me up a few times to check on me, and then I woke up just before you did on Friday. I looked much worse in the mirror then. Laura put me out again Friday afternoon until this morning.”

“How much do you know?”

“Nothing. Everybody said you’d tell me?”

“Ok. What do you think?”

“I think we have history. I think I said to Laura that we had planned to meet on the summit of the mountain that morning. But had never spoken before. And she said it was the truth. But there is more to it. And I know that too. And you. You change people. Just by being around; you’re draw out crap like snake venom.”

Tack inhaled slowly. My lips were tingling; begging for more like an addict.

“This is how I see things. And is just my private psychosis: I pieced it together from my memory but it feels imagined sometimes. I trust it is true.

“You and I have been here a few times. Together. Every seven hundred years is the best I can place. I have spent a lot of time in museums with my job.”

Tack waited for me to object. I waited, resting against his shoulder, without making a move. For some reason I knew he was waiting for me to add something, I didn’t want to talk.

“I don’t think it has been this hard before. Most of my memories are straight forward - and for us - rather ordinary lives. Ordinary when you seem to live around 200 years.

“My last memory is a mess. All I have from it is fear. I don’t think I lived much past three or four; when I think about it, it is like I was a toddler twice. There are just a lot of simple memories of affection and need. Basics. Fear mostly. Whatever happened, I think it affected you too.”

Tack waited again. This time it felt like he was pressing through pain. I saw images of shame and torment.

“I know I am not living up to the memories I have of me before.”

“I doubt that.” I grinned to reassure him.

Tack smiled back but there was no depth in it.

“Well it isn’t like we get a rule book. But my mind isn’t ordered or focused at all. My memories come like nightmares most of the time. They were just naturally there before. My dad says it sounds like the trauma in war veterans.”

“And how do you know they’re real?”

“Faith,” Tack replied. “Mostly. And that I have made a pretty reasonable career from finding artefacts and reading ancient languages. I am pretty good at it. And I tend to know things that upset people. Especially the Americans.

“I still remember everything my mum did before she had me. And I remember every mother before that too. Like an immortal coil of memory.”

It was as if Tack were waiting for me to withdraw. He kept stopping each time he made a small revelation. With the past few weeks, I would have accepted him saying I was a porpoise.

“And that is where you come in. You’re always the same. You bring me together. Make me who I need to be. The oldest story I have found of you was a weird verse from Norway.”

“What did it say?” I asked knowing Tack would have it memorised.

“Protect. Focus. Heart.

Arc light champion,  
heart of the darkness.

He is war like art.

Chaos injustice;

dragon immortal.”

“That is a terrible poem.”

“That is all you took from that?”

“I am immortal too. Did you see me this morning? Look at me now.”

“Being with me makes you immortal.”

“Being with you; sex?”

“Morso the together part. My mind is still a mess. I know when you are with me you are, especially when we are wed. But only you get the lot. Everything I can do. The agility, the strength, the mind. Bryah only gets what you could call side-effects. Little gifts show up, like speed or strength.”

“Like Laura?”

“No. Laura is different again. Laura is much much older than you’d think. But that’s her story to tell.”

Tack stopped speaking. This time I could tell he wasn’t going to start up again. I sat quietly. The way Tack had spoken made me sad. Like he was alone without anyone. His story came out more like symptoms. The confidence I’d seen in him was gone.

The dream I'd been having for months appeared in my head. *I'd wake up with Tack at the base of a massive fortress. We were in a tent we had made out of an animal. I had killed it myself.*

"There have been dreams."

"Dreams?" Tack peaked.

"One wont leave my mind. We wake up in a tent made from the body of a woolly mammoth. I know I killed it myself. We set it up outside a fortress. But not like we were attacking it, like we were just outside. "

"I've had a few of those." Tack smiled. "Three different ones; they come and go."

"Different ones?"

"Maybe separated by centuries. We seem to come and go. It is hard to imagine a starting point. I am a little disappointed I don't have a memory as an amoeba or a monkey."

I couldn't help laughing.

"You'd have to be capable of memory for you to remember, and coupling for that matter... As amoeba, we couldn't exist. They are asexual; no couples."

"You are really stuck on sex aren't you?"



“Well the dreams don’t necessarily end with the tent intact.”

“Oh?”

“As a twenty-two year old male, I *am* in my prime.”

“Easy tiger. You might scare me off.”

“Ha! Now I know they are memories I know you’re no angel either.”

Tack broke up with laughter. A deep guttural belly laugh echoed around him and through the room. His jolting body shook into mine.

“That’s exactly what I am.” Tack laughed as soon as he could.

“What?”

Tack slowly calmed his laugh and looked at me. The blue in his searching eyes deepened.

“You are too.”

I had nothing. I couldn’t respond.

Tack became silent. He sat tracing my ear. I sat listening as the rain started smattering on the window outside. It suddenly occurred to me that it meant other things I had heard of could be true too.

“We aren’t the only immortals here, are we?”

“I am not immortal. You will be while I survive, and there are some others here. Some good ones – for lack of a better word - my sister included, have been within the race from the beginning, others are here in shame. They don’t seem to die like we do.”

“Then what is the point?”

“Same as anybody else; to be ourselves.”

“What is being ourselves going to accomplish?”

“Why would we need to accomplish anything? We tend to have larger selves anyway. Don’t you already play football and study?”

“I have offers for a try out, and I am nearly finished studying. But what does that have to do with anything now?”

“You should start there. No reason to change anything. When is the try out?”

“Three weeks.”

Tack looked at me with a wicked smirk.

“What is it?”

“I think we could have you immortal by then.”

For some reason my mind had given over. I was who I was. I had never been anybody else.

“But don’t we have a job to do?”

“Wed, be who we are. Sounds good to me.”

“You’ll marry me that fast?”

“More like slow, if I hadn’t taken a hit to the head, we would be wed by now, not married. Married is for men and women.”

“Wed then, it’s just a word. And if you had come to the summit where would we be?”

Tack’s face became stone. He seemed afraid of what his mind was seeing but his face showed nothing. I had said the exact wrong thing for the moment. He had shut down. A question forced itself into my voice.

“Why couldn’t you come?” I pressed.

“I told you I don’t know.”

“Bryah said you felt sick?”

“My stomach cramped! My head screamed to stop! I just couldn’t go.” Tack growled.

Something in my mind clicked to the clothesline.

“My stomach cramped before I went to the clothesline. In my room, my head told me not to go looking for my pajamas.”

Tack looked at me confused.

“It didn’t make sense to me either. Why would pajamas be dangerous. But what if it was a warning?”

When Marty first met me, he did something that made me angry. And not just angry, raging. I picked him up off the ground with one hand.”

“He threatened me, didn’t he?”

I shook my head.

“Sortof, it was more that I thought he was a threat.”

“You do that a lot in my memory; you go off the rails when somebody, or something threatens me. That’s why you killed that mammoth. You’re like an angry ant.”

“More like a dragon with a golden egg, I like that better. But, the only other time I’ve felt like that was on that mountain, on the summit, when I saw a man I thought was you. I blamed it on not seeing you.”

“So what do you think? He was a threat?”

“You tell me. Laura said you had a talent for survival. She thought you were protecting yourself from me on the mountaintop. Because I might have hit you up there.”

“You think I was avoiding a man?” Tack scoffed.

“I am hardly defenceless.”

“If you died young last time, somebody killed you before we met. I can’t imagine a flu making you afraid.

The timing fits; if we knew, why couldn't somebody else."

"What do you mean, you think somebody doesn't like us being here?"

"I do. Being ourselves is not going to win a popularity contest today. You aren't going to be some wall-flower. And - if we are always the same - 700 years ago it would have been even worse. I can imagine the damage we would have caused 1400 years ago. Now legally we can't even get married or wed. If I am going to believe any of this, I am not going to give anything up to coincidence. Us being here is against nearly every organised group in existence. Somebody knows..."

"But one man couldn't hurt me."

"I did."

"I let you hit me."

"How does that work?"

"I have... We have abilities Elliot. We can't... Just, for now, accept that I am not that easy to kill."

"So hit you as a child."

"Then why not go after me again as a child?"

"I don't know."

“See. I understand what you’re saying but he couldn’t hurt me now.”

“But what about me?” I had broken my contact with Tack and was gesturing wildly. “What if someone was just trying to stop us connecting? What if they needed you to point me out? What if they found you young last time and couldn’t this time because of Laura? You said you need me to focus you. And they’ve already managed to damage your memory.”

“You’re awfully certain. Where is this coming from?”

“I don’t know, but it makes sense doesn’t it.”

“It isn’t nonsense.”

“What sort of abilities should I know about?”

“I can’t tell you that. If you try to do anything without knowing what you are doing, you could do something you’ll regret. Besides I’m not strong enough to show you yet?”

“Shouldn’t I already know how?”

“You do. Sort of. I think. But I can’t handle it yet.”

“Can Laura show me?”

“What is the rush?”

“It is a threat Tack! I have to protect you.”

“Until you are immortal, that will have to be my job. We are safe right now.”

“That’s not good enough.”

“It’ll have to be. I can’t show you yet. And if you ask Laura she will just put you out.”

“But...”

“You have to stop. It’s happening too quickly. If we don’t stop, I’ll get worse again.”

On sitting back, I found Tack’s face had lost all colour. Something the Black’s had mentioned about change made sense. In the past thirty minutes I had become an immortal without even balking. Tack was panting a little.

“You have to trust me. Any more change now isn’t”

“Stop,” I admitted to Tack’s shoulder. “I get it. I just, I didn’t realise it was... I’m sorry, my mind went to action.”

“It’s ok. We both have a lot to get used too.”

“You should get some sleep now.”

Tack became silent. When I looked up again he was fast asleep. Now that I had a moment, I realised I felt exhausted too.



## Tack 4 – Foot Hold

The room was pitch black. At first I could not understand why I had woken. As I moved there was a pinching sensation at the back of my skull. From my skin I could feel that Elliot was producing a line of drool that went from my left nipple, pooled in my navel, and ran in dual directions off my stomach. The sheets were nowhere.

“Elliot,” I whispered as I switched on the light.

Elliot did not move. Lifting my shoulder under his head, I nudged him forward as I sat up. As I moved, Elliot fell. His journey took him through his drool and into my lap.

“Uh.” Elliot jumped, “What? What’s happening?” Sitting up from my crotch, Elliot’s face came out covered in spit.

“What the fuck?” Elliot asked, wiping his face.

“That is your drool from the spit pool you made in my belly button. Nothing to do with me.” I replied.

“Oh... What’s wrong?” Elliot recovered. He used his arm to remove the spit. My left arm was dead from Elliot’s weight.

“I need you to help me take off this bandage.”

I picked my hand up and let it fall back to the bed.

“Oh, sorry. Why are we taking it off?”

“I think the stitches are out. And the plates.”

“Hu. What? Should I get the doctor?” Elliot’s eyes darted to my bandage.

“No I mean out. My head is fine.”

Elliot stared at me.

“Just do it.”

Elliot nudged closer and felt around my head.

“Just pull it off.”

“I’ll tear the stiches.”

“I’m fine. My head is healed.”

Elliot eyed me again, but went ahead and pulled off the bandage.

“Holy shit!” Elliot exclaimed. As he let the bandage drop, it tinkled like a coin purse.

“What?”

“Your hair is back?”

“Oh good.”

Elliot ran his hand through my hair.

“There is no scar?”

“That sounds about right.”

“You weren’t kidding about skills!”

“What, accelerated hair styling? Yes that is useful.”

“When we went to sleep you had three burr holes, 63 stitches, and a shaved head.”

“I know. Now you, have to get rid of the evidence and rewrap my head so nobody asks any questions.”

“That’ll help. They’ll want to check it.”

“Deal with that later. We need to get through tomorrow morning.”

“Why morning?”

“I intend to be gone by midday.”

“Why?”

“If you are right and somebody wants to find near immortals, headlines of miracle healing might be a clue.”

“So you believe me?”

“It wasn’t a question of belief. It was probability. And I didn’t believe you. Sorry.”

“That’s alright, you’re used to working alone. And you were punished with a dribble puddle.”

“Deal.”

Elliot picked up my bandage and emptied it onto the bed; three metal plates and 63 perfect stich loops smattered out.

“How does this work?”

“It isn’t a miracle. My body rejected them then healed. Just faster than normal.”

Elliot stared at me suspiciously.

“It isn’t a learned thing, I can’t show you how.”

I stared back at him expectantly.

“Alright. So what do we do with them?”

An idea came to me and vanished just as quickly. Not knowing why, and with the blood returned to my left hand, I picked up all of the metal and stiches in one swipe. Clenching the pieces, I focused on the matter within. I forced it to interact. Elliot stared, confused. Squeezing slightly, I moulded the puddle inside my palm into a small lump. With my last effort, I focused on an edge and encouraged it to form a loop.

When I opened my hand, a small malformed droplet sat in my palm, a pinhole loop sat on its apex. I handed it to Elliot.

“Here, if you buy a chain for it and it can be your reminder of the second day we met.”

Elliot took the pendent. His eyes had not left mine.

“How did you do that?”

“No idea. It just came to me when you asked. But it is special; surgical steel and surgical silk. I can’t imagine that that alloy exists anywhere else.”

“And it was inside my angel?”

“Yuk.”

“Thank-you Tack,” Elliot smiled, still staring into my eyes.

“Consider it a pre-gift for rewrapping my head.”

Elliot’s hand reached around my neck and pulled me in. As our lips met, the engulfing fire stole away my body; leaving me as lips.

I don’t know who broke first, but when we finally pulled away, we were both panting.

“Do you think this will get easier?” Elliot asked, still out of breath.

“How do the dreams end again?” I replied.

“Oh, yeah,” Elliot’s grin spread out across his face. His eyes leered hungrily. “Considering you’re well now, and we have an hour or two before morning...” The leer of attempted seduction was almost impossible to resist.

“Maybe we should learn to kiss without suffocating each other first?”

“OK,” Elliot smiled.

Elliot’s hands were around me before I could reply.

“Elliot...” I tried. Muffled by impending lips. Elliot planted against me.

My mind spiralled away, again leaving only the parts of me touching him. The seductive allure drove though every thought; demolishing them.

As Elliot pulled away to breath, I threw my hand between us.

“What? What is it?” Elliot searched.

“I don’t remember. We have to stop,” I replied. Never wanting to unsay anything more.

“Why?”

“If a kiss lasts eight minutes, sex could last days.”

Elliot checked the clock.

“Whoa, almost nine...”

“Better to just wait for the moment.”

The sheepish frown was worse than the leer; my under-experienced body screamed for him. From a point more of self-preservation, I switched off the light. The squeal of the inner springs pre-empted Elliot’s hands and head against my chest.

“How does it work that I haven’t even wanted to masturbate since I met you and I am still turned on so much?”

“I’ll let you know when I know.”

“You feel the same way?”

“Elliot, the only thing that made me gay before I met you was that I told people. I’ve never been attracted to anybody else. If you didn’t come along, I may never have been.”

“I was nothing before I met you. So man or woman made no difference. I felt the same about either. Nothing. At least you had your memories. For me it was easier to be normal.”

“Until the day of the mountain, my memory was a series of torturing dreams. The only reason I could stop now is that I have seen and not touched since I hit puberty.”

“Practice makes perfect?”

“No. Witnessed the devastation.”

“Oh.”

“Wait until we can find a nice field somewhere.”

“I’ll hold you to that.”

“You better. Goodnight.”

“Didn’t you want me to wrap your head?”

“Just lock the door. If I turn the light back on we’re finished.”

“Good call.”

Elliot left my chest and padded across the room. The last thing I felt was his warm chest press back in to mine. He snuggled into my neck.

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Dr Phelps, Marty, came in under the pretence of rounds. Elliot had unwittingly ensnared a follower; his gifts were surfacing without my help.

Marty looked at the hat covering my bandage.

“You shouldn’t have any pressure on your head,” he warned.

“Not easy to plan a comradery without a thinking cap. Besides it is not secured at the back.”

“A what?”

“Dudes don’t get married, they become comrades,” Elliot explained.

“Well that is one explanation I hadn’t expected.”

“I know. Who knew...” Elliot grinned.



“If you protest you get to attack us with swords.”

“Great?”

“It’s an ownership thing. So fathers of invited woman get at chance at the money in the houses of gay men.”

“So you’re just making up a ceremony?”

“No need,” I added. “It was made up for us like weeks ago.”

“Weeks?”

“He’s lying. Tack’s an anthropologist. It is a real thing from ages ago.”

“Can’t say I’ve heard of it.”

“Book burning was not just a Nazi thing. But tablets were smashed, not burned. Well they were fired at first. But that was in a kiln.”

“Tack. Mumbling,” Elliot announced.

“Oh. Um, OK, well I want to check out please.”

“What!? Where did that come from?”

“Yeah, this treatment is against my religion or something. I want to go out and use natural medicine, or something. Make the form sound really flighty. Against medical advice is fine.”

“You can go anywhere, your brain is a minefield.”

Elliot stood up and walked over to Marty.

“We need it to be clean, quick and under the radar,” Elliot explained, taking Marty by the shoulder. Elliot had been on board from the moment I mentioned nudity in the ceremony. Within weeks he would have a chance to show off his new body.

“This is nuts. What are you two planning?”

“Together, we hike from the place we first met to a place we love. Once we get there, with a group of loved ones waiting, we strip off our filthy clothes and our friends douse us with salt water from the sea until we are clean. Lovey dovy shit. Every person we love then gives us a glass of wine. We must drink until they have all finished.

“Then, every man or woman who objects for themselves or their own child gets a chance to attack. By that time we will be very drunk. It is not as easy as it sounds.”

“When are you planning this?”

“Three weeks.”

“Awesome! No.” Marty replied, Elliot smiled broadly.

“From Mount Warning to where?” I asked.

“Cunningham’s Gap?”

“Why?”

“There is a plateau near there that I love.”

“What about Kooralbyn?”

“My parents took me there when I was a kid.”

“Mine did too.”

“There is a lookout there that has sunsets you wouldn’t believe.”

“Wait. You’re not leaving, or doing anything like this for months.” Marty announced.

Elliot reached over behind me and pulled off the hat as planned. Attached to the inside rim, we had pinned one layer of bandage.

“What the fuck?” Marty stared.

Elliot walked over to the door and locked it.

I leant down and showed Marty the back of my head.

“We need to get joined quickly Marty. I don’t think we can wait weeks.”

“You can’t!”

Standing from the bed in my gown, I pulled Marty's hand up and ran it through my hair. Marty seemed catatonic.

"Elliot, go get Liz."

"Ok." Elliot eyed Marty and walked out.

"Look," I chortled. "It is a miracle"

Marty looked up at my head. I could see us in the mirror, it looked like some first contact scene.

"This is impossible," Marty whispered.

"Whatever you are thinking, go with it. What is important is that until we join, we are vulnerable. This proves it," I explained.

"What are you?" Marty asked.

Marty flinched as the door cracked open. Elliot entered, closing the door behind him.

"I had the other nurse page her up." Elliot announced. A small hole had appeared in Elliot's t-shirt.

"You need new clothes. With how much you've grown you look like you've robbed a twelve year old."

Marty stepped away cautiously.

Elliot looked at me and smiled.

"This is going well."

Marty stared at Elliot.

“What are you?” Marty asked, backing away.

“His mind is open now?”

“He should be terrified.” I smiled.

“What...” Marty trailed off. I nodded to Elliot to continue.

“We aren’t evil. So don’t worry about that.”

“What are you then? What is going to happen to me?”

“Not yet. We need to leave; before anybody sees too much. Liz will help.”

“I don’t suppose I have much choice in the matter,” Marty turned for the door. He stopped with his hand on the handle. He turned to us, breathed deeply and walked over to me.

“I believe in God. Whatever you are I wont go against that.”

“Which God?”

“The God.”

“Tack is asking what religion you are referring too,” Elliot added.

“Why would that matter?” Marty replied, staring at me.

“It doesn’t,” I looked at Elliot.

“I wont be doing any sacrificing or...” Marty was becoming loud.

I lifted a finger to my lips.

“God is God.” I replied, grinning at Marty. Elliot walked over and put an arm around his shoulder.

“I’m trying to treat this as normal too,” Elliot frowned at me. Marty sighed. Elliot looked up at me, searching my face. I had nothing to offer in reply.

“Take this,” Elliot surprised me again, holding out the pendant I had made for him. Elliot had threaded a piece of string through it already.

*Probably from his shirt, or his underpants.*

Marty’s eyes widened. “It isn’t special. It is just a pendant. But it saved Tack’s life. Like you did. I think it is yours before mine.”

Accepting the pendant, Marty slipped it over his head. His colour returned immediately.

“Don’t protect it. It isn’t worth anything,” I added.

Elliot put his arm around Marty again, guiding him out of the room.

“You think this is difficult for you. I am moving in with a guy,” I heard Elliot chuckle as the door closed.

I moved around the room collecting our things. I wanted to be prepared for a quick exit.

By the time Elliot returned, I was packed, dressed, and sitting on the bed with Elliot's baseball cap on my head.

“He's taking it all pretty well.”

“How are you taking it?”

“It is the best thing that has ever happened to me.”

“Even though you are moving in with a guy?”

Elliot knelt.

“I will hike, wash, drink and fight. Before God I will accept death, exile and punishment for him who risks heart for me.”

“I haven't risked anything.”

Elliot took up my hand.

“You risked everything. Free-will may define you, but it was you who knew the possible consequences. You took all the punishment and pain on yourself to spare me. You could have stopped it. Bryah said it, you let me hit you. Let me marry you, or whatever.”

“You can whatever me.”

Elliot smiled brilliantly.

“This is new. You have never been the reasonable type.”

“As you said. I must have survived without you last time. Or maybe not. Whatever happened, I am sure we must adapt to times like everyone else.” Elliot replied. “As part of the whatever, you have to walk into your house first.”

“Why?”

“Because I promised you would be home safe before I returned home.”

My face grew hot. Twelve thousand years of memory and I could still reduce to water.

“My blood is boiling.”

“When this hike starts, we are whatever then.”

“We are whatever now. Get up.”

Elliot rose directly into my lips. My head swam.

Marty and Liz arrived with copies of the discharge forms. Elliot and I signed me out against medical recommendation.



## Elliot 5 – Sex

Dreams had been fast and frequent. I woke to a hog-tying of sheets and a pain in my penis from prolonged strain. Planning for a comradeship and imagining the aftermath had made me anxious. Every minute Tack was becoming stronger; his hair grew longer, his body toned. The energy he radiated was like being at the centre of a football field with a packed stadium. Not surprising I dreamed of things that would make the Kama Sutra blush.

After a shower, 4306 push ups, sit ups and lunges, I sat on Tack's couch staring at the ocean. Tack emerged an hour later. He stumbled from his room wearing only a singlet; he was in search of coffee, I was in torment. The thin white fabric outlined a Davidesque body, and the lack of pants explained the rest.

I had spent twelve postpubescent years not enjoying anything about sex. Now the possibility left me lying awake in my separate room for four hours before I nodded off to the new torment of REM.

*Why had I insisted on separate rooms?*

After a loud display of coffee extraction, Tack disappeared into his room and reemerged wearing King-g work wear.

He walked over to me.

“Promise not to leave the unit until I get back,” he asked down to me.

“Sure. Where are you going?”

“I’ll be at max a few days,” he replied. He walked towards the door.

I tried to stand to call for an explanation, but my legs refused to stand.

“Hey?!”

Tack stopped with the door open.

“Bryah may drop by, don’t let him empty the fridge,” Tack announced from the stairwell.

“Wait! Where are you going?”

