

## When The Snow Didn't Come

Ennis Del Mar hated Jack sonofabitch Twist. He hated the constant bitching about the job, hated the easy way he rode in and out of camp, expecting grub and sympathy. He hated the way he sat on his horse like fucking air beneath him not nine hundred pounds of skittering horse flesh. He particularly disliked the whoreson's singing and his talking which was never ending. Most of all he was pissed off by waiting for him all evening, wondering when he'd arrive, thinking of things to say, watching the night, ears straining and then, worse, the leaving. That was when Ennis Del Mar particularly hated Jack son of a bitch Twist: when he left camp to return to the woollies, leaving him alone. He'd spent nineteen years in almost total silence, no one wanting his opinion. Jack fucking Twist made the silence seem wrong.

Ennis Del Mar hated Jack Twist.

He offered to exchange, anything not to have to wait all day for him, thinking on their talk and songs. All day and night with sheep bleating might remind him what was what. Only now he lay watching stars that shrank him smaller than he felt: ugly, skinny, homeless, alone and broke. Hated Jack now because he felt smaller every time he left the camp.

Told Twist how he felt, first time he'd put feelings into words, and was given quiet consideration then a thoughtful reply that even the fucking president of the United States feels small, looking up at stars. Told Jack that he hated him and Jack, laughing, said it was a common enough reaction. Told Ennis about the time his Daddy made him go to school with This Boy Is Rotten written on his face in pen. Told him if he washed it off he'd brand it next time. Teacher had scrubbed at it and he'd been so scared he'd pissed his pants. All of seven and got a beating for that and all. Ennis, awed, was silent.

The following night they began the habit of whisky, eager to tell more stories that everyday sobriety held inside.

Ennis ventured to tell Jack about his brother and beatings, showed him some scars. Jack had scars too from bulls and they spent an enjoyable evening comparing. A lot of whisky got drunk. Ennis's scars ached all night where Jack had touched. His head ached all the next day, and he was glad to be up high, away from temptation.

He took to staying out over breakfast, packing biscuits and the makings of coffee, unwilling to make the ride back, unwilling to make the ride back for such a short time. Unwilling to see Jack. Unwilling to see Jack for such a short time.

Rode in the following night and had so much whisky he didn't ride back at all. Woke up with more than a headache. Woke with Jack in a tent, shit between them and a gut that rolled with bile and fear.

Ennis Del Mar then hated Jack Twist with a vengeance. Rode out without speaking to him. Spent all day unable to remember why the shit and half-mast pants, wanting to be back in camp to find the answer.

Spent the next few weeks acquainting himself with all the answer he needed, not much said by either but a mutual agreement that wringing one out was a piss-all activity compared to fucking horse-hard butt.

Ennis Del Mar hated Jack Twist for being what he was, like you'd hate sin for the leading of into temptation. He sinned joyfully with abandon down on the ground and fucking Jack Twist into the dirt.

He hated Jack Twist for making him someone he couldn't be without him. For tying him forever to a mountain in memory of a time when he had found something in himself he hadn't known was there, some instinct to tenderness, Even Alma and her baby-fat softness had not made him rock and hum and give unconditional approval. So he hated Jack Twist for being something to him Alma never would.

So when the snow came and Jack said Aguirre had sent word for them to move off, Ennis was glad. He had not gone so far astray that he couldn't go home, marry Alma and save for a place. Plans and a life which fucking Jack Twist had near but destroyed. Was so glad, he took his gladness off a ways and watched Jack from a distance. Hating him from a distance was easier.

But the snow didn't come.

Jack, stripping the tent, Aguirre rode up, said the storm had moved east, no need to move them down. Gave Jack a hard look like he seen This Boy Is Rotten written large on his face, spat and rode away. Ennis saw Alma and a life lived in expectation of nothing but death slipping away and hated Jack Twist all the more.

The tent got re-erected and they made themselves at home. Jack said, "Thought I was gonna die there, friend."

Ennis didn't get into talking like this with Jack, wasn't what he was about, but now they had months more together maybe, risked a, "Cain't stay up here forever. Gitting married in November. Told ya: me an Alma saving fur a place."