“I’ve gotta get swords,” Tack grinned and let the door shut.

“What the fuck man?” I yelled.

The main door below slammed; tack must have been running. I slumped on the couch. My stomach ached. Tack’s phone sat next to mine on the table.

“What the fuck!” I yelled.

Once I finally had the strength to stand, I headed straight for a bath. I needed the water to relax my body and gave me a chance to think about things other than aches.

Completely pissed off, I went through every inch of the house. The only thing I found that were worth while were pictures of Tack at a nude beach from years earlier. I was turning into a pervert; but masturbating didn't help.

The next morning I moved my things into Tack's room. When I realised I only had the things I had taken to the hospital, I called my Mother. She agreed to come over with more of my stuff. I told her about the "wedding" over the phone. For some reason she didn't even question me. I spared her the full detail.

A few hours later she arrived with Dad's work truck full of my things. From the balcony I saw that Dad had come with her. The car looked packed to the brim.

Stepping out Mum looked up.

"What are you doing, get down here?"

"I can't I called. I promised not to leave."

"I don't care! Get down here."

“No.”

“Elliot, if you think I am going to lug all of this up the stairs with you just sitting on your arse you can just think again!”

“How many times have you had this argument?” Dad had emerged from the car. He spoke just to Mum, but I could hear him.

“Why would he promise not to leave? What a stupid thing to do!”

“Sounds like a slip of the tongue to me,” Dad replied.

“Yeah, well he can call some of his mates to bring it up.”

Mum walked to the building entrance. Dad stood next to the car shaking his head.

“Buzz me up idiot!” Mum called from the door.

I ran inside to the intercom and hit the door button.

Within moments, Mum entered the unit like a cyclone.

“I don’t know what you think this is,” Mum started. “Oh wow, what a view!” Dad followed her.

Deviating, Mum walked past me to the balcony. Dad closed the door quietly and pulled me into a hug.

“She’s right, you are an idiot,” Dad said. “But I am so happy. Finally one of my boys is moving out.”

“Dad!”

“I’m just one away from a pool room.”

“Look at this Colin. When Phil moves out wouldn’t it be better to just move somewhere like this.”

Dad’s head dropped.

Turning his head to the balcony, immediately his mood changed. In a mild daze, Dad walked towards Mum.

“You look magnificent on that balcony,” Dad crooned. Mum lapped it up.

Shaking my head in disbelief, I followed them. Together on the balcony, flanked by sunlight, my parents looked like a young couple.

“Elliot!” A voice called from inside.

I figured it was Bryah; the wind was blowing in scent from the ocean so I couldn’t smell a thing. And I knew had a key. Tack had told him on the phone that we had done a big shop the day before. I had already eaten the panty raw. He would be disappointed.

“On the balcony,” I called.

Tack appeared in the doorway, two swords slung on his back. He was covered in dust. His shirt was gone and the pants were torn to tatters. Ripples echoed through his flat stomach as he swaggered through the door.

“Eleven thousand years and they can still cut wet l...” Tack cut off when he saw my parents.

Mum and Dad turned around. Both stared in surprise.

I watched Tack’s face as he re-evaluated the situation. With barely a stumble, he recovered his stride and walked towards us. His bicep flexed and his lats pulsed as he drew the sword off his left shoulder. Mum and Dad stared. My jaw dropped.

Tack held out the sword staring at me.

“For the ceremony,” Tack smiled brilliantly.

Mum and Dad were still staring.

“Mum, Dad, this is Tack.”

Neither of them moved. Tack lowered the sword.

“Have you told them yet?”

“No. But I told Mum about the wedding on the phone.”

“Comradery,” Tack corrected. Flipping the sword and handing me butt end, Tack stuck out his hand. “Tack Black. It is such an honour.”

Tentatively, Dad extended his hand. Mum held to him tightly.

“The two of you are a magnificent couple. No wonder Elliot is remarkable,” Tack smiled again.

“Aren’t you just out of hospital?” Mum asked.

“No.” Tack replied. “I just came from a cultural recreation.”

“But you were in hospital two days ago.”

“No Mr Moore. I was working on a study in Sydney. Elliot came with me.”

“I didn’t know you were an actor?” Mum asked

“I am not. I am an anthropologist. I sometimes am involved in cultural recreations to simulate lesson learning in early mankind.”

Both Mum and Dad’s faces relaxed.

“It is such a shame we couldn’t speak in the car, but it was nice to meet your family... Oh where was that?” Mum replied, releasing Dad.

“At the airport. And I am sorry I was on the phone the whole drive,” Tack added.

I could see the waves of influence moulding around him.

“Yes that’s right. I dropped you and Elliot off there after Bryah’s birthday. He hadn’t told us about you then.”

Stepping towards Tack, Mum pulled him into a hug.

“Loty probably told you, he came home and told us about the two of you that day. Then flew down to you. We then had these boys get into the fight at our house. I think it was the day Elliot came back and then left again. It has been such a stressful month. With the police and all. I’m afraid I haven’t been giving Elliot enough attention. I would love to have a chance to meet your mother again without the pajamas.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it Mrs Moore. You have all been so accepting of him coming out, he knows how loved he is. And my mother wishes she could look so good in her pajamas.”

I tried to morph my face into a smile. I can’t imagine it looked convincing.

“Would you like to stay for lunch?”



“We would love too, but we have all of Elliot’s things in the car.”

“We’ll handle that, then I can make us some lunch.”

“I, um...” I stuttered. “I ate everything.”

“Then we’ll have to go out. Let me have a shower and get all this off. Can’t go out like this too often. Somebody might get the wrong idea,” Tack jostled my Mum, producing a giddy chirp from her. “There is some wine in the silver fridge. Elliot, would you mind pouring two glasses of something they will like? I’ll be right back.” Tack pecked me on the cheek. “Go with it,” he whispered then trotted away.

“Elliot, he is magnificent.”

Staring at his back as he disappeared, I nodded.

“You have no idea.”

“You haven’t told us a thing about Sydney.”

“We should wait until Tack is here,” Dad suggested.

“What is his workout program, I have never seen a man that perfect?” Dad asked me while fidgeting with his own gut.

“Dad?!”

“What, you have to get your taste from somewhere, and I can appreciate a body for aesthetic reasons. I used to paint you know.”

“I don’t know dad, I’ll ask him for you,” I replied.  
“Let me just grab a glass of wine for the two of you.”

My mind already swimming, I walked inside to find wine. I heard my Mum comment on the positive direction the day had taken.

It took me ten minutes to negotiate the cork. By the time I had the wine in the glasses, Tack’s arms appeared around my waist. I flinched at the touch.

“You have no idea how freaked out I am,” I announced.

“I have every idea. But I can’t affect you, you’re just going to have to deal with it.”

Turning around, I pushed Tack away.

“Do you think you can just go around doing what you want and telling me nothing?”

Tack looked hurt.

“I am doing anything but what I want,” Tack replied. “If you think we should draw your parents into this, I will. But what they don’t know can’t hurt them.”

It's law. They're protected as they are. Better protection than anything we can ever give them.”

I stood silent.

“It just feels like I know nothing and you're...”

Tack stepped forward and held me. My body melted against his.

“I'm trusting my gut Elliot. What does yours tell you?”

“To start training!” I stressed. “To learn everything I can.”

“Well, when I got home, I was going to say that that sword was my gift to you when our families first joined. Not that modern culture will let you carry it, but my gut tells me we need them. We at least need them to start you training.”

“Really?”

“Yes. I am not being allusive by choice here. I am still acting on instinct.”

Tack consumed my mouth in a kiss. *Hello, I love you, I missed you and I want you, all in one moment.* My resolve to control my muscles had increased since our first kiss. After a moment, my knees got weak. We broke away to catch our breaths.

“Alright,” I panted. “My parents will be wondering where we are.”

“I don’t think so,” Tack replied, pointing outside.

I turned to find my parents necking on my balcony like a pair of teenagers.

“You’re going to need to learn to control that.”

“What? I’ve never...”

“I may have altered a few memories, but you have given them a months worth of suppressed lust,” Tack interrupted.

“That was me?”

Tack nodded against my neck.

“You were trying to entice me. I thought you were a smoke machine of pheromones when I walked in,” Tack explained. “Be confident. I want you more than air.”

“I want you like nothing I’ve felt before.”

“I know that,” Tack produced a sword from behind him. He placed it in my hand. “We are training in five minutes.”

“Training?”

“Refresher course really. Make sure you have your confidence.”

“But my parents. Lunch.”

“You take out the wine, I’ll lock the door to our room.”

“Why?”

“They’re not going for it in our bed. They can use the spare room.”

“Ew! That’s my bed.”

“Don’t think I didn’t notice your stuff is all in my closet.”

I felt my cheeks blushing.

“Besides, you did it to them, not me. I’m not staying to listen to it. You can if you want. I’d tell them that we are going to bring back food and will be an hour.”

“That’s a good idea.”

Tack trotted to the fridge and downed a two-litre carton of milk.

“Where did you go?”

“Tahiti,” Tack smiled. “Cook left our Swords there before he died.”

“Wait, Captain Cook?”

“Great Great Great Granddad Cook,” Tack replied. He tossed the collapsed bottle into the bin and with a wink, disappeared down the hall.

Releasing a sigh, I put down my sword and picked up the two glasses of wine. As I walked towards them, my demonstrative parents seemed to be getting worse. The only acknowledgement they gave that I was near them was a grunt when I said we were leaving for an hour. It sounded like good. Keeping my eyes averted, I left them to each other.

I walked down the hall towards our room. Tack emerged as I reach the hall closet. Seeing my reflection in the mirror doors, I stopped.

“I have to change.”

Tack shook his head.

“I am wearing boxers.”

“They’re perfect. Let’s go.”

“They’re stretch pants and they should be baggy.”

“Good. Were just going to the garage. Besides, you don’t want baggy crap annoying you while we’re fighting.”

“You’re wearing a proper shirt and trousers?”

“I’m better at sword craft,” Tack was almost bouncing with energy. “Always have been.”

“Can’t I put some pants on?”

“Anything else you wear will get destroyed. So, it’s up to you. Catch me if you can.”

Tack slammed me aside and dashed out the door. It felt like I had been pummelled by a freight train. He was running down the stairs before I recovered. He was more excited than I was.

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Slight petrol fumes lingered in the garage. Stretch-boxer clad, I stood opposite Tack holding *my sword* in my left hand. I had no ideas on stance, so I pointed the tip into the ground on my left side. Tack stood poised, the image of a statue, legs set apart, sword in his right hand above his head.

“Should I be copying you?”

Tack smiled, twisting in reverse on his front foot. The sword sliced towards my right side. Glancing the blow off by lifting the blade upwards, I stepped aside. My arm had moved faster than I knew it could. Tack was gone. Literally gone. I searched the space and found nothing.

Running water flooded through the pipes above. A car slowed outside. I searched the garage without moving from my spot.

A sword appeared around my throat. Striking backwards with the hilt of my sword, I hit at air.

“You loose.”

The sword disappeared from around my neck. Tack stood opposite me again.

“What do you expect, you move like an elf?”

“I expect you to play hard. I can’t be hurt by you; unless I want you too.”

Pivoting on his forward foot, Tack stooped to collect my legs. I felt the blade brush the bottom of my feet as I jumped. The sword was already approaching my chest. I glanced it off, shifting my feet to return the blow. Tack deflected my strike, slicing down across my back. The pain burned for a moment, but the cut did not remain long enough to allow even a drop of blood to escape. My legs gave way and I dropped to my knees.

Tack stood opposite me again, poised identically to the beginning.

“That is what it feels like to have your spinal chord cut,” Tack chortled.



I stood up.

“You are too fast,” I panted.

“I am slow and sloppy. But don’t think I wont hurt you badly. I can put you back together even if I get my blade through your heart.”

Tack changed his position; left hand pointing at me. His right arm bent at the elbow and the sword pointed at me from beneath his chin. The sound of water flowed through the pipe above me.

Futile hilarity winded me as I looked down and saw the hilt of Tack’s blade imbedded in my chest. Tack stood plainly before me. I tried to laugh and could not.

Straws through a MacDonald’s cup came to my mind as the blade was removed as quickly as it went in. Tack’s arm caught me as I collapsed, his lips pressed against mine. I immediately felt fine.

“That’s the real kiss of life,” Tack trilled as he pulled away.

I vomited.

“Oh come off it. I’ve never beaten you more than twice.”

I stood up, dazed. Tack flicked the blood off his sword.

“I can’t believe this,” Tack trailed off. “I was so certain,” Tack whispered to himself. “I’m so sorry, I think I’ve made a mistake.”

“What mistake?” I spluttered.

“You can’t be my Dragon.”

Concern filled Tack’s face. Concern that contorted into pain for an instant as he turned away. A flush of water in the pipes overhead splattered around again. I lunged.

My sword glanced off Tack’s. The muscles in his back flexed and moved as he glanced my blows from left to right. He spun and crouched against the ground like a panther. I ignored my mind, my body knew what to do. I crouched, my leg dropping back. Tack’s pupils focused. He moved left, slow, his right leg muscles flexed, he was coming to the left.

Strokes echoed around the garage as the blades made contact. The force of the blows sounded as if we were firing guns. Minutes pasted as the rolling motion between us clashed. Now it sounded more like a tap dancing. Tack was not tiring. Neither was I.

People emerged from the other doors within the building. They stood back watching. Tack used the

distraction to allowed him to move to my right. I pivoted quickly, pushing advantage. Thrusting towards him my arm flexed to stab. My left side clamped. I dropped to the ground. As quickly as the cramp started, it vanished. Tack had recovered himself, and stood opposite me. He sheathed his sword.

I stood up.

“Well done,” Tack resounded. People around applauded.

“Are you performing somewhere?” One of the ladies nearest Tack asked.

“No love,” Tack returned. “It is just exercise. Leave us please.”

The tone in Tack’s voice was like nothing I had ever heard; sonorous could barely describe it. Each person smiled and headed for the stairs they had come from.

“Well done? I was ready to strike and I cramped. I lost.”

“You would have hit. You did win,” Tack smiled. “But if anything can go wrong in attacking me, it will. Your body is the weak link at the moment. That sword can’t break.”

“What? You’re saying anything that tries to hurt you can’t.”

“Exactly. Knives break. Gun’s misfire. Bombs fault. People cramp.”

“So you can’t be beaten?”

“Chance protects me. But the Dragon is a perfect weapon, you can beat chance.”

“How does that work?”

“The triad points; the weapon in your hand is perfect; your body immortal; your heart is mine. With those set, there will be no crack for chance to fault.”

“So you did let me hit you.”

Tack smiled and turned towards our stairs.

I threw my sword at him.

As the blade left my hand, Tack turned and kicked it towards the wall.

“It only protects me when I can’t protect myself. Me makes me untouchable as much as anything else does.”

“You seem quite certain about that.”

“Only so much coincidence can occur before one accepts that god truly makes plans. My memory is showing me less carnage lately too...”

Tack grinned broadly and ran.

As I grabbed the sword from the concrete pillar, visions crossed my mind of a thousand battles before. I sheathed my sword and ran up the stairs. If my memory was correct, sex was happening now.

## Tack 5 – Lessons

Ineffectual defence and the soft give of flesh against metal plagued me already. Inside my mind I watched my sword disappear inside Elliot's ribcage. I sat on the floor in the middle of my unit. I could hear Elliot thundering up the staircase. From the smell of him, he was coming upstairs to make a full pledge to the gay community.

Pictures rattled in their frames as the door Fred Flinstoned into the wall.

"Honey, I'm home!" Elliot bellowed as his trailing foot slammed the door closed.

In a stride I was swept off the ground and headed towards the bedroom. Dumping me on the bed, Elliot pantsed himself and stood arms spread.

"Fuck me!"

*God give me the strength to say no.*

*"OK." God replied.*

Elliot stood smiling brilliantly, the picture of the male design. Wicked thoughts crossed my mind. Memories of past touch that would be blocked the moment we made contact.

“Whoa Jockey,” I replied, completely happy at the offer. “Your parents are in the next room?”

“Hu? So?” Elliot replied, dropping his arms. “Nothing they haven’t heard before.”

“I doubt that. And you still need an STI panel.”

“My panel was clean at the hospital. Besides, how can STI’s hurt you.”

“They can if I let them enter my body.”

“I have none, the hospital checked me.”

“Fine,” I said, standing up in front of Elliot. “We can have sex.” I trailed my hand across his stomach. “Will you risk my life over your trust in Tia? She could have given you something that wouldn’t have shown up yet...”

Elliot stood still, his chin flopped onto his chest.

“Fuck!” Elliot yelled.

Picking up from the east, a cool wind blew through the unit; the curtains billowed. Elliot stood in the breeze; deflated.

“It will happen. Be patient. Wouldn’t want a sneaky virus destroying us just when we got here again.”

“Marty tested her two days ago. He would have called if it came back with anything,” Elliot whined.

“Imagine if I made a virus immortal...”

“This is bogus,” Elliot sighed and flopped onto the bed. He looked like a pornographic bedding add. My heart steamed.

“Trust me. My skin is crawling too.”

“Doesn’t look like it...”

“I am still recovering from stabbing you.”

Elliot’s eyes narrowed. His face suddenly shadowed with concern. No sign of disappointment remained. He glided from the bed and stood before me; his balance had changed completely in under an hour.

“You didn’t choose to do that?” Elliot reasoned.

I shook my head. Elliot pushed me down onto my back and surrounded me with his arms. His naked weight pressed me into the mattress.

“I’m so sorry. I thought it had stopped.”

“I did too.” The comfort of the hug seeped into my bones, the pressure on my body was magnificent. “I am getting the feeling that there is more going on than we suspect.”

Elliot studied me. His eyes seems to force my mind to overflow. For somebody else to make me attack



him would mean my will-power was destroyed. It wasn't possible. The whole month came crashing in around me.

"I remember the most horrible things," I cried, dropping my head onto Elliot's shoulder. "I can't believe I just put you through that."

"Put me through what. I am more connected with myself than I ever have been. If anything, *I* needed you to stab me. I wasn't going to let go. I am even starting to remember things other than sex.

My mind raced. Nothing in my mind ever told of a dragon with memories other than instinct.

"Will you share them with me?"

The glee in Elliot's expression almost leaked out onto the mattress. He was getting his first chance to be the storyteller. In an instant, he had lifted me up to sit cross-legged. He sat himself cross-legged opposite me. I stood up to close the door and removed my clothes. Sitting back opposite him, I stared into his eyes like an eager student. Elliot's ego look like it was exploding. The nesting scent of familial pheromones billowed like a stabbed shark. His basking blue eyes stared out at me; it was like the cloned reflection between two mirrors, echoes of eyes through time.

“It is like a dream.” He started. “And I’ve never seen a movie that even gets it close. It starts with humans hanging around happily; straight and gay.

“It seems peaceful. Gay men are sent from places as ambassadors. Sex is used to resolve conflicts. It is great, and what gets me in at first is this kind of kinky, spring-break-party parliament. Violence is completely replaced with sex. Lesbians are even in it, which is unusual for my sex dreams. They seem to master all the crafts of the age, it is incredible. It is like everyone has their natural place in the universe; an Eden, but with technology. The problems of population are gone; God has given homosexuality its rightful place and the world is balanced. It feels wondrous.

“Then suddenly it all ends. For some reason the majority become enraged. It happens in unison around the world. And it is like I am watching it. And however it happens, thousands of people are gathered and left in camps; all gays and anybody who tried to help. Then they start testing. It is like I am every one of them. They just do anything to us; to see what happens.” Elliot had started sweating; tears ran freely down his checks.

“I can feel it all.

“Being burned alive.

“Being covered in acid.

“Having parts cut out. Bearing children to watch them torn out of me. Then being left to end.

“Dying of diseases.

“It is like they are trying to exterminate us, but want to take whatever they can learn beforehand. It’s like the world just goes crazy inside me.”

Elliot sat back and watched. He didn’t try to touch me. He seemed to recover himself instantly.

“And you’ve seen worse,” he replied casually.

The impact of his story seemed to linger more effects on me than on him. It was like he had seen a movie and just gave away the ending.

“Why did you tell me this?”

“Because I don’t want you to keep feeling alone in this.”

“It is better to think I am the only one who has to go through what I can see.”

“But don’t you see. It is the state of mind you use when looking back, *that* helps you remember. You are forced to look back through fear and shame. It seems like

they've made you into the best weapon possible against yourself."

"What makes yours different?"

"There is good in my memory."

I swallowed the lump in my throat.

"Are you trying to protect me from myself now?"

"If I have to. But I can't get angry at you."

"So you've been forced to adapt?"

"Whatever it takes!"

A smile forced its way onto my face.

*If a dragon can be a philosophical, I can be instinctual.*

"It doesn't feel like the past to me."

"What makes you say that?"

"You do."

"How?"

"I don't know. I'm just trying on your shoes while you wear mine."

Elliot moved next to me, snuggling into my side. As he lay me down, an inkling wriggled its way to the surface of my mind. Somehow, I knew who could help.

"I wouldn't worry. Your impulses are a mystery for a reason. Don't tense up," Elliot assisted.

Elliot tightened his grip around me.

“I want to start our walk tomorrow.”

“Why the rush?”

“Thinking about dreams just gave me an idea.”

“Is this to do with the summit of Mt Warning?”

I studied Elliot. His hair tickled against my shoulder. His massive torso heaved in air as if inviting a friend. Every time I looked at him, something would surprise me. It was like my mind couldn't remember him as brilliant as he actually was. I knew what breathtaking meant.

“If we go up tomorrow, a native dreamer might be there; they're so tuned in it makes instinct look like a potato gun.”

“That is a big might.”

“It's an impulse. Besides I already know an elder that goes there pretty often.”

“What does that mean?”

“If I know Marcus, he'll be there waiting.”

“Why do I feel like you always stop short on information?”

“Because. For some reason you think I know more than I do.”

“I think you know more than you are letting on.”

“I’d say that’s because you do too.”

“How can I know more than I let on to myself?”

“You did just beat me in a sword fight. How did you know how to do that?”

“That’s just maddening.”

I sighed and snuggled into Elliot’s body. As the wind shifted the curtains, the afternoon sun bathed through the window. The warmth made me immediately drowsy.

“Welcome to the club,” I managed to yawn as I dosed off.

## Elliot 6 – Memories

I woke to the sound of water pump of the coffee machine; it reminded me of a man with a prostate problem trying to take a leak. It was one AM. Tack had already laid out one set of clothes; dry-as-a bone coats, shoes, shirts, thick pants, thermal underwear, and, the swords now attached to belted leather sheaths. On the table he had left Bryah instructions for the final preparations for the comradery. Other than him not making eye contact, nothing seemed abnormal.

Silent filled the car on the drive and through most of the walk. I finally snapped it around an hour up. I told him that I loved him and no stabbing would ever make a difference. It turned out he was trying to avoid looking at me because he found that the longer he looked away, the more beautiful I seemed when he looked back. That shut me up completely.

At nearly four-thirty we made the chain to the summit; the death chain, as Tack seemed insistent on calling it. Sure enough, a man sat at the bottom of the chain; I assumed it was Marcus.

“Welcome weary travellers,” Marcus trilled.

“Weary?”

“You’re over three million years old. You have to be a little weary. I hear this lug nearly spilled you brains.”

“Three million?”

“He was a bachelor a long time before he met a Dragon.”

“He is talking dreamtime Elliot. I don’t remember it. Elliot this is Marcus, Marcus this is Elliot.”

“Of course you don’t remember it. But it’s still you. And I still care less for names than you do. Come on, we have to catch the sunrise.”

Marcus grabbed onto the chain and started dragging himself up. His legs were paralysed. As I moved to assist him, Tack placed his arm against my chest.

“Don’t you dare.”

“He can’t walk!” I tried.

“How do you think he got here?”

I stared at Tack, then up the chain. Marcus had already disappeared out of site. The cool wind of the pinnacle beacons. Tack bit his lip.

“Will you make it this time?” I asked.



“I hope so.”

I headed ahead of Tack.

“I know it must have been torture to not follow my butt before. So this time knowing who it belongs to might help you make it,” I teased as I grabbed onto the chain.

By the time I arrived at the summit, Marcus was sitting happily on an edge watching the brightening horizon. I had no idea how he had made the trip. I refused to look backwards on the climb, so Tack would have more reason to make the top. I knew he was following closely the whole way; his smell under the stress was almost irresistible. His hand suddenly appeared on my shoulder. Instant euphoria erupted across my body. Breath escaped me as I beheld the dark quiet view, this time, next to my intended. I had achieved something that deep down I knew was missing before.

“That feeling is fate correcting itself,” Marcus called. “No sex to capture the moment. I already know what two of your extended family got up too on top of Uluru little Dragon.”

I blushed immediately thinking of the story of how my cousin had been conceived.

I took Tack's hand and we walked over to stand by Marcus.

"About halfway up that chain there was a tear in fate. I'd figure it would be gone now that you have passed it Arcy-boy," Marcus explained.

Tack pulled me downwards to sit beside him. The rocks were cold beneath me. A distinct line was forming before us at the horizon of the sea and the air. Tree-tops were still the deep ocean blue of the dawn.

"I couldn't come up here. I sat alone on the bench."

I looked closer at Marcus, his eyes were closed.

"My bet is that it was you who tore fate. I bet you made it half-way before you turned.

"Do either of you feel a sensation that circles the edge of the summit?"

I could sense a line, almost as thick as a smog-trail, it circled around the outskirts of the summit. A flash sparked a memory of the young man walking around the edge. My stomach clenched. The smog scent had layers, some lingering and some thin. Older and newer was the best my mind could reach for. Tack's body had become stone solid.

“They have been here everyday since and before the tear. Circling the mountain at the same time. For nearly eight years.”

“What are they?” I asked.

“My kind.” Tack answered. “That was around my seventeenth birthday.”

The horizon became an orange wire.

“They clearly have purpose,” Marcus struggled. “It is both a success and a goal.”

“It is about us. And was about us before.” I stated, contented by my own reasoning.

“Tack has flipped the intension. They cannot follow him. Now he has flipped back. Why did you not arrive here when you should have?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t really have a choice.”

“And from the looks of you it was a choice that led to a darker path for the two of you.”

“Or a brighter one...” Tack trailed off.

“Tack was supposed to meet me here...”

“You’re smart. That’s unusual.”

“Watch your mouth Marcus,” Tack warned. “Just because spiritual intelligence is all you value doesn’t mean everybody else is stupid.”

“They wanted to catch us vulnerable. While Elliot was... unprepared.”

“They succeeded before. But you managed to tear fate here.”

“Why can’t I remember anything?”

“I don’t know. It’s your memory.”

“Of what?”

*I have missed a step.*

Expanding, the orange wire of the horizon revealed the sun and lit the rock summit. For a brief second, an image of a man stood staring off the mountain. It was the man I saw the last time. The one I thought was tack. As the sun further broke the horizon the image evaporated.

“His fate rests on finding you two. And I doubt it is to wish you a pleasant gaying day.”

“He will come today?”

“He will. And then my guess is, he will call others to follow you.”

“Then we should wait for him.”

“Not yet. With our walk it will take them time to catch us. Especially if I continue to avoid safety.”

“That will work to a point. But I don’t think there is one you can choose.”

“I have an idea.”

“Oh please tell me? You’re insane plans have been missed for ages. People still discuss your antics at gatherings.”

“Will you be at the ceremony?”

“I will. Hasn’t been a proper wedding in centuries. I hope *you* will be there.”

“We will.”

“Wait, what about me?” I broke in.

“Oh.” Tack smiled, glancing to Marcus.

“Oh...” Marcus smirked. “You are as pure as the poison in a snakes tooth. Condoms saved the day here my boy.”

“Can you do anything about our scent?”

“Not anything this strong. Leave before the sun hits the mountain roots and the mountain will hide your direction. Love stinks I’m afraid.”

“Maybe you could let me take a little look at your back.”

“No way never. Being paralysed is a life experience in itself. It was my own fault.”

Tack stood looking towards the edge. I stood next to him.

“Show offs,” Marcus spat through a grin.

Grabbing my arms up around him, before I knew what had happened, Tack pulled us both over the edge. My mind raced as the ground angled away. We fell.

Sliding across sheer rock. As it angled away, leaf litter, pebbles and moss scattered around us. Tack positioned me beneath him locking his lips against mine. We careered through the trees and rocks; impossibly missing each one. The ground against my back seemed to be resisting the slide. I was beginning to enjoy myself as the incline decreased and we came to a halt beside a dead fern.

“That’s definitely something I hadn’t considered!” I heard Marcus yell.

Tack stood off me and smiled.

“What was that?”

“Not necessarily in our best interest.”

Tack reached down a hand to help me up. I accepted the hand. Somehow my dry-as-a-bone had resisted the fall with me.

“Tell me what is going on please. I got completely lost. And you just used me as a land sled.”

“While we walk,” Tack gestured downwards.

Feet crunching on a fresh untrail at a near jog, Tack started to explain.

“One of my kind, or more, is looking for us; somebody with enough bad karma to leave a trail. You could feel it, and smell it, I know you could.”

“How could they possibly know we would meet here before we did?”

“They’re following our karma.”

“What karma?” I asked, following Tack as he bundled under a thick bush.

“For lifetimes we have defended God’s will, without inciting death or damage. We have centuries of altruism between us. Our best interests generally follow us through fate. If you know what your looking for you can plot where we will occur. It is how I found anything about us in the history books. My seventeenth birthday was the day I first helped anybody in a way that mattered. You met her in the hospital.”

“Liz?”

“Her husband was destroying her piece by piece.  
Using her love like a weapon.”

“You told her who he was.”

Tack looked at me sidelong.

“She told me the night I hit you.”

“That’s different...”

“Why?”

“It is not often we get such open assistance.”

“What do you mean?”

Tack negotiated a small tree with a little flourish of his coat. He smiled as he jumped.

“I figured someone must have helped to make you come out without me around. If it had been just me, I wouldn’t be up yet.”

“Is it so rare to get a hand?”

“For a stranger to share their most painful day with another stranger, especially one who had accosted a friend, that’s strange.”

“That’s altruism.”

Tack turned his head to stare at me. He kept running with his head turned.

“So we were supposed to meet on the mountain here and you refused to let it happen?” I asked, suddenly



my sword hilt caught a tree branch. As I looked up the hilt released and the branch snapped towards my head. Before it could reach me, Tack's hand caught it. I hadn't noticed him turn back.

"I turned back. I took the path that would be worse for both of us. I can't tell you why." Tack smiled and pecked me on the lips.

"You just did it," I asked, stepping next to him

"Yes. And our meeting was negative. Whoever this is was not looking for that.

"Open up your senses, we need you aware."

"How?"

"Deep breath through the nose."

I inhaled slowly. Nothing. All I could do now was smell more leaf litter than before.

"That did a lot."

"Relax and try again."

With each passing breath, I noticed more about the surrounding forest. Soon even the ages of the trees seemed to be in the air. Tack started moving again; a smell of amusement preceded him.

Satisfied, I made to follow.

"Why are they still looking at the summit?"

“I’d say because we were supposed to meet there. The location anticipated our arrival. And now we did arrive.” Tack jumped easily over a fallen tree as he broke into a trotting run. I sped to catch up.

“So we arrive. Coming together identifies us. Then what? They kill us.”

“You more than likely.”

“Killing me is never easy.”

“Then how did they kill you before?”

“I don’t know. I don’t even know if they did. What if they just trapped me?”

“But you think they killed you.”

“I suspect they prevented us returning when we last should have.”

The sunlight had reached us in the above canopy; I could smell the radiation burning into the leaves instantly. The air started to steam.

“As long as we keep moving today, they wont dare come near us tonight.”

“Why?”

“Australia may seem to be in the hands of Europeans, but the dreamers still own the nights. Eighty

thousand years of history cannot be wiped away by two hundred.” Tack smiled

I ran silently for a while, thinking to myself. Tall trees became scrub as we past the mountain roots. I knew I had something to do with the damage to Tack’s memory. I could feel shame coming from somewhere that was not current. Tack stopped suddenly.

“Smell that?”

I returned my mind to the present. Decay filled the air.

“They’ve killed something.”

“It is rotten snake.” I surprised myself by saying.

“Snakes avoid me. If we can assume they are attracted to them, they have people out here already. That means they’re patrolling.”

“There is no trail like up top. Couldn’t it just be a dead snake?”

Tack shook his head slowly, looking up at the trees.

“The locals don’t kill them unless they want to eat them.”

“Snakes die.”

Tack pointed ahead.

“They generally don’t spontaneously cut in half.”

A severed snakehead was decaying on a rotten log fifty metres away.

“Swap your sword to the outside of your coat.”

Tack dropped his coat to the ground and took off his scabbard and sword. Donning his coat again, then the sword and scabbard to his back. I copied, revealing the damage to back of my clothes. It had already let the hilt of the sword be exposed. But I did as told.

“I’m sorry for that,” Tack said as he pointed to my jacket.

“Don’t be.”

“I am afraid I will have to do more things that are for the worse before we get to Kooralbyn.”

“And that shouldn’t hurt you. Somehow I know what has happened to you is my fault. I trust you to protect us.”

Tack’s brow furrowed.

“Why do you say that?”

“I feel shame when you talk about your memory. It doesn’t feel exactly mine.”

A starved expression crossed Tack’s face briefly. It betrayed the perfect calm I was used to. He launched

across the space between us. Devouring my lips, Tack kissed me like a never before. I could feel his yearning to be close through his tongue. He was nearly crushing my body with the force of his arms. My mind reeled as his tongue explored my mouth. I was in Nirvana before he separated from me.

“What was that for?” I gasped.

“Because I wanted to.”

“Don’t get me wrong. Do it whenever you want.”

Tack grinned broadly, “We are walking our wedding.”

“I know,” I beamed. I kissed him again.

Tack finally managed to break away.

“Come on, we have to run. As long as it is daylight we need to keep moving.”

Tack started to jog, then stopped and turned. I stopped on a dime; millimetres from his face.

“Elliot. They may succeed in killing me before we reach Kooralbyn. If they do, you run. You find my family and you keep going.”

My body relaxed, it felt as if I was growing as I listened. I could hear the sound of beetles creeping through the undergrowth.

“Don’t fight if I am gone. Run. Defend yourself.  
Do not hurt anyone.”

“I’m not going to just leave you.”

“Promise me you will.”

“No!”

Tack grabbed my shoulders, staring into my eyes.

“A dragon cannot break his word. Promise me.”

“Fine. I promise. But why?”

“I need to know you will be safe. I may have to be very stupid at some point, and I can’t do it with your head waiting on the chopping block. For now, the devil himself may be on our heels, so we need to run like it.”

My senses were increasing as moments passed. Tack’s life force had become a near blinding light source. I could hear the forest breathing. We ran.

I stopped.

“We just kissed without collapsing.”

Tack beamed.

“Run you horndog!” Tack called without stopping.

Whether it was Tack’s influence or just hormones, we ran solid until well after noon. No food, no

water, no breaks. Forest sped past in a blur of green and bark. Time seemed to blend into a moment; I knew each creature as it approached, as we passed it, and as it disappeared in the distance.

It seemed as if one moment Tack was telling me to run, and then he had stopped abruptly. Danger was betrayed in his back, it then relaxed in preparation. Air clung thick to my neck. Inhaling deeply, I tried to make out anything that would cue certainty.

“Show yourself!” Tack commanded.

A fluid slip of leather on metal; Tack’s took his sword out. Thinking to draw my own, I found it already in my hands. Sweat feathered its way across my back.

“Maybe it’s nothing?”

“You drew first,” Tack replied.

*I did?*

“Something is out there. *I* would have missed it.”

I remembered a doubt in the safety of the path ahead.

“I had a doubt.”

“Ok, circle around. Whatever it is, it doesn’t make it out of this forest without meeting us.”

*Tack would never kill anything.*

“What if it is a trap?”

“If it is a trap they can’t be overly strong in numbers. Besides, the best thing for us to do now is run.”

“Wait,” a muffled voice from nowhere squeaked.

A small woman appeared from what a moment before seemed to be a furn.

“I am not armed.”

“You have a mobile phone,” Tack replied.

*The ground beneath her had gathered natural litter. It was not disturbed at all.*

“You must have been in that spot for weeks,” I found myself balking.

“Three.”

“Give me that phone.”

“Why? I am not anything to do with you.”

“We are being tracked through the bush and you clam to be here by coincidence,” I found my voice demanding.

“There is possibility that the universe has other purpose than a couple on their wedding b....”

“How would you know that?” I interrupted.

“We stink of it Elliot,” Tack smiled. “She is just in the wrong place at the wrong time.”



“Are you sure?”

“There is no other choice. If she hides ill-will we can’t hold her, or hurt her in any way. Hopefully she is just on a spiritual journey.”

“She is not human.”

“No. But she has no scent. No malice I can feel.”

Tack sheathed his sword and walked forward.

“If you truly hold no malice, you should run. Return to your home. You may find yourself in harms way here.”

“More so than an interrupting Arc and his Dragon to be.”

“Moreso.”

A gasp escaped the woman’s mouth.

“Who and how would dare?”

“Good question.”

“How does she know what we are?”

“Marcus has told the whole dream world we have arrived by now.”

“I will find my way back to my tribe.”

“That is a good plan. Our location is no secret. Please do nothing to withhold it from others.”

Tack recommenced running, northward in comparison to our original journey. Reluctantly I nodded to the woman and followed.

A swooping whistle, reminded me of a magpie attacking. I deflected a sword as it struck downwards towards my back. The woman no longer was light and airy, her face had contorted into a menacing scowl. A dark nimbus filled the air around me. Glancing off blow after blow, I heard the snuffing of rage and anger. My vision failed completely. I switched my blade as fast as I could, I repelled each attack as it came. A tapdance of sound guided my sword.

The dark seemed to collapse around me in a suffocating strangle of my senses. Unwelcome vibrations intruded on my focus; a sonorous voice.

“Sleep Esmerelda! Sleep the dreams of the doom and glare. Sleep now.”

In front of me the woman collapsed in a heap. Tack suddenly stood next to me; the blackness gone.

Blue, yellow, then red, the full coloured world filled my sight again. The woman on the ground sleep quietly, her face serene and peaceful. I could feel her

heart beating within her chest. No sign of a sword was anywhere, a mobile phone sat in her hand.

Tack looked down at me, smiling brilliantly.

“You have just proven yourself a swordsman.”

“I have no idea what I just did.”

“You fought off what once was a Herald weapon mistress. Without vision.”

“What have you done to her?”

“Put her to sleep for a few weeks. I doubt Marcus will be overly kind to her though. She isn’t permitted in the dream world anymore.”

“How did you do it?”

“I am one of the few people who would remember her given name. When you resisted her, she faulted her composure for a moment and her face showed. I remembered her.”

“We need to move. No more stopping.”

“No.”

“What? They know we’re here.”

“No they don’t and we can use her shelter.”

“What?!”

“She has clouded a web in the area like a spider. She has a tent not three metres ahead of you.”

“How do you know?”

“I wouldn’t have. Until I saw her change I had no idea. She dropped everything to attack you. The tent is there.” Tack pointed ahead of him.

“Why would we stay here?”

“It is the perfect place. Nobody will check.”

Tack bent down and lifted Esmerelda up, carrying her towards nothing. I followed.

## Tack 6 – Separate paths

Elliot pulled aside a flap to another room as I placed Esmeralda in a corner. Stepping inside as if through the gates of hell, his intensity lifted as soon as he saw the comfort of the bedroom.

“Lavish boardings for an assassin.”

“It has two rooms!”

Planted to the spot, Elliot surveyed the room like a night watchman. Long and steady, the soothing chant of his breath drew me across the room. I could not suppress the desires of a thousand battles any longer. Watching his blinded body defend had destroyed my resistance. Intrusive thoughts of Elliot’s body had been on me since Marcus had cleared his health.

My hand softly touched Elliot’s chest beneath his shredded top; an electric jolt surged his attention to me. Our eyes met and I betrayed my purpose. Immediately intent, he ripped his shirt across the front and exposed my hand. He flung his coat and shirt to the ground behind him and brought his hands back to my body, lifting me off the ground. Lips locked against his, I tossed my jacket to the floor. Taking his head in my hands, I pulled at him

closer still. He carried me into the next room and sunk on me into the fur-pack mattress.

On top of me, Elliot explored beneath my shirt. It was almost painful. Our kiss broke for the brief instant it took to remove my top. Pausing suddenly, Elliot stared.

Finally our torsos pressed together. Our tongues entwined. Without moving apart, hands explored beneath pants, pushing the fabric down and then off. We were naked together, pulling at each others bodies to be as close as matter would allow. My need for Elliot had never abated. His scent, form and soul fit only me. Inhaling through my nose, I indulged in the electric tang of pheromones meant only for me.

Never loosing our lips, we started our journey to reclaim one and other.

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Night had brought with it the clouds and rain of a murder novel. Chest still heaving, Elliot's smile spread from left ear to right. I was again complete. I thanked God aloud, and in prayer.

*'MY GIFTS ARE ALWAYS PERFECT'* God replied.

I could feel Elliot's heart now. Being together had proven to both of us that the hearts in our chest had never been our own. It was like they had always been swapped. I could feel him beating within me at all times. I always could.

I knew what we had to do next. Elliot was now immortal. Against every urge I had, I knew I had to tear at fate again.

"We need to split up," I whispered.

Elliot snorted.

"I want you to head up to Kooralbyn. Go north then west. I will go another way."

Elliot sat up.

"You're serious?"

"It will tear fate again."

"Why? Together we are strongest."

"That was God's intention."

"Shouldn't we at least follow natural law?"

"You are immortal now. For a few days you will stay that way. I think the intension of a lot of the gifts

from God have been perverted unrecognisable since we were last together. We are being used against us.”

“So you want to rip fate again.”

“I want information. Even if we survive this to the wedding, what then? I want to know whose feet we’ll be stepping on.”

“If that is the case I should come back with you. You are heading back to the mountain aren’t you?”

I stared for a second; Elliot had caught me out.

“You learn fast.”

“I think if it is possible they can see us before we go somewhere, it is equally possibly they can use your chance against you as well. You still may be the target.”

*Fuck!*

“Well, since you will follow me anyway, you may as well come.”

“If anything happens I am immortal now,” Elliot chortled.

I stood up and loomed above him; trying to be serious while also naked.

“No time like the present.”

“Great. Let’s go again,” Elliot grinned.



Huffing at the effort of leaving the place of a gift from God, I stood. Naked as the day I was born, I recovered strewn clothes from around the room. Elliot watched, still beaming.

“We need to move,” I had no chance in hiding my enjoyment.

I threw Elliot’s damp clothes at him. His sly smirk never faltered. I could feel his confidence oozing around the room. It was as if I had had an Elliot flag planted. He dressed with both eyes on me; somehow I had become a possession.

“I am not a golden egg.”

“No you aren’t, not anymore,” Elliot trilled. “You are my golden egg!”

“So you will kill to keep me in a nest?”

“I certainly want too.”

“I know you do. But today, whatever happens, you can’t draw your sword. I’m not going to make you promise. I’ll trust you to trust me.” I sheathed my sword behind my coat. Elliot stared at me for a moment.

“Hurry up. The more we wait to make this mistake the worse the band-aide will sting when it comes off.”

Collecting the mobile phone from Esmeralda's grip, I pushed out of the tent.

The air was cool; like cold dry powder on my face. I walked to the edge of the mental-fog that still fumed from Esmeralda's sleeping mind. Shimmering on the edge, the more than heavy phone shifted to the hilt of a clear diamond bladed sword: I knew this sword well. Switching it for my sword I sheathed it in place of my own. The Riechling might prove a bargaining tool at some point.

I hid my own sword behind the bark of a hollow strangler fig. Remembering even more with Elliot's strength coursing through my mind, Esmeralda's illusions had given me an idea. I concentrated on the thought of a solid tree as best I knew. I then breathed my own memory of a solid tree into the fig's holes. An eyrie darkness covered the tree. No other than Esmeralda would have a chance of seeing through the fog. Hopefully not even her would see it.

Elliot's arms appeared around my waist. I had heard no warning. Jumping at first, I quickly relaxed into his body.

“Upgrading swords?”

I turned my body into his.

“Downgrading. Beauty does not make quality.”

“Why?”

“You are now the only weapon that can hurt me.”

“Chance favours the prepared.”

“Luck favours the prepared.”

“Luck is random. Chance is constant.”

“Chance favours you.”

“And you.”

I pecked Elliot on the lips and turned away. Today I could run at speed; we could reach the mountain by sunrise. With a wink at Elliot, I sprinted away. He caught up immediately.

Breathing around me, the dark forest was more awake now than by the day. Nocturnal life went about its business with no fear of two passing predators. My heart was eased. A shadow of doubt had creped into my mind; darkening our purpose, with Elliot safe for a time, it had brightened.

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Looming before us, the summit of the mountain lay at the end of the death chain. It was a place I would have preferred to avoid. Tension radiated from Elliot, the pace of my heart had slowed in steady control. Danger's scent came from above; a pungent trail of crushed ants and filth. Against my will, I grabbed the chain; determined to push forward. Answers were waiting for us in a trap we were wittingly walking into.

Cold dry darkness suffocated the summit path, the chain was our only guide towards the top. In the darkness I could sense the layers of trails leading upward before me. They were thick and massive. Their number exceeded yesterday by dozens. I felt the ground beneath me level. Silence.

Silence at dawn was wrong.

As the chain ended, I realised a complete mistake of reasoning. Bartlebe stood in the centre of the summit. I remembered his face.

Eight arms had Elliot before he could the end of the chain, I heard the grunt from behind me. A vicious growl escaped his body. I heard his sword unsheathe, it was not the sound of his drawing.

I walked over to stand before Bartlebe. Elliot continued to struggle behind me.

“I can’t say this is an entirely unexpected meeting.”

“No I would imagine you could Bartlebe. It being night seems brave, but many things seem to be off these days.”

“OK. I could lie if I wanted too,” Bartlebe laughed. He held up his hand to his colleagues, “Don’t bother, my guess is that he is immortal. You filthy homos don’t waist time there do you.”

Behind me I felt the group holding Elliot shrink.

“Why else would I be so calm hey?”

“You didn’t even draw.”

“Checkmate. You got me.”

“Moreso than you realise.”

“Spill it then.”

“You don’t think much of me. But I have defied chance and I have you. A difficult challenge in itself.”

“You’ve managed that before.”

“Oh,” Bartlebe rubbed his hands together, “You have managed to gather that. Well gather this. Elliot is

mine you pious hurdling. The magic of love is you deluding yourself. You create your dragons. Once your choice is made. Your influence collapses their willpower and turns them into your slave.”

“Bullshit!” Elliot spat.

“They have the reasoning capacity of sawdust. You addle their brains without even knowing it. And, this time to my purpose. You have led the world astray enough. The world will never return to the disgusting vulgarity of your kind. It is unnatural and against everything living that God has created.”