"You do it with her yet?"

Ennis kicked out at him, refusing to answer. Jack bounced on him, gleeful, and Ennis had to laugh and say he hadn't but that he reckoned after this it'd be easy. Jack demonstrated just how easy he could be, and they went at it some more. Left Ennis uneasy, hating Jack Twist for being his first and cussing the snow for not coming when it should.

Separation between the two camps, one up on the high meadows, no fire and a pup tent, and one down where both wanted to be, got harder and harder. Ennis hated Jack for that too, for making it hard to leave him, for making it hard to come back needing him so much. He hated that Jack's body swelled him, that Jack's voice was like fingers on his spine, that his eyes followed Jack and his mind always thought on him. Jack was consuming him and he hated him for it.

Summer progressed and Jack took to riding up with him for the day, no reason why not, and they went at it in the pup tent that stopped smelling like cat piss and smelt of them. Ennis had the scent of spunk in his nose all day and night, hated Jack Twist for what he was becoming and cussed the snow for not coming when it should.

Took to hating Jack some more because he seemed to know how he felt, watched him with sad, kind face and spoke soft about how things were. Ennis didn't want soft or kind from Jack, he needed to be hated

back, so they knew where they stood with things: what they were and what they were not. Hating it was the only way it could go, or it would be something else. Something else couldn't do Alma and a life. Only fear and flies for something else.

Hatred swelled in him when, crying, Jack found him and held him. Pa had beaten him down, brother had beaten him up. Jack held him and murmured and kissed and turned him into something that wouldn't be able to come off the mountain, but still the days rolled on, and Ennis cussed the snow for not coming when it should.

They got to not having to talk, which was worse for Ennis than being made to talk. Comfortable silence of knowing someone well enough without sound. It scared him that he could be so knowing of someone that a smile or wrinkle of a sun-worn eye could make him glad.

Got so close in the silences that the going at each other changed. Ennis hated that he wanted to undress Jack slow and easy like peeling a bandage off a wound, peeking to see what lay beneath. Hated Jack when his own clothes were removed so slow he almost shot before he was in Jack's hand or mouth or ass. Slow gave them time to notice and like and touch. Didn't need touch of Jack taken off the mountain with him for the rest of his life. How would he do Alma-touch after Jack? After his hardness and hair and grit and grime and stink of shit and piss and horse. Ennis cussed the snow for not coming when it should.

Slow and easy took them back to talking but not making conversation. Now words flowed natural from touch, senseless things they'd never learnt, for where would they ever learn talk of love? Ennis hated Jack for the fear that he might say one of these to Alma. *Feel good when you inside, like I full at last; ain't needing a place now, got my place here, in you.* These weren't words for Alma, and he hated that he would not say them for the rest of his life.

Speaking words of love, eyes on each other, made joining mouths easy, so they kissed proper for the first time after all they'd done, and Ennis hated Jack for finding something better even than the sex and the sliding into him, the licking him and prodding him with fingers and a cock built to fit Jack's ass. He took to the kissing like a starving man to vitals, needing it, salivating on the thought of it and greedy for fear of losing it. He ate too much of Jack and hated him for the way he felt heartsick and bloated on love. Jack laughed and asked him if he'd done that with Alma. Ennis had, but it was warm beer, and he told Jack so, hating him for the pleasure he got from Jack's expression. He had to live without pleasing Jack Twist. That was just his lot, and he hated Jack for giving him thoughts outside his expectations and cursed the snow for not coming when it should.

Then Jack began to make plans, and Ennis hated him with a bitterness he couldn't conceal. How they gonna have a place together? They fought, violent antithesis of the going at it in dirt, but the same when all was said and done. Ennis had no words and no thoughts to understand these flip sides of the same coin and hated Jack for making him so miserable and confused. Jack stopped loving him, turned away and offered him his back that night, and then for the first time Ennis hated himself more than Jack, for the tears and for the needing Jack's comfort more than he needed Alma and the life he'd planned on.

He hated them both when Jack took him and hushed him and told him some more about their place, over some fucking rainbow, as if that was what he was crying for.