“Heard from God lately have you?”

“I don’t need too. His aiding my search for you, twice, is message enough. Your memory fails because I found you as a child. That’s all. Slitting the throat of the four-year-old Arclight wasn’t difficult. Unfortunately the backwards dream-folk came to your aid in this despicable country. Your faith in God’s ‘test-humans’ is delightful, yet stupid. God isolated them from real people for a reason. Like lepers. And now his true people will correct the mistake.”

“You go your way, I’ll go mine.”

Bartlebe walked over to me, taking the sword from my back. The diamond blade caught his interest. He ran the blade against my neck as he withdrew.

“Whoa. I am impressed. I haven’t seen the Reichling since... Well... Since you made it.”

I inhaled deeply. Bartlebe switched focus to his men, holding up the sword.

## Elliot 7 – Capture

My eyes never left him for a moment. As if the air around him was consuming the flesh, Tack vanished. Bartlebe was still admiring the blade as he preened to his men. None had noticed Tack's disappearance. The heart beating within my chest told me he was still there. He had not run, or even moved.

Bartlebe turned. The moonlight reflected on the empty ground. Bartlebe spun, searching the space. His face became furious.

“Where is he?” Bartlebe demanded.

The men around me stared in disbelief.

Bartlebe ran towards me, stopping an inch from my face.

“Where, is, he?” Bartlebe growled.

“Who?”

Bartlebe raised the sword to my neck.

“You will be in my service soon enough boy, speak.”

My face smiled against my will.

“What is the sword going to do?”



Bartlebe flicked the sword at my neck. It did nothing.

“You’re immortal. But it won’t stay that way. Without your controller, you have three days.”

“Maybe a little more.”

“Oh really. Why do you say that?”

“Five times. Each. I’ve lived my life now. Kill me when you can, I don’t need any more.”

“I don’t want to kill you. But to have you kill him is appealing on many levels.”

I made my face show no expression.

“He ran and left you the second he saw me. He will just leave you and find a new dragon. Your mind has been crippled by him, he set it to stay that way with immortality. You will soon recover who you were when his poison has gone.”

“I don’t want to. If this is poison, it is all I want.”

Get him out of here. We have to be gone before sunrise.

The three men grabbed my arms and dragged me towards the chained path. Against my will my legs started walking with them. Bartlebe remained on the summit for a moment then followed down the chain.

Our pace down the track dwarfed the pace we had made up the mountain. These men were sprinting down rock paths and gullies; with me carried between them. Tack was letting them take me.

Before the sun had hit the summit we had hit the car park. I was tossed into the boot of a black Mercedes. I could feel the heart in my chest beating faster again.

*Tack is on the move.*

The ride threw me from one side of the boot to the other in rapid succession; it seemed intentional. Knowing I could not be hurt I started launching myself in time with the turns; trying to at least damage the car. I was enjoying myself by the time the car came to a stop.

Blinding me as the boot opened, the sun was well into the sky. I could feel the heart in my chest beating furiously now. As my eyes cleared, I found myself in front of a large gated house near the ocean. I wanted to hit at the men around me, but my body would not fight.

“Tie the weights on his feet and dump him in the pool. Use the plastic rope. Clear out the house, we need to be gone by tomorrow,” Bartlebe strode towards the house and stopped at the stairs. “Mikey watches first.”

*Mikey stunk of Bartlebe.*

The door opened to the massive sandstone house revealing a huddled group of people waiting at the door. The pale faces and black robes the reminded me of clergy. But as their smell hit me, I knew that there was nothing human left of any one. They were all dead: at least inside their minds they were.

I watched helplessly as the knots were fastened to my legs, my arms, and then to the remainder of a plastic coated weight set. Without effort, the three men, and Mikey, lifted and threw me into the centre of the pool. I had no idea how not breathing would work now.

## Tack 7 – Two hearts

My heart was thumping uncontrollably. Moments after Bartlebe left, the orange wire of dawn appeared on the horizon. Inhaling again, I pulled the illusion I had held to so tightly back within my chest; careful not to leave a morsel on the mountaintop. As I moved to pursue spot, the breathing of something near me sighed.

I turned to find Marcus sitting in the same place he had the morning before.

“Care to explain your reasoning to me?”

“Marcus!”

“That’s me.”

“If the impulses aren’t coming from me. Where then?”

“Two things first. A trade. You explain your reasoning, and then, explain impulses.”

“First, if I follow this path of taking the bad option then letting people I can easily find take Elliot, it the worst thing I could do. Second, impulse: thoughts that are making me do things, say things, make thing happen against my will.”

“You can’t be serious. Even I can answer that question without help.”

“Then answer it quickly please.”

“You have Elliot’s heart in your chest.”

“So what?”

“Science hasn’t tainted you that much has it?”

“Marcus please...”

“*Your* will, comes from Elliot as much as it does from you. You of all people should know the heart plays as much in thought as the brain.”

“So when I said everything I said it was him?”

“Just like you are making him not struggle now. He wanted you to say it. Like he probably made you stab him. His heart needed you to set it free.”

The sun peaked it’s head over the horizon. A line of light travelled down my face before the mountain itself.

“God’s gifts are perfect...” I whispered.

“Want to give me a down payment on more info?”

“I’ll trade. Esmarelda, Bartlebe; who is the puppeteer?”

Marcus shut his eyes as the sun touched the summit for the first time. Vapours rose off the rock becoming hundreds of feeble hunched humans, resolving into a dark form. The form walked around the mountain, keeping its back to the both of us.

“It’s very strong.”

The figure straightened its back, as if aware of us watching.

“I need help,” Marcus gasped.

Grabbing his hand, I used with all of the will I could muster.

“Wow that feels good,” Marcus sighed as the images faded into nothing.

I could feel the damage inside Marcus’s spine, the necrotic tissue flowing all the way up into his brain.

“Don’t you dare.”

“I would never. Just thought I’d hazard a look.”

“If you really want to see this guy, you are going to need to go to the caves surrounding Uluru. Wollumbin is just a port.”

“Did you see anything?”

“I think this one has had a hand in every prophecy for four thousand years. He has enough dark karma to

wear it as a cloak. Jesus, Mohammad, Buddha, King, you name them, he's had a hand in all of them ending early."

"Love preachers."

"Whatever he's after, Elliot will be heading to him."

"Fortunately, Bartlebe just took Esmarelda's sword with him."

"Oh snap. Reichling is hers and he doesn't know. And you stole it from her. I love it."

"Looks like there are too many cooks."

"If you wake her, can you keep up?"

"Without breaking a sweat."

Marcus winked at me as I ran towards the chain.

"You realise it is finally happening don't you?"

I stopped.

"You're even starting to talk like him."

*He can see the two of us changing through centuries as if they were hours.*

I nodded my head.

Without touching the metal, I bounded down to the bottom of the death chain. I prayed that Elliot would stay quiet for me. I knew he would. But if he managed to make too much trouble, Esmarelda may attack him first.

Not that she would cause damage. But she may see taking him as a priority over her sword. It was a doubt.

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The moon shone brilliantly behind a velvet sheet of black pearl clouds; a drifting white-eye watching the world across the ocean. Like God was watching us with one eye through a snake-skin of clouds.

Esmarelda woke with a start, immediately searching for her lost sword. She searched the area frantically, unaware of my camouflaged presence behind her. Within seconds she was sprinting through the bush towards the sea. It was not as easy as I had figured to follow her.

She was heading directly for the place where Elliot was held. I could feel our hearts beat stronger as the distance shortened. Elliot was bored; wherever they had him, he had nothing to do.

I ran faster than I knew I could. Before night fell a massive beach manor loomed before me. Esmarelda stopped to survey the gates.



The compound was alive with scents. They were there to mask everything possible. From the outside, it looked like any house along the beachfront. But this place *was* different. Death seemed to live inside the gates.

Suddenly, Esmarelda attacked like an atom bomb; tossing the iron gates aside like a popsicle stick bridge. The house burst into reaction. Hunched creatures, things that were once human, swarmed out towards the intruder. Esmarelda finished most of them with one swipe of her arm; the whole crowd gasped as if they had no air to breath.

Taking advantage of the commotion, I crawled up the side fence to get a better view. Lying along the top of the fence, I took in the site. I knew I could not wait for these humans - however deformed they now were - to suffer a delusion that would make them suffocate themselves. The light from the full-moon above hit the on ripples in the pool, catching my eye. Elliot was tied at the bottom.

One of Bartlebes' men ran away from the pool towards the house. Seizing the opportunity, I stood to jump off the fence. Drawing my sword and dove into the pool without a thought.

As I hit the water it burned like fire. I could feel it biting into my flesh as I reached Elliot's legs. I cut his ropes.

My eyes burned.

## Elliot 8 – Rescue

The surface of the pool broke. A face I knew cringed as it rocketed towards me, sword in hand. Tack cut my ropes and passed out. The pain in his eyes was unmistakable.

I grabbed his body and swam for the surface. Reaching the moonlit chaos above, I placed him on the ground and ran for the garden hose. The sound from his skin was like an aspirin dissolving. The taste of the water was like drinking from an old battery. Grabbing the hose, I tested the water before using it. It was normal. I aimed the flow at his sizzling skin. The clothes around him dissolved as the water hit them. Tack screamed awake as the water hit his skin. The chemicals had already taken some of his skin back to the flesh. It had to be an alkaline; I needed vinegar to stop the burning. Forgetting the chaos in front of me, I picked Tack's scorched body up off the ground and ran for the gate.

“No!” Tack croaked. “I help them first.”

I turned to see scores of people fumbling and falling around in search of air. With every ounce of will power I had, I turned back and took Tack into their midst.

“Do whatever you need to. Fast.”

Excruciating pain visible on what was left of his face, Tack inhaled. The result was immediate. The cloaks lying around me around me stood, or hunched, once again able to breath. As one they turned, eyeing us greedily.

I ran.

I could feel Tack's heart fluttering in my chest. Reaching the gate I turned towards lights. A few hundred metres away there was a club. I could smell the life and the food. A surf club quickly came into view. I could hear the bustle inside.

I ran as fast as I could; Leaving the hunched people well behind. Within moments I was bolting up the splintered stairs into the club.

People fell backwards as they saw Tack's annihilated body, and, I realised, my naked body. I made it through the reception and forced my way into the kitchen, ignoring the protests of several staff members. Knocking six plates of risotto aside, I placed Tack on the counter. His only movements now were slight flinches that betrayed his agony.

As fast as my feet would carry me I searched the kitchen for vinegar. Two industrial bottles sat full and

bulging in a large pantry. Grabbing them, I flew back and emptied the first bottle over Tack. He screamed again for a full minute. His heart was failing in my chest.

It took all of my strength to pour on the second bottle. This time he seemed to handle it. The sound of sizzling had stopped. Once again, I grabbed a hose. This time out of a dishwashers hands. I wash off the vinegar, hoping to give him at least a little relief.

As I finished, Tacks hand grabbed my wrist.

“Go back.” Tack croaked. His other mangled hand nudged me with his sword hilt. I took the blade from his hand.

“Help them. They can’t die for us.”

Tack’s heart stopped inside me.

“No,” I squeaked; barely managing a sound.

Tears poured down my cheeks, but my body refused to stay at his side. I could feel my legs taking control. Without thought, I turned and ran back to the house; my heart reducing to nothing but flesh.

In a daze, my head wondered back through the gate as my legs hammered at full pace. I could hear screaming a woman from the house. Her shrill voice babbled through some language I had never heard before.

Without stopping, I drove through the swarm of hunchlings; never giving them a chance to touch me. I hurtled into the house, up the stairs and into the gateway of hell.

Esmarelda held two of the guards up by their necks, her leg subduing the other. Mikey was out cold, it looked like he had been thrown through the wall into the next room. Bartlebe held the Reichling to Esmarelda's neck.

Without another thought I tackled forward to knock Bartlebe and Esmarelda aside.

Bartlebe spun around as he hit the floor. He collected my legs with the Reichling. Nothing happened. The Reichling bounced backwards. I spun easily to collect his counter blow, attacking back with one of my own.

Esmarelda jumped away from the guards. She landed on Bartlebe's back. I continued to fight; waiting for an opportunity to disarm Bartlebe. Esmarelda's teeth sunk into his shoulder.

Across the room I saw my own sword. With a pirouette manoeuvre worthy of the London ballet, I soared past the wrestling Arc's and grabbed my sword.

Somehow Bartlebe managed to shake Esmarelda off. He ran towards me with his sword raised.

*What an idiot!*

As the sword swung downward, I swung the two swords inwards; collecting the Reichling from both sides.

An almighty gong buzzed as the three swords met. I had driven every ounce of strength I had into the strike. The Reichling exploded between my two blades leaving only a hilt.

A deafening scream erupted from Esmarelda. It dropped everyone in the room to the ground, their hands clutching their ears. I stared. If acid could not hurt me, a scream would not. I watched until she stopped. Bartlebe staggered to his feet.

“A minor over reaction there,” Bartlebe scoffed.

“That sword was the only one of it’s kind in existence,” Esmarelda cried.

“Just make another one.”

“I cannot, Tack made it. I do not know how.”

“Oh, that’s right. Tack. How did he fare in my pool?” Bartlebe smiled gleefully. He turned back to me rubbing his hands together.

My stomach clenched.

“Oh. That’s a shame,” Bartlebe drawled. “At least I can leave this rotten country now. Without a beating heart you will die the second your immortality fails. Toodle pip.”

Bartlebe smiled and walked for the door.

“Let’s get home boys. Get Mikey to my car.”

Bartlebe swaggered over his guards and out the door. The *boys* scrambled to their feet and disappeared through the hole in the wall.

“Tack’s dead?” Esmarelda asked.

I choked and turned away.

“That’s impossible.”

I walked out of the room and down the stairs

“I want to see the body,” Esmarelda called from the top of the stairs.

Turning back from the doorway, I made eye contact with Esmarelda for the first time. Her eyes were beautiful.

“If you go anywhere near Tack’s body while I am alive. I will cut the head off your neck the same way I crushed your precious sword.”

Esmarelda eyed me suspiciously.

“How are you looking at me?” She asked.



“I’m immortal and gay. A woman’s eyes aren’t going to do anything but annoy me.”

Esmarelda laughed. I watched until she stopped.

“You know. Tack said that exact line to me thirty thousand years ago.”

The sound of Bartlebe’s car screeched down the driveway, it was followed by the sound of van doors sliding closed. The van then screeched away with much less drive.

“Forty thousand years ago,” Tack’s voice announced from behind me.

Tack’s heart suddenly started to beat in my chest. His skin was perfect again. His eye’s perfect.

*Would Esmarelda want to fool me like this?*

An electric current surged through my body as his hand ran up my chest and around to the back of my neck. His lips pressed against mine. I felt my eyes fill with tears.

*That could not be a dream. Again I am crying.*

The tension melted from my body. Tack pulled away from me.

“That vinegar was a brilliant plan. Leaving me in a kitchen. Not so much.”

“How are you ok?”

“I have an immortal’s heart. And the ability to heal rapidly.”

“But you were in hospital for weeks?”

“Because you were continuing to hurt. I took the damage.”

“You did what?” Esmarelda asked from behind me.

Tack had his swords from my hand to her neck in an instant.

“Come off it, we both know you wont hurt me. And that I can’t hurt him. Bartlebe was just stupid to even attack him.”

“So what? You’ve just given up on assassinating me?”

“You just survived an alkaline swimming pool. What more can I offer? I have no sword since your little boyfriend smashed it. And you gays don’t respond to the glad eye.”

“Then what are you going to do?”

“Suck up to you to get a new sword.”

“That’s all you care about?”

“Now that it’s gone. What else is there to do? *You* are rarely alive, and then only for a few years. Another sword is a challenge more difficult than assassinating you. I’m bored.”

“Fine. Who sent you?”

“Slorack.”

“Great. Now I know who and why. What is he doing?”

“I don’t know exactly. Your death is all I can confirm. But I think he wants control. “

“Who’s Slorack?”

“One of us. An Arc. Usually gets called the Mighty. I remember him.”

“Ok, well you know why he wants you dead, and I don’t.”

“Because he fell for a human. Gave up on immortality and, as Slorack sees it, spat in the face of creation. He was the Untouchable one,” Esmarelda answered. “Which is better than getting called Medusa for three millennia. But he gave it all up for love. He weakened the entire angel mentality.”

“Esmarelda was the Lasting.”

“Nobody ever said how I was supposed accomplish lasting by the way. Just that I was. It gets awful boring on this planet after a while. At least trying to kill you was a time waster.”

“Why didn’t you just leave?”

“It didn’t feel right. All of us gone. The dreamers kept me entertained pretty well.”

“What now then?”

“Win back your trust. You?”

“Elliot and I are going to finish our walk. Report us dead after the wedding.”

“And you’re just going to trust her? Again?”

“Again. What more can we do, we’re alive, sounds like another bad option to me to let her go.”

“Bad option?”

“Ask Marcus.”

“I take it I’ll be hearing from you?”

“My guess is you’ll be sent back to finish your job.”

“I’ll need proof you’re dead. Him too.”

“Then you better come to the wedding. I’ll give you the swords after the ceremony. You can take them back.”

“Doesn’t this wedding business get old?”

“To reaffirm my life-force and love? What do you think gets me back to earth from heaven so often?”

“I suppose I should take a look. I’ve shunned every invite since the first and change is always interesting. Marcus will know where it is.”

“Of course. Make sure you are on my side. You already fought the groom.”

Without a word, Esmarelda stepped past us and walked out. Tack smiled to her back.

“We need to fix that pool before we go,” Tack said to my forehead as he kissed it.

## Tack 8 – Hidden Trail

Storm clouds gathered overhead. Typical of the weather, it really did not mark occasions as it seemed to in books. The throbbing had not stopped. It had taken all of my strength to repair my eyes, face and hands. My body would have to wait.

While Elliot searched the house for remnants of the chemical used in the swimming pool, I searched the room for clothes. Catching my image in the mirror, I could see the scorched remains of my body beneath the fog I was using to hide them. I needed sleep. Elliot had been captured for a day, which gave me less than two days to repair my injuries. His heart could not keep me alive without immortally. I picked up the wall phone and dialled Marty.

“Marty, it is Tack,” I started.

“Um, hi.”

“I am sorry to impose, but I need you and enough bandages to cover my body at my unit as soon as you can please.”

“Oh, Shit. What’s happened? Is Elliot Ok?”

“Elliot is fine. I just need them please.”

“Um OK. Sure. I’ll go past a few chemists and be at your address in half an hour.”

“Thanks.”

I slowly hung up the receiver. I heard Marty sigh before the phone clicked off.

Elliot walked into the room carrying two large empty drums of Potassium Hydroxide. The echo of emptiness resounded the space as he dropped the sealed barrels.

“Empty. There are eighty more in the basement. ”

“We’re going to need a lot of acid to neutralise that much,” I sighed.

“I know. The heat from the reaction will be too much for you. I’ll have to do it on my own.”

“Would you mind if I went home for a little while? I am exhausted from the burns.”

“I was going to say you should.”

“Walk with me. It’s only five minutes away, then you can take my car.”

“OK.”

Elliot put out his hand to me. I hesitated.

“We might need to put off touching for a little while.”

“I was wondering about that.”

“I am very tender.”

“Your heart is struggling.”

“Nothing a little sleep won’t fix.”

“Let’s go.”

I walked over to Elliot’s side. Together we walked through the remains of the expensive beachside mansion. I had a feeling the building would not last very long. As new as it was, the house felt worn out already. Humans would not know why, but somebody would get the hint and knock it down.

Elliot and I walked in silence. The road beneath my feet throbbed, luckily my shoes had stopped most of the chemicals from reaching my feet. Maintaining the distance between my face and the pain was becoming difficult. I continued to ignore my decline. I knew Elliot felt it within his chest.

My building quickly arrived and our paths split; Elliot to the garage, me to the stairs. Finally I could remove my cloak of fog and returned the energy to my



muscles. At the final step I practically fell through the front door into Marty's waiting arms.

"Holy fuck!" Marty gasped. "What has happened to you?"

"Alkaline burns."

"We've gotta get you to the hospital." Marty started to stand, I resisted. "I haven't got the equipment to deal with this. These are burns. You'll have infections, scarring. It is a giant open wound."

"Nobody has equipment to help this. I just need you to bandage me up. Don't make me make you, I can't waist the energy."

Marty sat back onto his hunches.

"How are you alive?"

"Elliot. But he doesn't know I am this bad. I need it to stay that way."

Marty stared.

"I take it trying to change your mind will be useless."

"Please just start."

Marty grabbed a plastic bag full of bandages for the floor next to him. After rolling onto my back, he

picked up my left foot and started wrapping from the ankle up.

“What are you two doing?”

“We’re just trying to survive.”

“How do you intend to hide this from him?”

“I can. But I don’t have long before his immortality fails. When it does I die. And so does he. It will be a lot faster if he finds out about this and starts to stress.”

“Can’t you just heal it?”

Marty grabbed another bandage from the bag and started up my leg.

“Not this much. Not in two days. My ability to heal self-inflicted injury is not strong.”

“Then what are you going to do?”

“Get married,” I replied. “Once we are joined our hearts won’t be separate; I can die without taking him with me.”

“You should tell him.”

“We barely have two days. I tell him and we may only get one.”

Covering my thigh, Marty started on my other leg.

“Can’t you change the location of ceremony?”

“No. But with some luck, our devil thinks we’re dead, it may just be a walk.”

“200 kilometres, through bush, with third degree burns across your entire body.”

“We can run the distance in under 20 hours. It is the only chance we have. If I can get some sleep before dawn I’ll be fine.”

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Just be at the wedding. Elliot may want to kill me for lying about this.”

“Then tell him.”

“If I do, we’re dead. You may as well shoot me in the head now.”

“He can handle more than you think.”

“His immortality can’t!” I growled, immediately regretting it. “I do thank you for this, but I need to sleep and I need you to go without seeing Elliot when you are done.”

“Fine. But you should try to let others help you. What about your family?”

“Fine. Go to them when you leave. Tell them what is happening. You should stay with them until the wedding anyway.”

“See. Compromising is good for you.”

*Like hell! My family would be insisting I should not have wasted time on sleeping or a death trap pool. I said nothing back. I let my eyes close, falling into a deep sleep.*

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Searing fire engulfed my whole body. I opened my eyes expecting to find the mass delusion of eternal punishment surrounding me. Elliot’s keys jingled in the door.

Mustering my strength, I breathed another cloak around my mummified corpse. Marty had moved me to the couch. Elliot’s head popped around the door as the image settled.

“Morning,” Elliot beamed.

“Morning,” I croaked in return.

Elliot flopped down next to me. The jostling set pain through my back. I contained my reaction.

“You can’t hide pain from me.” Elliot tapped his chest. “I have special access to something of yours.”

“It is nothing. I will be sore for a while.”

“Well we have some time. We may as well wait a little before the wedding.”

“Nope. We’ve started now. We need to finish.”

“Oh…” Elliot trailed off.

“I want to leave once we are dressed if you are ok with that.”

“Yeah sure. That’s fine by me. I don’t seem to be getting tired at all.”

Elliot said nothing more. He watched happily as I dressed again.

“I am worried about you. You just spent a day as a prisoner without breathing.”

“It wasn’t a problem. I knew he was lying through his teeth. I know you. And him; he used to be me. He is a man in a cage, pretending to believe something so he doesn’t have to face himself. People who don’t now love are vulnerable to confinement, that’s why they think it is such a punishment. Floating there was kind of peaceful knowing you were alive.”

“Did you drink any of the water?”

“I realised it was like battery acid when it touch my tongue. The taste it left in my mouth was the worst part of the whole thing.”

Elliot’s expression made me smile. Without knowing it, he was able to reach me through any level of shroud. He did indeed have a special connection, and he was the first devious enough to take advantage of it.

I dressed in silence to minimise the appearance stress I betrayed.

Shoes finally on, I felt sick; getting dressed had used more energy than I could spare. Running was going to destroy me. Even the walk down the stairs became excruciating.

It felt wrong to be in a car again. Elliot seemed to get the hint that I needed to rest as much as I could; he drove. For the second time in two days, Elliot patted the separator block he was sitting on when we first met. He muttered something about the people who built things never knowing what uses would come up.

The early morning sun had hit the mountain roots. I could feel every strand of my hair matting inside the weaves of the bandage cloth. It seemed as though I was a giant walking scab.

Above, swaying arcs of trees betrayed the strength of the wind they protected us from. Elliot eyed me cautiously.

“Are you positive you are up to this?”

I glared at him and broke into a run towards the side of the mountain. After the third step I could feel the weight of 200 kilometres. I realised that even without an attack I may not survive the trip. I had never been aware of the reliance I placed on my senses. Until now, I had never been without them.

Pain seemed to block everything.

Elliot seemed to pulse and dance the journey; gaining energy with every jump and roll. He was easily aware of every crawling creature within a kilometre by now. I wanted to play along with him. I wanted to tell him the truth.

*Elliot, your death is now possible because I am stupid. Touch before you leap must be a lost lesson in time.*

Every cartoon I had ever seen came to mind; some overweight characterised icon, swan driving through the air towards ice-cold water. Then managing - at the last moment - to finger-walk across the surface.

Maybe the teaching had left every memory but the soul of slapstick comedy.

Our lives waited to spill on my hands. Every step threatened to overwhelm me was going to kill us.



## Elliot 9 – Cannons to the right

Something was terribly wrong. Tack would always play. He hadn't refused one invite to stuff around. It was like his body was tensed to pre-empt an attack.

Like some brainwashed zealot, he trudged forward, drilling every step in defence of some concept he had taken to heart. It was clear by the fourth hour his body was going to give out. His heart clenched and fluttered in my chest. His control was amazing; I could not find any trace of concern in his face.

Smells of damp and rain wafted within the breeze. Sounds rang of birds and sheep at a farm. I could sense well beyond the limits of the rainforest. Then it hit me like Federa's racquet; death without sound, a memory of soldiers, I could see nothing. Tack's sword clashing against another rang like a gong.

The fog disappeared. Tack had moved to engage something that looked like a massive black blob.

I had never seen Tack fight with the elaborate moves he was using. His sword flourished faster than I could see. My feet were glued to the ground. As I looked

down, I found myself missing legs. My arms had disappeared. And my body. Tack was holding me still.

“Stop!” a voice called from within the blob.

As if responding to the command himself, Tack lifted his sword to his cheek.

Four armed women emerged from the blob, or, the blob disappeared from around them. I could not tell. Each woman was clad in matching armour; black and gold, their dark flowing hair and faces were near identical. They looked similar to a black storm trooper missing a helmet. A man was standing casually behind them; his dark hair opposed to the white linen that covered his body. The angular point of his features made him seem sharp and dangerous. His smile lines contradicted that.

“Caradoc?”

“Mavis.”

“I thought as much,” Mavis replied.

“You fight for Slorack?”

“I don’t. *I* never fight. But I have been given the tender for you collection.”

“Mavis, Esmarelda, Bartlebe and Slorack. Has the whole world been lost?”

“But they have failed. Where did your boy get too?”

“He is around.”

“Get him please.”

“I wont.”

“He’s not immortal.”

“He is.”

“Then why hide him?”

“He would be a safer choice for the first line.”

“I am already mortally wounded. We are only seeking to be wed. Bartlbe was very clever.”

Tack inhaled. A shimmering effect surrounded his hair, then his body, revealing what looked like a mummy from behind.

Eyes wide, Mavis walked through the women.

“You are hardy stock.”

“The Reichling has been destroyed.”

Mavis raised a hand. The women behind him sheathed their swords.

“I take it Esmarelda has run?”

“I suppose you could say that.”

“I wasn’t sent to kill you.”

“I didn’t expect you would have been.”

“Bartlebe has fallen a long way; the fruit bearer was once a heralded for mercy.”

“With my dragon suspended in a pool of Potassium Hydroxide solution, I dove right in.”

Mavis stared. Tack raised his eyebrows, asking silently to move.

“Go ahead,” Mavis replied.

Tack walked away from Mavis, standing at my side and inhaling.

My legs freed.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

Tack stared back without expression; he looked exhausted.

“It doesn’t matter now.”

Tack’s legs gave way beneath him.

Mavis lurched forward. I drew before I could control myself.

“Peace dragon!” Mavis commanded.

I held the sword at him, lowering myself to Tack’s side. I could feel Tack’s heart giving up inside my chest.

“I will get him to the wedding if it has to be through you.”

“Peace dragon. I offer help.”

“You offer a trip to the Devil.”

“He wont survive a trip to the next kilometre if you don’t let me closer?”

“Why do you care?”

“I have seen this man tackle creatures you can’t even see in museums. I knew him before the first of you.”

“Then why turn on him?”

“My boy. He turned on us. He left God for you.”

“Oh really?” Elliot goaded.

“God is all he cares about. God brought us together. God made us what we are. God still speaks with him everyday.”

Mavis’s eyes looked me over.

“You people are the ones who turned on him. You can’t even see what you’ve turned in to. Maybe it would be better if we left you to wipe yourselves out. Why we are doomed to keep trying to rescue you from yourselves is beyond me.” Mavis stared as if re-evaluating my body.

“Please just leave. His heart is failing. I am not going to spend our last minutes speaking with you.”

I knelt down at Tack's side. The slow linger of his cologne wafted up to meet me. The sting of applying cologne to the bandages must have been agonising. Mavis knelt down opposite.

"Please just leave."

"I can help."

"Why? You have been just lousy with loyalty until now."

"Call it repaying a favour."

I sighed, withdrawing myself slightly I took up one bandaged hand. Mavis laid a hand over Tack's chest. Mavis looked up in surprise.

"His heart beats?"

"My heart beats. You're looking in the wrong place." I pointed at my own torso.

"That's not possible."

"Ask God. If you two still chat."

Mavis muttered something in a language I could not understand. His façade faltered. Holding his head over Tack's, Mavis closed his eyes and seemed to pray. The word Caradoc was littered through his chanting. Around me, the forest became quiet as if it were paying

attention. A flutter of movement aroused in my chest. The wind overhead stopped.

Mavis withdrew to kneeling. Tack inhaled.

“He was once the only one of us who could do everything he saw. I have tried to copy what I know he would do. But it was a pitiful effort, riddled with my own shame. It may have brought you time. Do not delay and don’t let him exert himself. I’ll go now and see to a clear path for you.”

Mavis disappeared on the spot, his harem with him.

Forcing my hands beneath him as I had first done on our second meeting, I tried to lift. The weight was solid. Immoveable, not heavy.

“If either of you think I am being dragged to my wedding, you’ve got another thing coming.”

“I can force you too. I know how your heart works now.”

Tack opened his eyes, their dark brown pools stared into me.

“Then you should not even try to carry me.”

“You’d carry me.”

“Not if you didn’t want me too.”

Tack pushed upwards, standing. Sitting back on my haunches, I searched at his gauze flanked face.

“Why did you hide this from me?”

“In this state, I can’t maintain your immortality. The more you try to protect me, the faster it will wear down. Without it, when my heart stops, we both die.”

“Then why are we here? Why aren’t we at a hospital?”

“Because there is more to marriage than the greeting card it’s become.”

“More than the chance of surviving.”

“I won’t survive in the hospital. My skin is gone. Under this gauze is a wound I cannot heal alone. Bartlebe did his job well. Our only hope is that we want to be one enough to give up independence forever.”

“And then die?”

“That depends. In the past we would then share everything. With how injured I am, I am hoping your immortality protects you from my injuries.”

“We’d have a single heart and just you can die?”

My face tickled as Tack’s gauzed hand touched my cheek.



“I’ll be back, we’ll be back. You can try a life without me for a change. I spent millennia without you. And you being alive will really piss Slorack off.”

My mouth flinched. Tack smiled back, a twinge of pain in his eyes.

“Come on. Let’s at least spend the time we have happy.”

The breeze around the treetops picked up again. I watched Tack force through, what I can only assume was worse than torture. I timed my speed to his as best I could.

Together we ran.

## **Tack 9 – Where comes the bride**

Practically perfect with its timing, the sun creped up behind us as we entered the Kooralbyn valley. The last hill of grass trees fell away before us and the clear bitchumen of a government road trailed the rest of our journey. Elliot was quiet.

The pain in my skin felt like nothing next to his heart breaking within me. Psychology said pain had gates, making you only aware of the worst. Clearly that was wrong. I was depressed, and my skin hurt.

The presence of a large group loomed above. I was not sure which of us had detected it, but my mind was alert. I had no more fight left in me; being drunk shortly would be interesting. Lack of control and excruciating agony don't mix well.

The sky opened up to a crimson dawn. Scattered clouds marked a day of rain ahead. The weather was providing an appropriate setting for once.

Rounding the last bend, an element of the ceremony I had forgotten came crashing back. As the first bucket of salt water hit my bandages, it drew all of my strength to contain my screams.

Up the path, my parents and sister held Marty stationary.

Bucket after bucket hit me.

*Why had I made so many friends!? No conversation or companionship could account for searing ignition.*

It did not help to suffer Elliot's concern at the same time. Friends I had not seen in years came forward with buckets. Marcus watched from the wine bearers section, laughing.

*Little shit-head.*

Esmarelda watched solemnly next to him. The last bucket hit and the last friend passed. I trudged towards my family and loved ones, all forty-three of them, happily holding empty glasses. Stripping down to the fog façade I had created of my skin, I took on my loved-ones stark naked. Even with his normal body, Elliot outstripped me like a possum to a panther; he looked glorious. The spirit of modern man; hiding all feeling to play his part.

Fortunately, Elliot faced a greater number on his side. Not even immortality could stop the effects of wine.

If I was going to act a drunkard, at least I would stand an equal with the man I loved.

Fourth glass in hand, I discussed the effects of deforestation with one of my balding uncles. The pain was starting to lighten. I could feel Elliot's heart hasten. Looking up I found him seven glasses ahead of me. Already he was halfway up the hill.

Marcus sat waiting at the bottom of my fifth glass. The sun rose warmly above the horizon. The warmth dried my bandages.

"The wine drinking would usually take a week with this many people. Does the rushing have something to do with the bandages you are hiding beneath that illusion?"

"It does young one."

"From anybody else that would be an insult. Now I'm glad the salt water burned you like a bastard."

"Kiss my arse cripple! I'll be dead by tomorrow. Again."

"Don't be so dramatic."

Wine was finally drowning my pain sensors.

"I ran into Mavis."

“I know. He threw the third bucket of water at you.”

“Really? It’s been a long time since he counted me in his friends.”

“I think he took it worse than you did.”

“I’d say so. He’s woken up surrounded in unfaith.”

“Esmarelda hasn’t said two words beyond her first retelling.”

“Did you tell her where I hid the second Reichling?”

“Yep. She wont go.”

“She claimed to be staying until I made her a new sword.”

“She knows you made it for her when you made the first. When we told her where it was she shut down. Before you came she wouldn’t even talk to Mavis.”

I drained the rest of my wine quickly and left my line of loved ones. Well onto his twentieth glass Elliot swayed while watching me.

I walked across to Esmarelda, took her hand and walked her into my line next to Marcus. The waiter behind the line offered forward two more glasses.

Esmarelda took one, her expression blank. I took my glass, sipping from the edge. Looking out over the valley before us, I held my glass up to catch the morning sunlight. Esmarelda stared at me and took a sip. I played with catching the purple light through the red wine on her face.

“Can you stop that?”

“Why?”

“It’s annoying,” Esmarelda answered, dragging out another sip.

“What do you care? Shouldn’t you be long gone to the next challenge?”

“What challenge? You robbed me of any challenge by making two swords in the first place. You knew one would be broken.”

“I did.”

“So what’s the point?”

“Why was one gift more special than two?”

“I deserved the first.”

“No you didn’t. The first deserved to be destroyed.”

“And the second?”

“The challenge is to make up to the second for destroying the first. You have left it all alone in the world.”

“How do you make up to a sword?”

“Collect every piece of its twin and repair it.”

I drank more of my wine.

“Then what?”

“Then give them to somebody that does deserve them.”

“And then?”

“Help Elliot survive without me.”

“Why would I do that?”

“Because you once asked to be my wife and I said no.”

“Then you took the hand of that putrid human.”

“I did. The challenge of a lifetime is in that human.”

“Which is?”

“My heart.”

“I don’t want your heart.”

“And you can’t have it. But you can get yours back.”

I drained my glass.

“How?”

“I don’t know. But you gave your heart to me and got a sword back. I gave my heart to him. It only makes sense that you need start looking for your heart where it was last seen.”

Offering a feigned curtsy, I left Esmarelda staring at Elliot from across the road. I walked up the hill to my Aunt from the south. Then to my cousin from the south. Then to Bryah.

Bryah stood before me, two glasses in his hand, a worried expression on his face. His blue eyes had no ability to hide emotion.

“Your little smoke screen there isn’t fooling me.”

“I never could.”

“What the hell did you do?”

“I dove in head-first without thinking, literally.”

“I haven’t heard from you in weeks. You hid all of your dreams. What’s going on?”

“Elliot will be up too you soon. We should wait for him.”

“No. You tell me why I’m being blocked out.”

Bryah’s left eye glimmered the signs of a tear.

“You already know.”



Bryah scoffed and looked out towards the sunrise.

“This is bullshit!”

“Did you bring everything?”

“Everything Marcus said to.”

Bryah’s eyes gave out; tears flowed. I pushed past the wine glasses, wrapping my arms around him. His broad back heaved beneath my arms.

“When I met you I was just human. What do I do now?”

“Keep going. Help Elliot, he’ll need you. I’ll be there every time you dream, I promise.”

Elliot tittered up the hill towards us. I held Bryah to me.

“Does he know?”

“He does.”

Elliot’s arms pushed around both of us, his pressure ignited my back.

“Elliot, not so hard,” Bryah scorned.

“Oh. Shit yeah.”

Elliot pulled away.

“Look at me, forgetting things only half way in.”

“How’s your week Elliot?”

“Fucked up as fucked up can be.”

“Do you think you’ll make it?”

“If you can do it, I can.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” I replied as I emptied my glass. “I’ll talk to you soon best friend.”

“See ya Best friend.”

Without looking back, I pushed away from the huddle. I forged further up the hill, towards my family.

Laura just stared at me. As she slowly sipped at her drink, her eyes betrayed the story of our past.

*Laura was three when I was born. Already formidable, she referred to me as ‘our baby’ while I was still inside mum’s womb. All the stories I loved to hear as a child went, when ‘our’ baby: got trapped under the Christmas tree; turned blue from me putting cellophane in the bath; was pushed in a pram towards traffic.*

*She had been my protector since birth and thanks to her memory; I had survived the damage to my own. My problems at school were always solved by her; she kept me grounded. Even as my abilities took over, she had been there to make me believe in myself. Never embarrassed, never afraid, never far away.*

*Now I stood before her finished.*

*From my own doing.*

Laura finished her glass without a word. She turned away from me with an attempt at slight smile. The last look in her eyes was one of failure, one that I had caused. I had made her powerless.

*Because I never stop to ask for help!*

Placing her glass on the ground, Laura walked towards the hill side to stare into the valley.

“She isn’t angry,” Dad attempted. He stepped up to the spot Laura had left.

“I know dad.”

“I know your mother and I are not like you two, but we have built our lives around providing for you.”

Pain built behind my eyes; pushing my resistance against crying. I couldn’t reply.

“Let me provide this. You were made with human limitations too. Your mistakes are here for a reason. Everyone goes crazy in love; Laura is just upset now, she is happy you got a chance to get this far.”

“And what about you dad?”

“I don’t buy it for a second.”

“Buy what?”

“You aren’t going anywhere.”

“I am dad.”

“So you’ve taken God’s job now too?”

“No.”

“Then I will sit happily in my own opinion thanks. Stupid as you may find it wonderboy.”

My lips split into a grin. One of my eyes finally gave away a tear.

“That’s my boy!” Dad leaned in and hugged me softly. “Let’s get this mushy shit over with.”

Dad drained his full glass in one gulp.

I copied.

Loosing my balance a little, I stepped pass dad to mum. Mum stepped in to support me. My grand parents stood in front of me.

“We all thought we’d drink one glass with you together. Traditions are flexible that way,” Grandma smiled. “We have to be careful of the diet today like any other day; so you will just have to suck it up if you don’t like it,” taking a small sip, she passed the glass to Grandpa.

I grinned again and took a sip.

“Mind how you go!” Grandpa said as he raised the glass to his lips.

Handing his glass to Mum, Grandpa placed his hand in Grandma's and they strolled away from the line.

As Mum smiled, tears started to flow down her cheeks.

"You know what I remember most," She choked back a sob and continued. "A little boy, spending all of his allowance money in those coin machines. Just for other kids to have rides at the shopping centre. You wouldn't even tell them your real name."

Blushing, I looked away while I took another sip. Mum could always embarrass me. She was doing it now.

"You have to stop this madness. You keep giving until there is nothing left and people just end up hating you for it. It isn't selfish to keep something for yourself. It isn't brave to do things alone. And it isn't love if you mistake protection for control."

"Mum I don't know how to be anything else."

"I know.

"I just don't want you to keep living on the outside because you think you don't belong. Elliot deserves a man who loves himself. The only one who keeps you outside is you. So if you can't do it for yourself, do it for him. Don't make him miss out on even

one minute of being truly with you. Especially because of a fool notion that people don't deserve, they should just be grateful."

Mum's words triggered a memory. But it got stuck on the tip of my brain.

"Yes I read your diaries from therapy. But I only did it after you sent Marty. He told us you were dying - which was a piss poor way to tell your parents - and they've been left in my house for ten years. So I own them anyway. And I wasn't letting you go anywhere without knowing you. Whether you wanted me to or not!"

Mum's hands had become as animated as mine would during a rant. Part of my psyche seemed quite obvious. My mouth was split wide in a grin. Mum's wine had spilt everywhere.

"What are you grinning like an idiot for?"

"Nothing, just noticed a family trait."

Shaking her head, Mum went for a swig from her glass. It was empty.

I couldn't hold back from laughing.

As sore as it was, my belly jostled around as the laughter refused to stop.

“What!?” Mum demanded.

Still laughing, I pointed to the ground where all of the wine had landed.

I could feel hundreds of eyes staring at me and I didn't care. I kept laughing.

Mum rolled her eyes, a smile creeping into her lips. Soon mum was laughing with me. Like two psychotic hyenas, we stood in front of each other and roared laughing.

## Disney 1 – Ceremony

By the time I was through my parents, the sun was high overhead. After laughing hysterically for about ten minutes, Tack's parents had dressed him in his favourite couture suit. Laura was fastening his sword to his side, her face stony. And even though he was faking his image, he looked sensational.

I, on the other hand, was dressed in a rented tuxedo my mother had picked out during the week. The continued body growth had rendered my own wardrobe redundant. My brother was still admiring the sword instead of belting it on. I gave him a dirty look, and told him to get on with it.

I jostled as Phil reluctantly hugged my body to attach the sword; the wine had made it difficult to stand upright. Tack looked fine.

I stepped forward from my family onto a circle of olive and basil leaves and scattered rosemary. The smells of the crushing herbs beneath my bare feet smothered my senses. I had memorised my speech. When I had chosen the verse it had seemed more about the death of the person I was. Now it just seemed macabre. The crowd -



now hundreds strong and still growing - stood quietly. Quietly for those who couldn't here them blinking. I bellowed for the group at the top of my lungs.

“Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone, Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone, Silence the pianos and with muffled drum, put away the coffin, let the dancers come.

“Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead, Scribbling on the sky the message I Was Dead, Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves, Let the traffic policemen wear white cotton gloves.

“He is my North, my South, my East and West, My working week and my Sunday rest, my noon, my midnight, my talk, my song; I thought that love would last for never: I was wrong.

“All stars are wanted now: put on every one; Stay up the moon and embolden the sun; Churn away the ocean and keep up the wood. For everything now will only be good. For Tack; my love.”

Tack gasped, inhaling suddenly. The colours from our connection had flexed and morphed as I spoke. I could feel his pain distinctly now. I stepped back. Tack

stepped forward. Without yelling, his voice boomed over the crowd.

“I do not love you as if you were salt-rose, or topaz, or the arrow of carnations the fire shoots off. I love you as certain dark things are to be loved, in secret, between the shadow and the soul.

“I love you as the plant that never blooms but carries in itself the light of hidden flowers; thanks to your love a certain solid fragrance, risen from the earth, lives darkly in my body.

“I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where. I love you straightforwardly, without complexities or pride; so I love you because I know no other way than this: Where “I” does not exist, nor “You”. So close that your hand on my chest is my hand, so close that as your eyes close I fall asleep. For Elliot; my love.”

Tack stared at me, transfixed. His light made it impossible for me to turn away.

I barely heard the scuffle as our parents circled in behind us.

Tack’s mum stood forward to speak.

“Accepting as we are, we have taken Tack at his word that the ceremony now requires the opportunity for

a challenge. Our sons between them are eligible, fertile and capable of providing for anyone. Should there be a man or woman among us who would like to put up their fight for either man, now is the time for you to draw your piece, or forever hold it,” Beth drew in breath at her last words.

The crowd was silent. It seemed as though even the crickets stopped to pay attention. Without speaking, our families walked us together onto the circle. Then with a kiss on each cheek, they left us alone together.

“From our families before, we are now created; Disney by family,” Tack choked out at the top of his lungs. My whole body was tingling. Tack’s smile was magnificent.

“From our families before, we are now created; Disney by family,” I bellowed through an unstoppable grin.

Immediately, my body felt perfect. I could see, sense, control, and, manipulate everything around me. The feeling was overwhelming. I could all-but see the free-will of the crowd before me; their faces were all those I had seen before but from other names and

histories. Some were more beautiful now, some less. Tack's pain was overwhelming, but still controllable.

A strange choking sounded. Tack clutched at his chest, dropping to his knees. Bryah ran forward as I grabbed in to stop Tack's fall. The crowd swooped in around us. Before Tack hit the ground, I had him.

I laid Tack down on his back among the herbs. I couldn't smell them anymore.

This was it.

I could feel the presence inside me waning; like watching him fall into a dark cave. The lustre of his eyes glazed. My eyes gave way. Dripping tears rolled down Tack's face from my eyes. As he tried to speak, he found no breath in his lungs.

Trying to shake my head just forced out more tears. Bryah's hand wrapped around Tack's and mine. For the second time in two days, I watched Tack blink away.

His skin turned white.

His eyes went dark.

And his hand finally let me go.

From behind the crowd, I could suddenly hear the makings of a scuffle.

“Let me through,” a voice called. I knew the voice. It was Mikey.

“I can help,” Mikey’s voice yelled.

“I have him, what should I do?” Mavis called from the same place.

“He can’t exactly hurt, let him through,” I yelled.

Mavis arrived with Mikey beneath his arm.

“Let him go,” I demanded.

I stood between him and Tack’s body.

“Take this,” Mikey held out what looked like an apple.

“Why?”

“It’s from the tree of life. Bartlebe keeps hundreds of them.”