When their last week came and Aguirre sent word for them to come down, Ennis had nothing left inside to hate or love or hardly live at all. Jack, who'd led the way in everything, step by step taking Ennis along the unforeseen trails of Brokeback, gave up the lead. He could hardly manage himself off the mountain let alone Ennis. They came missing woollies and missing their hearts. They came with woollies mixed, unable to separate. They came with hearts mixed, unable to separate.

Early October and Ennis was a few weeks from marrying Alma and cussed the snow for not coming when it should.



“You goin a do this next summer?”

Ennis scuffed his feet unable to look at eyes that now knew his secrets. “Maybe not.” Reminded Jack of Alma and saving for a place, as if Jack needed that, Alma a source of friction between them: Jack’s jaw, blue and swollen, proclaiming *This Boy Ain’t Alma* just as clear as if written in pen.

Jack was talking about going to his daddy’s place but Ennis wasn’t listening, he was picturing forty feet of distance between them. Turned and put a hand to the wall, retching. Jack, concerned, got a kick for his troubles. “Leave me be.” Ennis cussed the snow for not coming when it should. Reckoned he’d have made the forty feet if the snow had come.

Felt a hand on his shoulder. “Could come back with me, jist fur a few days. Maybe you ate something rotten.”

*You Jack Twist. I ate you.* Ennis hated Jack Twist, but he climbed into his truck, thighs brushing as Jack drove, a lot less than forty feet of distance.

Jack Twist was riding high on having Ennis in his truck, singing and joking, and Ennis shrank, smaller even than star-small. Thought on

the truck from the outside as they drove, making himself a stranger thinking on them. *Two men in a truck. Rotten.*

Slept under the pick-up that night, rolled in Jack's blankets, smell of gasoline and blackness blotting out the stars. Told Jack his fears. Jack, as ever, considered Ennis's feelings and said, slow, "If we weren't goin' at it, would ya think it wrong? Lots of guys ride round in trucks. Cain't see it m'self."

Ennis knew what he knew. Jack fucking Twist hadn't seen spurred up and drug around.

"You niver fool round with yer brother, Ennis?"

Barns and roadsides, people who didn't want them and his brother taking his hurt out on Ennis, fists and the other, hurt the same and just as helpless. "Some."

"There ya go. Everyone do it, I reckon."

"That different."

"Don't see that, friend."

Ennis pulled Jack's face to him and with lips showed him the difference. "Niver fucking kissed, Jack. This jist fur you," and because the snow didn't come.

Ennis got that they'd left the mountain forever as soon as he saw Jack's daddy. Glint in his eye was like sun on a bluebottle's back. Nervous and saying too much, "Right decent of you to have me here, Sir, jist till I can save on some for the wedding. I'm gitting married nixt month," he felt writing on his own face that the daddy could surely read. Wished he had a photo of Alma, red badge of courage, but never wanted one before. Reckoned he'd have a lifetime of waking up to that face.

"Thought m'be me an' Ennis could git the win'er feed in fur ya." No mention of sickness brought on by forty feet.

Bluebottle nodded. "Kin use the barn."

The barn had a room with a bunk, sink, door and no window. Ennis held hat in hand, twisting it. "I gotta let Alma know."

Jack didn't care about Alma, took the hat and acquainted Ennis with the bed. First time they'd gone at it on springs, slowed down to

savour, knees not rubbed raw. Jack wouldn't let him up, wanted to snuggle and talk, and Ennis wished the snow had come and buried him forever on Brokeback Mountain. "I gotta go, Jack. I cain't do this no more."

Jack murmured, sleepy in his ear and tightened his arm. "This ain't something I kin jist stop, Ennis. This is it fur me."

Ennis sat up, skin pulling apart, bodies stinking. Jack caught his hand. "What ya gonna think on, Ennis, every time you bed Alma? Who gonna listen to ya dumb nonsense an' hold ya close when it done? You cain't do this t' me."

"Jack, you done know I'm right 'bout this. What you thinking on us doin'? Livin' here, two ol' queers?"

"Ain't queer, Ennis, 'less you want it t' be. How you know everybody ain't doin' this only no one talkin' of it?"