I took the apple from his hand, sniffing its skin. Memories flooded through my mind: days of trees made through divine inspiration; days of darkness without light; days before days.

In my mind I saw Tack diving into the pool towards me. I looked at the fruit, then up to Mikey.

“Why?” I demanded.

“One of the crowd he saved was my sister. I can’t let him die when he may have survived if you left when you had the chance.”

“Why didn’t you come forward sooner?”

“He looked fine before. Just give him the fruit.”

Tack’s face had gone pale; his heart had stopped. I could not overcome the warning in my heart. Another trap from Bartlebe may destroy us entirely.

*Mikey’s mind is in front of you.*

*Five seconds into my abilities and I am considering abusing them!*

There was no time to question. If Tack truly was untouchable I had to have faith his rescue was possible now.

I knelt down to Tack’s side. The question arose of how to feed a dead body. The thought was vanquished with the memories of a Sesame-Street-cut-scene on making apple juice.

I squeezed the fruit with both hands above his mouth. Silver and clear, the juice poured from my hands like an ocean had been contained within the fruit.

As excruciating and slow the waning of his mind had been, the rebound now was like the whiplash of a footy scrum. A presence exploded into the world, knocking me from my knees onto my back.

Silence.

Actual silence.

The crowd had stopped blinking.

All movement anywhere had stopped.

Tack sat up out of his body. I stared at him from the ground. He looked like nothing, but I knew it was Tack. Sitting up I could see his naked body lying broken on the ground beneath him.

“If anybody could pull Tack from my hands it would be you,” God spoke, I remembered the voice. “You should remember the body too.”

I turned to find God standing behind me.

“I cannot just attend a party without there being incident. I feel like a doctor in the house.”

Tack’s shadow, if it could be called anything, laid back down into his body.

“What is going on?” I asked.

“By all counts you were too late with the juice.”

“No.

“Please don’t say that.”

“If counting mattered to me, the universe might prove fair.”

“He’ll be alright?”

“Tack will be as perfect as the day he was born.”

If I was breathing I would have gasped. I ran at God and hugged nothing. God was not standing where I was aiming at.

Instead I knelt down at God’s feet.

“What would you have of me?”

“I would have the kneeling never happen again!”

I rose quickly and nearly fumbled into God’s chest.

“I simply ask to speak with you.”

“I accept.”

“Congratulations.”

“Thank-you. I am so grateful,” tears would not flow from my face.

“I know.”

“Of course you do.”

“You are not human any longer Elliot. The bond you have completed has changed you and Tack alike.”



“I know.”

“This lifetime you spend together will be different from the others. As I am sure it has proven to be already.”

“I am ready.”

“I know. I am trying to tell you something,” God stopped and eyed me sidelong. “Would that be alright, or do you want to keep interrupting?”

“I’ll try not too. I want to hear.”

“As all information does this can help and hurt.”

“Why do you offer it then?”

“Because unlike Tack, you might say no.”

“I will not.”

“I know,” God stared at me again.

“Proceed, please.”

“Slorack has achieved magnificent success. Which is his right. The fracturing is all-but completed. People have no common ties any longer. Subscription to any method denotes the exclusion of others. Few remain willing or capable to enact change for the better. The penny will come up heads more often than not, so to speak.

“Balance is failing?”

God walked through the crowd staring at faces in their frozen states. He stopped at Mickey.

“People still want balance. A mere moment exposed to freedom will have an effect, even if it isn’t the one expected; things change.

“But they do not have to. If you wish, the penny will fall to heads always. At that time, thought will change matter. The deep structures of this universe will collapse – things nobody knows of yet will change – and life will face its endgame. Openness as it is now, is as closed; closed is blind ignorance. Even the enlightened now champion some cause.”

God walked back to me, the richness of his scent encompassed all things I knew, and more I didn’t.

“By rights, the will of the people is to confront annihilation with open arms. But they do not know what it is that stands before them. Do you know what I am asking?”

I swallowed, hoping not to answer incorrectly. My need to please was more intense than my will to breath.

“Stop that. Answer stupid if you can.”

“We bring fight: without weapons, without sway, without constants.”

“Do not even bring a fight. Openness to the point of ignorance, invite destruction; risk the naivety of ignorance. The two of you are truly immortals. The fates have no method to injure you beyond the natural progression of time.”

“And so our method is futile. We pose risks that we aren’t taking ourselves.”

“Whether it is nailed to a cross, mopping a floor to feed your family, a trek through a desert, occupation of conquerors, or running for days without your skin – your gifts do not lessen your acts – find a way to be seen.”

“Why?”

“In body you and Tack should be members of the current ruling class. You are white men. Your hearts demote you into a conquered people, but one random thought promises a return from imbalance.”

“I accept. I just doubt what use I’ll be.”

“It is rare to hear of doubt. It almost seems a taboo to reveal doubts before God.”

“How can anyone doubt anything where I stand?”

“Doubts join humans more often than hopes.”

“Will you come back?”

“To the world, no. The will of all thought can never be joined again to recall my form - time will eventually circle back to the day when I am there - but I will continue to press every loophole to stay involved.”

“Your physical form was the only part of you sent away?”

“Not exactly. With the precision of the first language, humans voted to remove my entirety from the world – even from memory – I will never break that. And, they can’t undo it.”

“As long as it is diminished in some way you are there.”

“Helps the illusions of mortality to be incapably of perceiving everything at once.”

“It brings faith into life.”

“Fortunately human language is ever in the present; no consideration of past was made, which kept my reign over creation absolute.”

“Like a ripple in a pond.”

“A dropped coin may change sides at the bottom of a wishing-well without the knowledge of the others.

Especially, if it is well covered by newer coins,” God seemed to be wrapping up.

A question burned it’s way to my mind.

“Tack speaks with you everyday?”

“He does.”

“May I?”

“Yes, and you did not need to ask. But. You will only know my response if you are willing to hear anything.”

“Is it alright that I don’t want to leave this time now.”

“This is notime. And you do want to leave. I can feel the itch for Tack growing.”

“Thank-you.”

“For what?”

The crowd inhaled as one. Tack’s body jolted against the ground, arching up, again his pain echoed impossibly against the gates of our control. Two hearts beat in my chest through the one physical globe. Tack’s beat was strong and surging, mine forceful and swift.

The sun overhead burned into the black material of my suit. The illusions around Tack’s body were dark

fog now, as if his body were a cold valley beneath a warm sky. The people around me waited, unknowing of the death they had witnessed being reversed; safe in their knowledge of the world around them.

Tack's eyes flickered open, squinting at the sun above. Moving my shadow, I sheltered his head from the light. Tack smiled, his eyes gave me an 'I know' look that cut through my mind. A dirty smirk crossed his face. I could already feel an enjoyable start to this marriage being prepared.

## Disney 2 – Being Dead

I had been dead for a split second. I knew that. Elliot had the look of a man who knew more than he let on.

Five hours later nobody had left the party, not even Mikey. The hill held the recent footprint of the divine, which was odd after five hours, but people could sense it and wanted to stay. The ceremony itself had taken a few hours, but sunset was coming now and people still littered the hillside.

The moon was rising to the east, the sun setting to the west. Both were full and stared at one another. Night would be warm. A buzz was growing in the crowd. Wine poured freely. After sweating like a pig for an hour I had managed a moment aside to remove my bandages. My skin was perfect and now I was even comfortable.

Elliot was obviously avoiding me; I was ready to leave and he knew it.

Finally spent with socialising, I escaped over the edge of the lookout. It was enjoyable to sit alone in the setting sunlight. A cool breeze from the north was blowing. Grass trees sat patiently around the rapid decline like my own feathery guard.

My senses had not corrected themselves yet. Being dead does seem to make colours burn more intently into your mind. Perhaps it was the effect of the life fruit.

A huffing sound approached from behind me. The slight plod to the steps told me it was Bryah. The whistle in his breathing confirmed it. Without a word he sat next to me and watched the sunset.

“Considering the two of you meeting was because of me, I’d say right now would be a good time to ask a favour.”

“Yessum?”

“What would you say to giving me the remains of that apple?”

“It’s all yours.”

“Seriously.”

“It is dead as a doornail. But who am I to refuse my best friend decaying fruit flesh.”

“Really? Damn.”

“Wouldn’t matter if it was not. They aren’t like a snack pack; one person one use.”

“Like a condom.”

“You might say that.”



“Then what of the apple Adam and Eve ate?”

“There is a difference between knowledge and life.”

“Any idea where we could get another then?”

“Not that you would want. If you eat one as a human, you will literally live without death forever; even if you got out into space, or trapped in a black hole, or stuck without a universe altogether.”

“Oh.”

“Most immortal humans are trapped at the bottom of the sea. I would imagine it is quite boring.”

“Why are they stuck there?”

“Because people threw them there. Immortality isn’t such a great thing really, it does not mean you are stronger or better in anyway. Just stuck one way, forever. They all tended to get quite annoying after a while.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“I have the endurance of my people again, so does Elliot I believe.”

“Then you can’t die either.”

“No I can die. I think I was brought back from death today - my untouchable luck saves the day - the

fruits potential was spent against the death. Our gifts as a couple will protect us with long life.”

“Then where to next?”

“I’d say we’ll keep being ourselves. That usually causes enough trouble to keep us occupied.”

“What about the two nutters you mentioned?”

“I don’t know yet. I guess they’ll be back.”

“What about us?”

“Feeling insecure?”

“A little.”

“You are my best friend. That wont change to my end and then some.”

“Good.”

It felt important to be quiet. The trees hushed the noise of the crowd. Purple and pink spears were bleeding the sky from the setting sun. For one moment in my life I did not need a thing.

A surging explosion erupted behind my back. Bryah jumped like cat from water. I sat still. My Teutonic behemoth husband had just jumped off the lookout onto our outcropping. I had distinctly heard the sound of a bone snap within on the landing.

Elliot laughed raucously, his mouth in a wide grin. Bryah collected himself, laughing nervously to take the joke. I stood and turned to meet them both.

“I think you just broke your shin laughing boy,” I announced.

“What?”

“Can’t leap down ten meters without damage once you aren’t entirely immortal.”

Elliot’s face dropped. He checked down with his legs.

“The problem with pain control is that pain is meant to protect you.”

“But I’m supposed to be immortal now?”

“You are boyo?”

“Just not in a trapped at the bottom of the sea way,” Bryah added.

“What? Ow, this is starting to hurt. Do something please.”

“This will hurt.”

I pressed my lips against Elliot’s lips. The bone snapped in a reversed echo of the sound I had heard earlier. Elliot grunted into my mouth. Bryah started laughing.

“I love seeing karma work so quickly.”

Pulling my lips away from Elliot, I searched his eyes for an answer to his change. A sparkle behind his eyes was dimming slowly. If memory served, the cause of that sparkle had not been in the universe for a long time. Elliot had seen God.

“Bryah. I need to speak to Elliot for a second. Go away and come back after the count of thirty.”

“Ok.”

Bryah walked back towards the lookout.

“A true immortal is a being that does not change from life to death and back again. You need us together to keep yourself invulnerable. And since you don’t have that now, I can torture you if you don’t tell the truth. Did you tell God I said hi?”

“How did you know?”

“You wear your heart on your sleeve big boy.”

“I wanted to surprise you.”

“I had no idea until you said *supposed to*.”

“It’s lucky I didn’t go more ambitious with my scare.”

“It is.”

Bryah arrived back.

“Get it out?”

“Elliot met God.”

“You too?”

“You have?”

“Yep. I saved both you and Tack, I’m special too.”

“You’re *special* alright,” Elliot drawled and grinned again.

The tooth-hold the sun had on the horizon was lost. A quiet pink sky replaced the stellar brilliance.

“We’re missing the moon.”

A shrill curdling scream broke the peace from above. Scents of old life and new pain trickled over the hillside. Elliot’s body reacted like a viper. Bryah’s eyes met mine.

“Walk behind me,” I announced. “Both of you.”

Towards the sound, I walked back up to the lookout. Above the rise, the crowd was in chaos. Hunched figures in black swarmed among the attendees, none yet touched any of them.

At the centre of the mass, where hours before we had married, Bartlebe and Slorack stood. A tall dark and handsome man in a dinner-suit worn over a white shirt

stood next to father winter; pale white and gaunt, showing only a green riding cloak flanked by his mane of white hair. Slorack's old angular face carried the signs of an old illusion; somewhere beneath the invisible fog was the face I knew.

    Mikey lay dead at his feet.

    I walked into the gathering of everyone I loved, towards a time-addled psychopath, who smelled like crisp ironing aide.

    “You put me to sleep, my friends will meet your friends.”

    “It is strange that either way, *you* loose. I wouldn't have thought you'd risk coming yourself.”

    “It has been too long.”

    “Let's get reality out of the way. If you touch one person here, you and your friends go to sleep, and when you wake it will be in a place without an escape. If I put you to sleep, there will be a fight, most of us will survive, and you will wake in a place without an escape.”

    “Subtle. And true - except the most part - we are willing to all die here today.”

    “A bomb would fail near me, so I would assume your kamikaze friends hide other means.”

“Means only immortals can survive.”

Esmarelda and Mavis emerged from the crowd arriving at my flanks.

“Now that reality is set. Why is next.”

“I just came to pay my respects.”

“Balls!”

“Would you believe, I came to see what a clever dragon looks like?”

“Try again.”

“Truth then. You made it further than I wanted. Past a point of no return so to speak. I needed to meet my enemy. Decide a new method of attack.”

“I understand the risk we pose to your plans.”

“Do you? Tell me how?”

“Unlike you, God and I stay in close regard.”

“God communes with those in most need of supervision, hoping you can change for the better.”

“Nobody is special Slorack,” Mavis replied.

“I see your poison has taken the weaker of my assets already.”

“No doubt why you sent them first.”

“Got them out of the way.”

“I have a way out of this now. Your consideration has missed something as always.”

“Don’t be too sure.”

“It involves almost certain death, and, your own measure of poison.”

Slorack’s eyes flicked over to Marcus.

“The dreamers are scattered and lost. They fell to righteousness as did your people and all others in defile.”

“They are in your head already. They know what you have done to them.”

Slorack stood straight. He yelled *grieve for losses* in ancient. His cloaks gaggle immediately filed towards the road.

“Any other land, and you would not have been so fortunate.”

“Besides America. Your onslaught there took out many ancients, but many still remain. I am surprised the hold of a righteous cause isn’t stronger.”

“America is well oiled.”

“Why come Slorack? There is a reason. Out with it.”

“I would think that was obvious.”



An almighty crack seemed to break the air around Slorack. In an instant he was gone. No sign remained in the space that he had ever been. His minions were gone, Bartlebe with them.

My heart started to beat within Elliot's chest again. Marty rushed down to Mikey's side. It was too late. Slorack had remained long enough to put him beyond the skills of any Arc; a doctor definitely had no chance to save him.

Esmarelda and Mavis exchanged severe glances.

"They know every face here," I announced.

"By coming they succeeded in everything they wanted," Esmarelda whispered.

"Not everything."

"Bartlebe is terrified."

"They stopped Michael from talking."

Elliot stepped forward into the group.

"He made one mistake."

"What's that?" Mavis asked.

"He gave us a scent."

"He'll just change forms," Esmarelda replied.

"Won't stop a Dragon's nose." I smiled, wrapping my arm around Elliot.

“And what will that do.”

“Faces can be hidden. Smells linger. We can find him.”

“Then what. Find him. He may have over a hundred Arc’s. And he knows your people. If I were him I’d take you out one by one.”

“He may. No point dwelling on it.”

“I doubt he will hurt anybody – Michael was a traitor to him – only those violating his views require death. The only people here needing death in those terms would be Elliot and myself.”

“So what are you planning?”

“Living life.”

“Elliot will continue as before and I will keep working.”

“What is the point of that?”

“They are our lives.”

“We will need to take care of the body.”

“We will. I will have it sent home. Maybe Michael had family. Elliot’s family and friends are forgetting the whole experience already. None of my people aren’t in on us already.”

“He just saved your life and died for it? You don’t seem to care,” Marty yelled from the ground next to Mikey.

“I care. But there is nothing can be done. We can try to send him home. There are deaths that are far worse ways. He is lucky. He gets to go home.”

“Why is Marty paying attention and nobody else is?” Elliot interrupted.

“Human minds cannot hold impossible actions. They aren’t built for it. Marty is becoming more ethereal. His mind changes the more it is exposed to us. To everybody else here, time just jumps from believable event to believable event.”

“Haven’t you ever gotten home without being able to remember the drive?” Bryah asked. The same words I had used on him years before.

“Humans respond, but just don’t file it away. It was a condition of God leaving that all ethereal actions not remain in the physical mind.”

“We can at least cover him up can’t we?” Marty asked.

“We can do better than that,” I answered.

Inhaling deeply, I made my way over to Mikey and breathed the façade of a sharp rock over his body. Marty flinched back in surprise.

“Will that suffice for now?”

“I.. I Supp.... Suppose so.”

Elliot came over and placed an arm over Marty’s shoulder.

“Come and get a drink Marty.”

While guiding Marty away, I heard Elliot start a rant.

*I have had a bad influence on that boy.*

### **Disney 3 – Football**

Marty calmed faster than I thought he would. He turned out to be more concerned about the treatment of the body than what else he had seen. Obviously his mind was not completely ethereal-compliant yet. The concept seemed slightly like a software upgrade; the length of the process may not be justified by the advancements.

Tack told me that Esmarelda had agreed to get the body back to its family. We did not choose to stay much longer. Laura wanted to get the baby home and offered to take us along as long as one of us rode in the back with Allaura.

One bumpy hour later we drove through the outskirts of the Gold Coast. I could feel Tack's memories scratching at the back of my mind; just waiting for me to take another look. I was delaying them. Memories from past lives held no interest for me as long as I was making new ones with Tack. If I had access to Tack's mind now, that would have been interesting, but it was just as interesting to not.

The unit looked like a world lost in time. Our past days felt like years and had changed everything as if they

had been. It seemed impossible that a hub of our lives could still remain the same. As the door slammed shut, producing a noise well beyond its weight, I realised we were alone for the first time. And, we were married.

Tack's heart was racing. My body was around his before my mind could comprehend the move. With the first lip contact my mind exploded. Our every memory together came bursting through. Again my body was gone; only lips and a tongue were left. It was overwhelming; the soft supple flow of skin against skin. I could feel arms around my back. Skin against skin.

My clothes were gone. So were Tack's. My body burned cold fire. I carried us away to our room.

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Immortality coursed through my veins. The feeling now was a surreal mosaic of all worlds I had ever beheld. I could remember our lives. From my scattering of white sheets and strewn pillows there was a clarity of purpose tied to me. I looked up at the ceiling; trying to remember the rules of twentieth century football. Tack's arm tensed

around my torso. We had not left our unit in a week. I still didn't want too.

For the past three days Tack's nightmares had been getting worse. One morning he had even woken with a bruise on his back. He insisted that the effects were temporary; just while he got used to the effects of his new connection to me. But then he still refused to tell me what the dreams were about.

As usual, he woke with a yell. Flashing open - Tack's eyes were staring into mine - the picture of a dream still within his pupils.

"Oh crap," Tack sighed.

"Good morning to you too..."

"Hi..."

"Care to elaborate today?"

"Not overly. I'm controlling them now."

"I would like to know why you can't tell me?"

"If I tell you they would take root. It would make it more difficult. I need to forget them."

"Why don't your memories include anything about this?"

"Dreams don't last well in memory. How many of your dreams do you remember?"

“Maybe if you tell me, then I can help.”

“Exactly. Your impulse is to help. You can’t. Anyway, your football tryout is this morning,” Tack replied.

“It would be nice to remember the rules.”

“Don’t worry about that. React. You have rules and lessons burned into your flesh.”

“Even in football.”

“In everything physical. Your body knows how to succeed. Trust me,” Tack grinned.

Tack jumped out of the bed before I could grab him. His naked body disappeared through the wardrobe into the bathroom. The echoed sound of water hitting walls erupted.

“I will tell you this,” Tack yelled over the stream, “there seems to be more people on our side than we thought.”

“Mmm,” I replied, collecting the sheets to make the bed.

The stream stopped, followed by a running tap. With the bed made, Tack emerged from behind the door. I picked up the last two pillows and placed them on the bed head.



“Groups are resisting him - perhaps to a fault – but they are pushing back.”

“I take it as usual you are welcoming everyone.”

Swooping past, Tack collected my lips and continued out of the room.

“Yepper.”

I dropped the pillow and followed him down the hallway.

“So every man and his dog has access to you. And some of these people are just run-of-the-mill psychos; they catch you off guard and you wake up screaming?”

Tack grabbed oats from the cupboard, pressed on the coffee machine, gathered his bowl, spoon and the milk, in one practiced progression. Plonking them all on the bench, he turned to me, revealing a red swatch across his chest.

“Holy shit Tack. That looks like a sword wound?”

“Its fine. It will disappear in a moment.”

“This is ridiculous. You aren’t even getting nights off.”

“I get days off. And I get them with you.”

“And you start back at work on Monday.”

“I don’t care. Why do you?”

“Because I am doing nothing while you come home from some dream-war every morning.”

“You’re are about to change the world, that is enough.”

“By getting into a football team?”

“Yeah. Sport is the heart of everything in the world nowadays - not that it is different from any other time in history – and you will be the first out married star.”

“If they let me in when they find out.”

“Oh shit, I forgot.”

Tack left everything in the kitchen half-running and trotted away. I walked over to turn off the running water. Moments later, Tack returned with a small terrycloth bag.

“I made these for us.”

Tack plonked the bag in my hand. It clattered like two small metal bells. I knew it contained rings. I opened the button on the top and poured the contents onto my palm.

Metal clink was completely wrong. Two perfectly clear glass rings rolled out.

Impossibly detailed, the rings were etched and sculpted as two flowing parchment scripts. As I looked closer, at miniscule calligraphy, I found the words of our verses lined the two intertwining pages.

“When did you do this?”

“On and off for the last few days; when you weren’t looking.”

Taking Tack’s hand I slid the smaller ring over his ring finger and offered him the other. He took the ring and pushed it down my ring finger. The glass was unnaturally cold, but the smooth surface glided across my skin, it all but disappeared on my finger.

“These were diamonds found near Uluru over three thousand years ago. I used the same process you used to neutralise the swimming pool to build them into rings. They stay cold, even when exposed to the heat of a furnace. And, burn red hot when immersed in water. Just in case you ever need a cup of tea and can’t find a kettle.”

“You made this out of diamonds?”

“Art used to be one of my gifts.”

“You made me an actual diamond ring.”

“Us,” Tack replied. “I figured people wouldn’t notice them so much.”

I wrapped my beringed hand around Tack's neck. Pulling his face to mine, I kissed him. The ring heated against my hand. I pulled away, checking Tack's face.

"Sweat gets them going too," Tack smiled and rubbed his neck.

The band around my finger felt soothing and warm.

"Won't it burn us?"

"No. A bit of sweat isn't enough to heat it too much. And if we go swimming, only the outside will get wet, so you just have to watch touching people with it."

"So the next time I am trapped underwater in rope I can burn my way out?"

"Sounds good too me."

Tack pecked me on the cheek and went back to making his porridge. I stared at the invisible band around my finger. The etchings of text had already left an imprint on the skin beneath; a mirror image of our verses pressed out in skin; like Playdoh through a mould.

"The text imprint is in Da Vinci mirror writing; just for you," Tack blushed beet-red.

I stood staring at my hand.

I was speechless.

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Nobody noticed my ring in the change rooms before training. Not that it was easily visible. It was my first day back in over a month and my size got all of the attention. Even the coach commented on the usefulness of my increase; as long as it didn't effect my speed.

My news was still a secret. Even-though half of the team came to the wedding, thanks to Slorack, nobody could remember the whole day. All the boys knew was that I had not been to training since Bryah's party.

On the field outside the dressing room, three of the boys were running pass drills. Feeling game, and mildly indestructible, I decided to start with tackling. On the opposite side of the field, four forwards were laughing at each other while they slammed into pads near the corner. I usually would work on passing, but today I wanted to test myself.

James stood waiting impatiently after a particularly hard hit with Tim; Tim was regretting the pre-training-training.

"James," I called. A smirk pasted on my lips. "Hit me."

James looked up with a sceptical look.

“Alright Moore,” James replied, tucking the ball under his arm.

I prepared my legs and body, James was already lumbering towards me. The others stopped to watch the two of us. James slammed into my left shoulder. Without meaning to, my right leg dipped at the knee and my right arm rolled upwards. Before I knew what I had done, James was lying on his back behind me and I had the ball. I had thrown James, swooped round with him, collected the ball and was standing ready to run.

Tim, Tom and Seth burst out laughing. James lay stunned on the ground.

“What the hell was that?”

“You look as stunned as James is, Moore.”

“Um. Yeah. I just reacted hey.”

Tom and Tim walked over to me, Seth walked towards James, still laughing.

“You learn some Kung Fu on your holidays Moore?” Tim asked while waving his hands around.

“It is Disney now.”

“What is?”

“My name.”

“Your name is Disney. Why? Because you think you’re Mr Incredible?”

Tim and Tom Laughed. James stood up. Seth came round to look at me.

“Nah. I got married.”

“You got married? Oh, get this boys, Moore is married. Changed his name and all. Hey man what’s this a ring?” Tom yelled, grabbing my wrist and holding up my arm.

“He’s serious Man!”

“Woo man! Bag Tia all for yourself hey?”

“Why’d you change your name for, her last name isn’t Disney is it?”

“Chicks change there names not dudes. You marry a bloke did ya?”

The boys who were passing stopped as they saw the small crowd. Together they trotted over. Tom and Tim started to joke around, playing Man and Wife.

“Yeah. I actually did.”

“Whoa yeah! Moore married a bloke. Whoa! All video games, sport and porn!”

“No. I did,” I yelled over the cheering.

Tom and Tim stopped dead. All of the boys looked around to each other. Tom dropped Tim's hand.

"I married a Guy named Tack Black."

The whole group was silent.

"We got married three days ago out at Kooralbyn. Chose the name Disney because we both nicknamed each other a Disney character when we first met. Not that either of us knew at first. But yeah. Um. We are married now, and I have moved into his place on the beach at Broady," I was rambling like Tack.

"Don't fuck around like that Elliot, it ain't cool," Seth replied. "My brother is gay. It isn't a joke."

"It isn't a joke," I held up my hand. "I'm gay, married and happy about it."

The whole group stood still for a moment. I waited for the group to register some reaction. The coach walked up from behind me.

"Why the hell are you all standing here like brown cows!"

A wave of reaction moved through the boys. Nobody seemed able to think; everybody stood still. The coach looked on with confusion, his silver whistle



dangling against his rolled business shirt. James broke the silence.

“Moore just floored me in a tackle, now he’s a gay Disney.”

“What?”

I turned from the group to the coach.

“It is true sir. I married a bloke on the weekend. Changed my last name to Disney. And I floored Ealist.”

Coaches face turned quizzical.

“I was invited Moore. I know! But who the hell cares now! You’re supposed to be training!” The coach announced. “Shuttles! Fifties! All of you! Now!”

Obviously everybody hadn’t forgotten. Maybe because he hadn’t been able to come, he was able to remember everything. I shrugged. I trotted away with the group, slightly stunned myself.

With all twenty of us finally arrived, after a quick warm up, we were moved into columns drills, and then onto a mock game. I annihilated the strength and speed work, pushing harder and further than I had ever been able to before; weariness did not even touch my edges.

Coach pulled me up after the session, waiting until the other boys had disappeared into the change rooms.

“Play like that later, you’ll be picked up by whoever you want.”

“I will.”

“Might want to be careful in the showers tho.”

“No need. I’m immortal now. It’s a gift with purchase of club membership.”

“Don’t push it Moore.”

“Disney.”

“Whoever you are. Don’t push it.”

I walked into the sticky fog of the change rooms. The screams and hooting of shower-time were echoing off every wall. I heard my name echo more than once before I appeared around the corner. The room went silent.

Stark naked, Jeff Tolmise, a young newbie, strolled over to me.

“You think my arse could use some work?” Jeff asked, turning and slapping his cheeks. “I work on everything else, and I don’t think I’m balanced.”

“Oh. Jeff, fuck up, leave him alone.” Seth called.

“What, why? He’s the only friend I can ask for real. I’m not giving up on this opportunity. He’ll get picked up tonight with the way he played today.”

“Yeah, you need some more squats man. You’re all chest. Not attractive hey.”

I walked over to my locker.

“Why do you care what he thinks?” James called. “He’s crossed over. He’s married. Not even allowed to look when you are chained up.”

“It’s worth finding out. When will I get another chance at naked criticism.”

“Right here! Your ugly and nobody will ever love you!” Tom yelled from inside the shower.

Mark Dupree, another newbie, walked over to me as I started to undress.

“My girlfriend always stops me kissing her after like a minute. She keeps pulling away. She’ll let me do anything else tho. What’s with that?”

I ran the back of my hand over his cheek.

“Get a better razor. Stubble hurts.”

Mark ran his own hand over his cheek.

“Sweet man! That’s awesome. Thought I must’ve kissed crappy or something.”

Mark swaggered away over to his own locker.

I stripped off my clothes and headed for the showers. Five of the boys were showering, they all turned towards their own jets as I moved in. I walked for the spare jet between Tim and Jeff. Deafening silence smothered the room.

Mechanically the boys finished washing and filed out one-by-one. Only Jeff and I remained.

Jeff turned to me.

“How do you go from dating-straight to gay-married in a month?”

“Sometimes things just happen that way.”

“Seems a little psychotic to me.”

“I can’t really explain it; I met the person I was meant to be with and it all just fell into place.”

“Why did you have to do it so quickly? Doesn’t seem too legit to have to rush so much.”

“Trust me Jeff, it’s legit. Just because it was fast, doesn’t mean it was easy. My life has turned upside down.”

“Sarah told me what happened at the party. You could be feeling guilty and trying to make up for it.”

“There is no guilt. I can’t explain it to you, even though I’d like too. Just trust me? Time will clear it up.”

“What will have happened to you in that time? You could have blown your career with this.”

Twisting off the jet, I walked closer to Jeff.

“Tack is everything. So just be patient Jeff, time will clear this up anyway. And don’t worry about my other career; it is about to explode - blokes or not.”

I left Jeff standing under the flow of steaming water.

The locker-room was empty. The lingering starch of sweat clung to the walls. At my locker I towelled off and searched my bag for cologne. An arm snaked its way around my waist. A sweet voice whispered in my ear.

“A dragon caught off guard?” Tack joked. I turned to find Tack wearing only board shorts and thongs.

“That was stealthy. I’m impressed.”

“Old tricks are the best tricks.”

“Jeff is still in the shower. Maybe you should wait outside.”

The sound of water being cut off preceded Jeff walking into the room.

Jeff's eyes hit Tack like an electromagnet to a iron girdle. Jeff sunk to his knees without another step.

“Apologies Arclight, I did not know.”

“Get up Jeff. What the hell is with the kneeling?”

Jeff remained on the floor, forehead glued to the ground.

“Jeff!” I called. “You’ll get a fungus on your forehead.”

Tack walked over to Jeff, pulling him up off the floor.

“Jeff, what are you doing?”

Jeff kept his eyes angled downwards, painfully shrinking from Tack.

“You’ll have an STI from that floor.”

“Tack what is going on?”

Tack swallowed. Slowly Jeff peaked out from under his brow.

“This is the dragon?”

“This is him.”

“Arclight, I apologise. I didn’t know.”

“Guys, what is going on!”

Tack walked back over to my side. He sat on the bench next to my clothes.

“I am dreamfolk. Arclight is holding our lines for us.”

“I don’t get it.”

“Jeff is Marcus’ brother. Not genetically.”

“This is what you have been dreaming about?”

“Arclight, I’ve compromised *you*. Please don’t forsake us?” Jeff was pleading.

“Jeff stop it, you’re being ridiculous.”

“What’s going on? Tell me!”

“Slorack is not happy about the dreamers interfering. He has turned all of his attention to them. Before now he just considered them vermin. Now he doesn’t.”

“We are strong. He fears our life-force.”

“And you are holding him off?”

“Not exactly.”

“Arclight anchors the dream to one person, he keeps us together.”

“Why couldn’t *you* tell me; I knew you were in danger.”

“It was too dangerous.”

“Now you know, you will fall into the dream. You are too young Elliot, you can’t understand,” Jeff added.

“I’m three years older than you!”

“Not there you’re not!” Jeff replied.

“Whatever. So why didn’t you stop him from saying it?” I turned to Tack.

“Look at the situation,” Tack replied.

“What situation?”

“I try to stop you from being included and you stumble across it anyway. What are the odds of a dreamer being the last person in your locker-room?”

“So you’re saying I’m supposed to know now?”

“I don’t know Elliot. Jeff’s here, why not you be there too. Let’s just make life really hard.”

“But aren’t I you now?” I turned to Tack.

“Here you are. Dead you are. Not in the dream. You don’t exist there.”

“Well I want too.”

Tack’s dropped his head, Jeff eyed me.

“You are a baby. You can’t fight with us.”

“It doesn’t matter. He knows now. The next time he falls asleep he breaks through.”



“Why is this such a big deal?”

“Look at it this way. Tonight when you fall asleep, you will wake up as a new born baby, in the middle of a battle-field.”

“It’s a dream. I am still immortal here.”

“You are always immortal in dreams.”

“Then what?”

“This world was made before the physical one. This world reacts to thought like the universe reacts to God; thought controls everything. In dreams people can exist as close to God as a defined being could. It is where humans go every night - a shift from bodies – where your mind is free from control. Dreaming has always been essential to life. And, as long as you stay in your own dreams, nothing can touch you.”

“And what. Just by knowing I am stuffed?”

“Usually it wouldn’t be a problem. But with Slorack on the attack, I am holding the world as I find it each night to keep everyone together. If he separates them they will be vulnerable. As a group, he can’t hurt us.”

“But he can hurt me, even with you there?”

“Over time you would learn to feel the rules out, and I’d probably find you somehow. But because they change and move each night; you will have no way to learn. I have to stay as I find myself. And when you first wake down you will even have to learn to breath.

“You can’t be trained for it. It is learning that is all experience. Even I am always surprised. And somehow we’ve just wandered into you being there.”

“Can’t I use your memories from before?”

“They don’t hold in memory.”

“Can you remember dreams from before?”

“No. I don’t think this has ever happened before.”

“It hasn’t,” Jeff added.

“I’m not sure what you’ll even look like dreaming. I don’t even know if I’ll be able to find you,” Tack said. Turning away from me to Jeff, Tack asserted, “We have to take him through ourselves.”

“No! There will be no sleeping ceremony for a season. It isn’t respectful to the dead.”

“You don’t have a choice.”

“Elders don’t choose. Law is culture and dreaming at the same time.”

“Elliot is a direct path to me.”

“Not in the dream.”

“In the dream too. Speak to Marcus. Tell him what I’ve told you. I’ll keep Elliot awake tonight.”

“You can see him in the dream.”

“Please Jeff.”

Jeff nodded and headed to the exit.

“Jeff. Clothes?” I suggested.

Jeff looked down at his naked body.

“Oh.”

Jeff turned back to his locker. Angily throwing on clothes, he tossed his kit in the locker. I sat on the bench and waited for him to leave. Slamming his locker, Jeff hurried out of the change room. Tack sat next to me on the bench.

“Maybe you should put clothes on too,” Tack suggested.

“What else haven’t you told me?”

“Everything I can avoid.”

“Why?”

“Elliot it has been three months since we met at Wollumbin. Two of those we didn’t know each other.”

“So what?”

“Even an immortal can only grow so much. You need to process; let your mind open on its own, not cram in a crowbar and force it.”

“You keep making decisions for us. I don’t feel like I have any free-will at all.”

“I understand,” Tack’s tone was short and senseless. Through his heart I could feel his pain at the comment. I placed my hand on his arm to stop him from standing.

“I know I am going to feel like that Tack. I accept it. It just feels better when you know that is how it is.”

“It feels better for me to tell you everything Elliot,” Tack’s voice broke slightly. “You can force it out of me at any time.”

“I’m not going to do that.”

“Elliot. Before everything else, I’m just a 25 year old.”

“And you also aren’t.”

“More than you think, I am.”

“And I am just a 22 year old. More than you, and more recently.”

“And there is much more for you to know. And the dream universe is another whole universe. One where

*you* are in real danger. I have no way to protect you. I was terrified you might find it. Now it looks like you were meant too, and even then I stuff it up.”

“Fine. I don’t want to be a grown up about this. It’s too much right now. I have this game today. I can’t worry about sleeping, that will happen later.”

“Ok. That’s good. I can deal in the present.”

“Then we just work on what’s directly in front of us, agreed.”

“Agreed.”

## Disney 4 – Dream game

Elliot played like he owned the field. Players would barely touch him when he got the ball. Players could not escape him when they had the ball. His tackles looked orchestrated, and through our time I could see them being written in his skin; centuries before. For me it was difficult to see another player on the field, next to his acrobatics.

*And you are a bias nitwit.*

Siren still blaring, dozens of suited men tripped over themselves to meet player two. He stood with them all, shaking hands and smiling. Although a few were even bigger than he was, I could see his immortality from the stands. He towered over other men, and they all, somewhere deep down, knew it; they stayed back.

An hour later none of the Elliot's team members had left the field. Elliot stood with one last suit; he seemed to be getting annoyed. I stayed alone in the grand stand.

Finally, the last suit walked away looking more perplexed than every suit before him. Elliot waved at me

to come over. He turned his back and walked over to his teammates.

I collected my things. The heat of the afternoon sun was still beating down on my back. I decided to hide my sweat-drenched shirt in my backpack. Not thinking there would be need for an outfit change, I had brought nothing else to wear. So I would either have to walk over clinging to a saturated shirt, or topless.

*The shirt stinks. But they've all been playing football. But then they'll think your sweating because you've been watching them.*

*Why are you nervous, you are a hundred thousand years old! They are a group of footballers.*

*They are Elliot's friends.*

*You met half of them at the wedding.*

*They wont remember that.*

*Just go.*

Topless, I walked down the stand and jumped the rail. As I approached them, I could hear whispering. I knew Elliot had something arranged. Just meeting a guy would not have keep them this long. I stopped a few metres from the group. Elliot walked out to my side.

“This is what you call a sculpted Athenian?” A tall floppy-haired-lanky-guy scoffed.

“Oh nice. I’m about to be hazed. Hot!” I replied.

“Not a chance pretty boy. Elliot said you’d show us a fight.”

Elliot nudged closer to me.

“It’s the only way I could get them all to meet you. Again,” Elliot whispered.

Dropping to my left knee, I swept underneath Elliot’s right leg and knocked him up and under himself. Flicking up, I slammed at his chest with both fists and plunged him into the ground. Kicking him around onto his back I pinned him to the ground, both arms locked up behind him.

“Whoa, shit! That was gnarly,” a stocky-skin-head laughed.

Elliot’s strength weighed in. He lifted me completely off the ground. Reacting, I swept around to collect his neck and arms into another a lock.

“Is the demonstration over yet?”

Elliot twisted in my arms.

“Few boys want a go at you,” Elliot choked.

I released Elliot and jumped quickly away.



“Who then?” I stood as tall as I could.

Jeff stood forward.

“Great. Jeff and Elliot together.”

Elliot stood off the ground.

“Maybe you should reconsider? I wont be surprised this time.”

“Sure husband,” I taunted.

“Fine.”

Elliot walked over to stand next to Jeff.

“Go ahead.”

Elliot and Jeff moved to opposite sides of me. Jeff came at me first, running for a quick tackle. Elliot waited until Jeff was almost on me before he started to move. Jeff was not an issue; awake, he had nothing on Elliot.

Elliot ran towards me with his centre of gravity forced low. Dropping my arm, I snatched at Jeff’s wrist as I swept across in front of him. Like a Spanish dancer, Jeff tripped upwards. I held around his neck with his own arm. Elliot sprang aside to avoid Jeff. Suddenly his arms were grabbing my torso from behind.

With his momentum up, I allowed the roll to take us all. Tying a knot of arms, I wound Jeff’s arms up around Elliot’s body. Elliot attempted to smother my

movement. But he would not hurt Jeff. As the roll stopped, I extracted myself from his hands and perched on top of the intermingled bodies. With one hand, I held their limbs clamped. Elliot and Jeff looked like a game of twister gone wrong. Neither could move.

Springing off the pile. I sighed.

“Have I proved myself butch enough to be spoken with normally yet?”

Extricating himself from Jeff, Elliot strutted up behind me and slid his arms around my waist; he planted himself like my picture frame. We stood in front of the team. Two of the team members refused to look at us. The rest seemed intrigued.

“So what do you do?” Asked a short stocky guy with brown floppy hair. His uniform was more covered in grass stains than the entire team put together.

“I finished an anthropology degree a while ago, now I work for the state museum in artefact acquisition.”

“In other words, he’s the fag Indiana Jones,” Elliot beamed.

The group seemed to loosen up.

“Who withholds sex?” An arse-less young skinny guy asked.

“Yeah. Elliot is the biggest horn dog of the group. Who’s the woman?” Tim asked; I had met him at the wedding.

“No woman. Fifty times a week,” Elliot trilled.

“Bullshit!” A stocky bloke spat; one of the two who wouldn’t look at us.

I shrugged.

“How the hell is that fair?” Jeff interrupted.

Elliot had planned the entire conversation; I could tell. The other boys were just here for overexposure. I could hear the intellectualised explanation in my head: *to decrease weirdness and promote teamlynness.*

“Guys, we’re normal as. Eat, sleep, work, play.”

“Bullshit. Elliot has turned into some football freak. He’s played like he did today once before, and then only for half a game.”

“We train together.”

“What?”

“Mostly defensive martial arts. Stuff from all over the world.”

“And all through time,” Elliot whispered in my ear.

“Why are you telling us all of this?” asked the other no-eye-contacter. He was a pretty blonde boy, who was still refusing to look at us, even while talking.

“Because if I get picked up, it’s going to be as a married man. I want my mates to know that. I don’t care if you accept it. But it’s happening this way. Not under a rock. Ask everything you want now.”

“So why did this only come about now?” Asked the stocky one.

“Yeah, how do we know you haven’t been secretly checking us out for years?” Tom asked. He was another from the wedding.

“Fair cop. If you can believe it, I needed to be told I was gay. I honestly thought I was just an unhappy person.”

“You didn’t seem unhappy,” Tim asked.

“I was a zombie Tim. I walked through life feeling nothing. Since I’ve met Tack, I’ve come alive. I’ve even spent time crying.”

“That seems unhappy to me.”

*Tim has rainbow dreams.*

“The rest of the time was the opposite. The point is I am actually feeling something for the first time. Since

I was a little boy. It is affecting everything; even my game. What you saw today was me alive.”

“And the crying? Dude that is weak,” finally somebody else had spoken.

“If it is weak. Then I am weak.”

“So you aren’t attracted to any of us?” The arseless skinny one asked.

“I’ll admit, I appreciate what some of you look like more than I used too. But I am attracted to none of you. Why would I be? I have what I want.”

“Sounds pretty gay to me,” Jeff chortled.

Jeff had sat himself down cross-legged in the front of the group, he had picked up a few strands of grass to fiddle with.

“So what do you want us to do with this information?” another tall-lanky guy asked.

Elliot stood still for a moment, his body tensed against mine.

“I want you to vote on me being in the team.”

“What?” Jeff scoffed.

“That’s bullshit!” Tim spat.

Elliot pulled away from me taking my backpack off the ground. Suddenly, the Post-it notes and pencils made sense.

Removing a handful of yellow squares from my bag, Elliot tossed them and a few pencils to Jeff. They scattered everywhere.

“Brilliant moron,” Jeff shook his head.

“Write *in* or *go* on the Post-it and put it in the hat.”

Elliot grabbed his cap from my bag and tossed it to Jeff. Grudgingly Jeff tore off a note and chucked it in the cap. Passing everything on behind him, Jeff stood up.

“I don’t know what the point of this is. You’ll leave the team by the end of the week anyway.”

“I don’t care. People deserve to feel however they want to.”

The hat moved around to each member of the team. Most scribbled quickly, hidden beneath their hands. It was easy to tell a *g o* from an *i n*.

A hat full of scrunched yellow was handed to me. I offered the hat over my shoulder to Elliot. He refused to take it.

“It’s your fate,” I said, holding out the hat.

Elliot shook his head. He did not seem scared. Just uncaring, even from the inside he felt *fortunate*. I grabbed out a handful.

“In, In exclamation point, In, In, In, In, In, In, In, In, Der In, In. Do I keep going?”

“Yeah. May as well,” Jeff announced.

Elliot smiled happily. His heart seemed to glow inside me. His arms crushed around me to the point of suffocation. Realising my discomfort, Elliot released his pressure.

“Sorry,” he whispered.

“In, In, In, In, In.”

The coach trotted up from behind the team.

“Out,” he announced, “you have eight offers from eight teams.”

“On my terms?”

“Only two, one is three hundred metres down the road... Best money too.”

“Sold!” Elliot beamed. His hug nearly crushed me. After a long, slightly heaving, hug, he took my hand and turned back to the coach. I gasped a little for air.

“You could hold out for more?”

“No! First in best dressed. Terms, money, location. I’m not being greedy.”

“Figured as much. Fax is coming through now. A whole chunk of the terms section is gone.”

“What terms?” I asked.

“No negative publicity clause,” Elliot smiled.

“Why?”

“Just in case they considered my gay story *negative*. So they can’t sue us if it impacts the club.”

“Clever.”

“I’m pretty too.”

Elliot looked away at the team.

“I guess this makes the vote pointless.”

“Why? *You* can’t do both?” I asked.

“I’d be exha...”

“Exactly,” I smiled as Elliot’s grin expanded.

“I’m not out if you’ll keep me?”

“Don’t make us vote again,” Jeff whined.

“As much as the thought counts. I don’t think you will have the energy boss,” the Coach chimed in.

“Trust me Coach. If I ever look tired, you pull me out, I’ll leave then.”



“It can’t hurt me to say yes. But be warned, if you crash and burn. I told you so.”

“Done.”

The sun finally hid behind the horizon leaving a pink scar across the twilight sky. Elliot smiled at me, then the boys.

“See you at Tuesday training then.”

Tugging on my hand, Elliot pulled me away as the group turned away to the change rooms. Elliot’s face supported the smirk of Macchiavello himself.

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The moonless night sky brought the foreboding of dreams to my mind. Elliot seemed to anticipate my thought process and started the coffee machine. With a sidelong glance, Elliot watched and waited for me to start talking.

“Marcus is here.”

“What? Where?” Elliot asked.

“Downstairs. He is just getting out of the car.”

“What for?”

“I am not a mind reader Elliot. But I am hoping it has to do with you.”

Before humanly possible there was a knock at the door. I opened the door to found Marcus sitting cross-legged on the mat.

“Admit it. That was impressive.”

“I will. Faster than most huffing walkers.”

“Most!?”

“Elliot is quicker under certain circumstances.”

“Rot! You pretty much sprint too.”

Crawling on his hands, Marcus dragged himself inside. He positioned himself by the couch.

“Where is my room?”

“Don’t you just need a pile of sticks and leaves?”

“Funny! We can let the little Dragonette die if you want?”

“No we can’t. The heart thing, you know, kills us both.”

“Isn’t that protected now you’re married?”

“Obviously not.”

“Damn it. Lucky I came then.”

“You have a plan for me?”

“I am going to escort you in, find Tack and dump you together.”

“What about the taboo?”

“It isn’t a ceremony. It’s an escort.”

“If I am focused on Elliot, what about your family?”

“My guess is he will make you more eager to win.”

“I have been flat out already.”

“You’re the only one who can protect him...”

Elliot sat down on the couch between Marcus and myself. I found myself staring at the metal ceiling fan in envy.

Marcus sighed.

“Get naked and lie on the tiled floor. Count backwards from three thousand in nines. Wait until I am looking away to remove your pants.”

Marcus moved into the lounge room and took up a position on the outward facing couch.

“Why can’t I have pants?”

“Do it, and don’t ask me questions. You have to be quiet.”

“Will this help me with sleep?” Elliot turned to me.

“You’re not allowed to sleep either,” Marcus replied.

I shrugged.

“Get over here tap head. You have to ignore him too.”

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Marcus had a bowl of plain corn chips in front of him. He could not eat anything else in the house; my other food all had something on it. He seemed aloof. He did not want to make eye contact with me and I could tell there had somehow been force exuded into the action he was taking.

Lying naked on the cold tiles, Elliot watched the two of us eat as if he was not in the room. He was going nuts. I had been hiding my panic since before the football game. I was learning to hide the subtle signs from his heart. But I was still freaked. It was driving him insane.

For the fourth time in an hour, Elliot counted backwards from three thousand in nines. The ceiling fan

distracted me again. The clock on the wall read two thirty; which meant two fifteen.

“I’m not doing this anymore!” Elliot yelled.

“Finally!” Marcus cheered, “put your pants back on.”

I stood from opposite Marcus and stretched. Marcus flopped back on the carpet. Elliot grabbed his pants from beside him and pulled them up.

“Seven hours.”

“He definitely lasted longer than I’ve seen.”

“What was the point of that?”

“To see how hard you clung to rules; fight for a pointless cause; trap yourself without reason.”

“I had no reason to not?”

“The cold hard floor, the numbers, the boredom?”

“I’m immortal. What do I care about cold floor?”

“True. I hadn’t considered that.”

“And it was better than being in pool, at least I could breath. The only reason I stopped is because Tack is fretting so much.”

“I am not.”

“Whatever. You can’t hide from me.”

“Great then. The only hope we have is you carry your need for Tack’s comfort through to dreaming.”

“What? Why?”

“Can’t we just put him into a coma?”

“Yes Marcus, that idea worked out brilliantly for me.”

“You’re alive and you have your memory,” Marcus replied.

“Excuse me. Me please,” Elliot announced.

“Don’t worry about it. Better you just find out on your own.”

“Let’s go to bed,” Tack sighed.

“Elliot needs to sleep touching me,” Marcus said.

“I know.”

“The two of you can use the spare bed.”

“What are you expecting to happen?”

“I don’t know. I don’t even know where we will start. I haven’t shared a dream before.”

Elliot walked up the hallway.

“There is no way I will fall asleep with pants on.”

“Too bad. If you even take your pants off in the bathroom again I’m leaving.”

I was asleep before I hit the pillow.

#####

Growing like steam from slowly boiling water, the dream world smoked into existence. A formless black desert, resolving again into a black field, resolving again into a hillside. Smoke resolved into images, black and dark blue at first, like a reversing sunset. Trees and forest developed colours: green, then yellow and finally red. Thought came last.

I knew Jeff immediately. He resolved first into complete form, probably because we had spent so much time together today. He was a giant dragon, reminding me of the Sean Connery character in DragonHeart. With a movie-coined waddle, and less than two steps, Jeff licked my face.

“Hello idiot.”

Jeff nuzzled my face silently.

“No voice box? Clever.”

Jeff nodded slowly.

The surroundings resolved into focus. The whole plane was ruined. Black charcoal sooted the tops of trees. Nobody else was resolving.

I expanded my attention.

“Where is everyone?”

Jeff shook his head slowly.

“Great. I am gone for half a night and everyone nightmares.”

Jeff shook his head again.

“What then?”

Jeff looked over my shoulder. I could feel another thought resolving into existence behind me. It was Marcus. I remembered now. Marcus should have Elliot with him. Marcus resolved into the clock from Beauty and the Beast.

“Where the hell is Elliot?”

Marcus’s clock hands swept across his face in disarray.

“I made it into his pre-dreams. Why else would I be this putrid babbling clock? Disney is his name and his brain. It’s worse than you!”

“Where is he?”

“I brought him with me. He should be standing next to me.”

“Hi Jeff.”

Jeff licked Marcus’s clock face.



“Did you forget a voice again?” Marcus tooted in cartoon disgust. “Where is every...”

“The plain is empty.”

“Not empty. Blank.”

“When did you sleep?” Marcus asked Jeff.

Jeff started at him.

“Push the clock arms around with your tongue,” I laughed.

Marcus’s face fell in futility.

Jeff poked out his tongue, and manoeuvred the clock arms to one-thirty.

“They’ve blocked entry?”

“All we know is that our entry was blocked.”

“If Elliot is not here. He may be there.”

My fury built like a crescendo. I could feel my body split.

“Go for a minute,” I managed to say.

There was no rule I could not break in my dreams. Marcus and Jeff vanished, but not before Marcus spat something about coming with a voice.

Not a moment too soon, they were dissolved. Everything I was arced out within the plane. Furious-everlasting-white-light shattered all images I had beheld.

The plane cracked. I broke through from my own plane to the image of a billion heads sleeping in their beds, back to the form of joint thought permeating all things. A monolithic rule stood before me; a clean rendered bevelled block of marble, lit only by white glory.

I smashed it.

The sound of a thousand thoughts screaming resounded my own. Thought slithered away from the tatters of their joint imposition; liquid metal remnants of the marble. The dream realm snapped up around me.

Dampening my own light, I resolved again into myself. Thoughts flocked to my sides. Marcus arrived again immediately, the image of an American Indian Chief.

“I have never known a seal to hold any dream before.”

“It wasn’t a seal. It felt like a thousand puppies thinking together.”

“Children?”

“Babies; at least they felt like babies.”

“Who would give over their babies imagination to somebody else?”

“Where is Elliot?”

“He never woke. He must be here. I slept to join his journey. He should be right here.”

Jeff resolved next to Marcus. Harry Potter scar, glasses and robes surrounded Jeff’s body.

“You look like you are at a costume party.”

“I was rushing.”

“You have sex dreams dressed up as Harry Potter?”

“Shut up Marcus.”

The Dreamfolk clustered to my position. Thousands flowed into the plan as the seconds passed. Something had changed from what I knew from memory. I could sense something new. Something powerful.

“You idiot Marcus! Wake up and change beds.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Switch, you need to use me to get into his dream.”

Realisation dawned on Marcus’ face and he vanished. From somewhere I felt a hand take my hand; here mine were still empty. An unsettling sensation seemed to reverberate through my skin, bounced off my bones, then was gone. The space around me flowed with

life towards my flanks. The surrounding forest all but moved with the hordes of thoughts following through.

It was approaching, and it was beyond powerful. The air surrounding me seemed to electrify. The hairs on my bare arms prickled. Marcus' hand suddenly left mine. Marcus cracked back into existence.

“We don't need to find Elliot anymore. He is coming.”

“How does that work?”

“I've never seen anything like it. I think we should get everyone to leave.”

“Why? Tell me what you saw.”

“He's with Slorack. If you can call it with. He has no form. He's everywhere.”

“Wake everybody. I'll be fine alone.”

Marcus flitted away, spritzing across thoughts like a pianist to keys. The plane was empty by the time Elliot and Slorack resolved on the horizon. With impossible speed, Elliot was at my side. He even left Slorack well behind.

“Elliot?” I asked.

The intensity of standing in proximity to Elliot's exposed mind was intoxicating. Slorack was going to

steal every opportunity he could. Elliot had no ability to express or action. He was an unformed ball of impulse.

“I figured you lost this,” Slorack slurred. “It appeared in my back yard and strew up the lawn. Want’s to be close to you, that’s for sure; like a lightning rod.”

“This is unexpected. No army. No mass. No sycophants.”

“You’re right. None of that. This trip was all about me and you.”

Slorack clicked his fingers. Elliot vanished. I felt his mind wake.

“Why don’t I believe you?”

“You should. The trip was about me seeing the look on your face when you uncovered my trap.”

“Elliot is fine. He is awake.”

“But you aren’t,” Slorack drawled. “You may have found a thousand easy to break; from the outside. Try a million, from the inside.”

My mind reeled. I tried to connect to my body. I could not.

“Even now you are going to deny me the vision of my victory. Let your face not be stone. You’re dressed like Liberarchy you realise.”

“I assume you will need to leave before I do.”

“I will be leaving. And you won’t follow. By the time you even glimpse a scent of escape, your body will be well dead.”

I let my hold as anchor slip. The plain buckled. I tried phasing out of physical awareness.

“You walked right in; so obviously selfless. Dearest Arclight, protecting his damned prehistoria.”

Slorack’s joyous laughter rang across the plane; a righteous peel of psychotic chuckling.

I had walked into a trap.

## Disney 5 – Lost and found

It was like having a book snapped shut in my face. The world not only dissolved, it cut dead; leaving me nowhere. With a jerk, I dropped backwards. The warmth of the sheets and the breeze on my face didn't stop me from jolting on the bed like I had fallen from a plane. My eyes snapped open.

The roof was the regular white wash. The fan silver. The walls blue. I was home. I could here Marcus scuttling around in the next room. Tack's heart pounded in my chest. Something was not right.

Since moment one I could feel hints of Tack's emotions. Right now I could feel nothing. Just a heart beat.

“Elliot!” Marcus yelled from the other room.

Sheets aside, I was standing over Tack and Marcus in an instant. Marcus was sitting over Tack, staring into pulled open eyes.

“I can't get back to him.”

“Why?”

“I don't know.”

“What's wrong?”

“You tell me. You were there.”

“It’s all blurry.

“Make it up then!”

“I got to Tack. Slorack arrived, I woke up.”

“What do you feel?”

“His heart is pumping fast.”

“Any idiot could tell me that.”

“What do you feel from him?”

“Nothing!” I replied.

“Is that normal?”

“No. Now that I know what it feels like, I’d say never felt nothing in my life until now.”

Marcus stopped. He eyed my chest.

“He’s trapped,” Marcus announced.

“Trapped where?”

“Trapped asleep. That’s what this whole thing was about. All of it. Getting Tack inside. Keeping him there.”

“Can’t we just wake him up?”

Marcus stared at me stupidly.

“And *he* can’t get back?”



“I doubt it. I’d say not even he will make it in time. His body will waist away quickly without his mind.”

“He’ll be able to crack it.”

“No, he wont. He’s inside. The dream is set; he set it.”

“Then he will just let it go.”

“If it was that easy, do you think his heart would be pounding?” Marcus yelled at me.

“Then we have to crack it,” I yelled back. For once my eyes were not filling with tears.

“You don’t understand.”

“Then explain it to me!”

Marcus stared at me impatiently.

“Your other half. We call him Arlight for a reason; he can see thoughts within dreams,” Marcus replied, “once he can see a thought, he can change it. On the flip-side, he can shroud thought, cementing a dream like reality for a time.”

“And this is unusual?”

“It isn’t unusual, it is impossible. Dreaming like he does stopped in the dreamtime. To let go of your body the way he does shouldn’t be possible.”

“And *only* can?”

“As far as we know, no-one else of his kind showed interest in the dream world once this one was finished. Besides Slorack.

“It has been our realm, alone, for millennia. Slorack has now - somehow - used infants to turn Tack’s abilities.”

“He handles dream lore better than you?”

“Yes me...”

“What’s Slorack’s ability?”

“Marcus!”

“He never had one I know of. Anybody can transform. I suppose that means anyone probably could do what Tack does.

“But. Tack is the only one who manages to come back from it when he does.”

“So we have a way?”

“No we don’t.”

“Why!”

“Nobody knows what happens when you surrender form. They may forget what they were doing when they give up a brain.”

“But Tack doesn’t”

“No Tack doesn’t. But Tack is different.”

“I am the same as him.”

“No you aren’t. You don’t even know how to find him?”

“Yes I do.”

“How?”

“That’s how Slorack did it. Said he was like a lightning rod for me. I remember it.”

“And what do you do when you find him? Find someone willing to self-sacrifice and crack him out? Tack would never accept that.”

“I’ll do it.”

“You can’t even manage a human form yet!”

“Then teach me. Skip human. Maybe it will be easy to never have a physical form anyway.”

“It doesn’t work that way.”

“It’s a fucking dream! It works how you want it too.”

“And what about you?”

“I have Tack as an anchor.”

“You think the reason Tack comes back is for you?”

“I know he does!”

“Tack could do this well before you came along.”

“I thought time didn’t exist in the dream.”

“There is no chance. We are better off sending you at Slorack here if we can find him.”

“Then I will try it on my own.”

“Shit!” Marcus spat. “Well why we’re at it, we may as well go for broke. But I am not climbing the mountain again. You’re going to carry me.”

“What mountain?”

“Wollumbin. At least we know then the mountain might ad some ceremony to you dying.”

“I thought ceremonies were banned?”

“I’d say that is a luxury we have lost; we can’t let Arclight suffocated in a dream.

“Slorack isn’t about to suffer any independence once he’s through with you two. Besides, I can sell it as a burial.”

“Let’s go then,” I turned towards the closet.

“You can carry Tack and me up the mountain alone?”

I stopped.

“Might be an idea to wake Bryah.”

“Better; a little thought never did stupidity any harm.”

“What about Tack’s family?”

“Don’t tell them. Mother and Laura don’t get along.”

“Wouldn’t Tack be worth them getting over that?”

“No. Neither of them would see it that way.”

I stared at Tack’s body. He was already starting to look less like Tack.

Marcus pulled himself to the floor. It felt crazy that we had worked our way this far through the Disney collection of stories in a month; we had made sleeping beauty now. I left the room to get Tack’s clothes.

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Mt Warning was becoming a central hub of our lives. I could finish the walk blindfolded now. Even my feet had started to regret not stopping when I saw Tack for the first time.

*If I could have walked away with him then and there... Why did human minds have to be so concrete about themselves?*

At sunset, we reached the summit. The dark orange of dusk was diminishing to the west. A small group of men and women sat in a circle around the mountain edge. Sunset's angle pushed the aged faces to the look of severe sentinels. A woman - in all respects the oldest I have ever seen – sprang forward.

“He has connection to the Arclight. Why does it need us?”

“It is blocked,” I replied.

“Piffle!” She returned, “I can feel the blighter from here.”

“You can?”

“You called a ceremony when this one should be able to jump through the hoops in a heartbeat.”

“Elliot has only dreamed once Mother.”

“Idiot!” Mother announced, “this is the partner of the Arclight. He dreams larger than we. He dreamed himself into Arclight's wedding bed before we were born.”

Bryah arrived at the top of the summit chain carrying Tack. Mother stopped and starred like a ghost had walked in.

“Put Arclight down in the Centre!” Mother announced.

“What are you talking about?” Marcus inquired.

“This human. He chose Arclight for his own while still in the creators’ arms. Before time, dream or otherwise.”

“What do you mean mean? Who are you?”

“I am telling you this is garbage! You look in yourself and you can see Arclight. Just use that. Marcus can do it even. A wall built around a tunnel is as pointless as the tunnel built through a wall.”

“What?”

“Elliot.

“I might be able to get to Tack through you.”

“And what would that do?”

“If we can get in. He can get out. We may need to leave one of you in there, but we can buy some time.”

“Let him try. Hold onto Arclight and dream.”

Mother returned to her place in the circle, her face looked bored. I watched the group settle around her.

Nobody even tried to move. Bryah stood at the edge of the circle, hands on hips.

“What now?”

“Bryah sits with me!” Mother announced, clearing the man off from beside her.

“There you go. Prime position.”

“Thanks?” Bryah checked to me.

“Dream idiot!” Mother interrupted.

I walked over and lay next to Tack. Bryah took his seat next to Mother. Mother’s face was no longer bored. She started to whisper to Bryah. He smiled brilliantly.

I laid down on the rock; taking my usual side of Tack’s body. Even in a group of strangers, I relaxed instantly against his shoulder.

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White light.

Nothing opened out before me; what I would imagine the inside of a star might look like.

The light felt somehow familiar.



And pleasant. Then it was gone. I was standing in the clean remnants of an industrial kitchen. Standing failed to cover my state. I was hovering somewhat.

Tack appeared. Massive white phoenix wings flowed from his shoulders. My... bubble... was immediately next to him.

“Elliot?” Tack stared “How the hell are you here?”

“Think something. You can’t just float there like Glinda the good witch.”

As I tried, the image of Mothers face appeared in my mind calling me an idiot.

“Idiot,” I announced.

“What?”

I pictured the image of calling Tack.

“Tack.”

“Yes Elliot?”

I pictured the image of calling go through me.

“Go me.”

“Leave you here?”

I saw myself nodding.

“Yes,” I replied.

“Not a chance.”

“Little bit,” speaking made no sense. I had tried to think go for a second.

“Then what?”

“Trade!” I bellowed.

Speech was very tiring. I already felt exhausted.

“Trust!”

“Fine. I will be back in a minute.”

*How did he say minute.*

Tack stepped towards me. An unusual sensation of a form inside my body passed for a moment and vanished. As the sensation vanished, an electric sensation tingled on my human bones.

Feeling my own bones caused a ripple in the kitchen. In an instant, I was myself in the dream; legs, arms, head and body. I realised I was standing in the same kitchen the kids had hidden from the raptors in Jurassic Park.

Changing form was so easy. I stopped thinking and I was light. I thought body, I was me. I could change back and forth easily – body to bubble – half body and half bubble. But even when human I could not make myself move.

I had made myself move towards Tack before. I'd just used an urge to be near him, I aimed myself at the freezer door in the corner; urging closeness.

My head collided with the door. Followed by my body. Pain echoed through me.

A hand surrounded my arm. I looked down, but my arm was bare. An electric charge hit my bones again. Tack appeared next to me.

“Right. Go back.”

“No.”

Talking was much easier as a person.

“No?”

“Elliot don't screw with me.”

“I can do what you do.”

“Elliot you can barely speak.”

“No. I want to crack this here and now. Slorack has a world of plans for us. I'm not wasting another minute!

“This trap had to take him years to set up. I want to crack it from the inside. I want him to feel a doubt for a change. We are strong too.

“I'm not asking permission. Together we can do it.”

“How do you know this?”

“I just do. Dragons are instinct I think you told me. Watch me burn baby.”

From my centre came a light I knew from my own beginnings. I let it grow.

It expanded to the point of white heat. I left form.

Tack stood happily for a moment, then a beacon lit within him. His body gave way to light; clear and white.

Then we were one – in all of the same places – contained at once. All of my dreams to complete his body came true. We were two people consumed by each other. The pleasure extended from within me back to my human body, across the physical touch and into Tack.

The boundary around us for a moment was a blessing; containing our intensity in a singular place. An urge to remain this way came from both of us. Stronger than survival. Filth and sensuality crossed between us with no origin mind. Still our presence grew.

A millions babies all started to cry.

Like the crack of an electric shock in my mouth, all of a sudden we were in a never-ending maternity ward. Surrounded by baby capsules.

Tack appeared in the centre. I followed.

“Would you mind collecting Mother?” Tack asked.

“No need,” I pointed.

Mother – looking eight thousand years younger - appeared with Bryah. Thoughts started to flow into the space again. Thousands of dreamers suddenly appeared in different forms.

Mother strolled over to the two of us. Her attention was set on the infants she passed.

“Told you, you could do it.”

“What’s with the babies?”

“You made them by joining together the way you did. You’re pregnant.”

“What?!” I replied.

Mother’s mouth grew into a capacious grin. A melodious belly laugh erupted from her. She dropped to one knee to steady herself.

My face must have been in shock. Every time she looked up at me she would burst back into hysterics.

“Just kidding you idiot.”

My whole body suddenly became a puddle. It took me a moment to become a person again.

“These are. Well, to be truthful, I don’t know. They feel like slaves. They are human, I know that. But other than that, there is nothing.”

The image of the cloaked people jumped into my head.

“The cloaked hunched things that showed up at the wedding?” I announced.

“Maybe. That’s as gooder theory as any.

“We can send them back to their own dreams, but they are addicted. They are addicted to merged purpose. That will carry through sleep.”

“Is there anything we can do about it?” Tack asked.

“Not if you respect free-will.”

Mother waved a hand over one of the babies’ faces. The baby continued to cry.

“It is monstrous. They feel nothing but connection.”

Mother extended her finger inside the head of the baby. Withdrawing a clear bubble that expanded from within, she pulled. From within the baby the bubble continued to expand until it moved beyond touching the body. As it encapsulated the whole baby; in the instant

the bubble touched none of the baby, it all vanished. Mother stood holding nothing.

“Repeat a million times and call me in the morning,” Mother bellowed. It echoed like we were in a cave.

Mother turned to the two of us and eyed us up and down.

“You two can’t help; except to maintain the plane until we have finished.”

People around started extracting bubbles from each baby. Each time it resulted in sudden vanishing. Thousands of thoughts had arrived in the space; babies vanished in truckloads. Soon they popped out of existence like the sound of a fizzing coke.

“They will never dream happily.”

Tack’s hand took mine – I could not be certain if I had caused it or not. The last baby in the distance stopped crying. Mother’s eyes became sad.

“Our people shall retreat to the planes for now. The planet is not our concern. The dreamtime is long over. We can’t chance crossing over again.”

Mother looked at Bryah happily. Placing her hand on his eyes.

“I will like to be your teacher boy – your mind accepts everything it is given – you will teach me much.”

Mother turned to us and frowned.

“Between you two, Slorack is going to have his hands full. But don’t think anything is over. You must..”

“We must,” I interrupted, “be ourselves.”

Tack smiled brilliantly.

Mother’s face aged immediately.

“If you interrupts me again, you will spend a week thinking you are a smashed crab.”

“You are must less tolerant than God.”

“And God bloody knows it too,” Mother yelled.

Tack held up his hand between us.

“Guys. Ease up. Same side.”

“This one was born arrogant!” Mother announced.

“So were you,” Tack added.

“I hate that you remember that!”

“I don’t remember much.”

“That just means you can learn it again. Goodbye!”

The space became empty. All that was left was Bryah and the two of us.



“We should give them a few minutes to run away from the mountain mysteriously,” Tack announced.

“Will you two leave me to dream please?” Bryah asked.

“From the looks of it. You will spend a lot of time dreaming.”

“She thinks I am special.”

“I’m sure she does,” Tack said as he nudged me.

Bryah raised his eyebrows.

Tack smirked. His heart filled with a savage lustre. The plane collapsed on itself.

Bryah vanished.

Tack and I reappeared in what looked like an empty white bio-dome.

“What happened to Bryah?”

“He is probably in a harem of his fantasy women by now.”

“So why are we in a white dome?”

“Just wanted some time alone.”

“What will you do with me I wonder?”

Tack’s smirk returned.

“This dome is much stronger than the trap one...”

**The end.**

For now