Ennis didn't. Didn't know anything, one year of high school and then nothing talked about life or where you love. He rubbed his hands over his face, Jack-smell strong on his fingers. "Cain't see yer daddy doin' it. Know mine weren't."

“M’b that why they so goddamned miserable.”

Ennis swung his face around with his Jack-smile, big, reaching his eyes. “You the devil, Jack Twist.”

Jack sliding closer, mouth seeking for wet, soft parts. “An’ you the sinner.”

Later, Ennis said, “What you reckon your daddy think we doin’?”

Jack shrugged. “He like to think on me always doin’ something wrong. He’ll make something up if he cain’t catch me at it.”

Ennis, considering the tip of the cigarette and where to put it if the answer should come back wrong. “He catch you at this before?”

Jack trying to distract him with a finger, pushed in and swirled, Ennis having none of it. “Jack, you ever had someone on this bed afore me?”

“Christ, Ennis, I cain’t remember every little detail of my fucking life. I fooled around some, sure. Ain’t never wanted no cock in my ass till I met you, an’ that’s the God’s honest truth.”

“An’ your cock, Jack. Where your cock bin?”

“Friend, don’t tell me you ain’t tried sheep afore.” Ennis rolling away, hollering, holding his ass, and Jack laughing and beating the bed at Ennis believing him. Never did get an answer to his question.

Morning came and Ennis made another attempt to escape, wishing the snow had come before this helpless imprisonment. Didn’t need iron bands, just Jack’s finger on his belly holding him captive to his need for love.

He woke early while the house was still silent, stood for a while watching Jack’s window, being inside the room inside Jack then began to walk, knowing no escape was possible.

He had a very long road ahead of him, but it was better begun sooner for the snow would surely come.

## Chapter 2

“What ya lookin’ at, sweetie?”

“Nothin’.”

Alma came to the window, looked too. Maybe Ennis needed correcting. Lifetime ahead of correcting Ennis to make him somebody she suspected he wasn’t. Just the street. “Ennis, what ya lookin’ fur?”

“I told ya, nothin’. Shit, Alma, I gotta git outta this house.”

Hand on his arm. “I know, hon, ain’t no picnic sharing wi’ my folks, but it’s only fur a few more days. We gits the weddin’ done and we kin look fur a place of our own.”

“I’m gonna go out t’ the ranch. See if they need me t’day.”

“Ennis! You done got three days off t’ help me. I got your brother an’ sister comin’! Ennis!”

He felt like he was crawling out of his skin. Two weeks away from him and the need grew like cancer. If he could, he'd take a big old kitchen knife and cut Jack Twist out of his body. Wedding on Saturday. No place for need.

There was always work to do on a ranch. Short-handed he was given a full day's and broke his back forgetting Brokeback. Returned late to Alma's place, stumbled getting out of the pick-up, engine ticking in the quiet night like his life. A shadow shifted, unnatural and bear-like. Ennis fucked high and loud. "Easy, cowboy. It's me."

Ennis went for him, punched him down, pulled him up, punched him again and with every punch, no, no, no. "I gittin' married! On Saturday! I ain't gittin' into this thing wi' you ag'in'."

"Ennis? Ennis? That you?"

"Yeah." Ennis straightened. Saw that Alma saw Jack. "This here's a friend a mine. Jack."

Alma wrapping a flannelette robe tight looked smaller, more vulnerable than Ennis knew she was. Felt suddenly protective of her, and wanted Jack to know this, to understand this, that he was getting married and that was that.



Alma laughed, uncertain, her dumb-calf look. “Said you ain’t got no best man, Ennis. Jack yer best man?”

Ennis hung his head. “Christ.”

Alma glanced into the house, unseen woman’s thoughts. “Where he gonna stay? No room here and—.”

“That’s fine, ma’am; I’m campin’ down by the river.” Hard determined look not at Ennis but they both knew it was. “I come t’ git this ol’ near-married man off fur a few days’ fishin’. M’be last he gonna have, now he gittin’ married an’ all. Lucky son of a bitch, beggin’ yer pardon.”

Ennis was caught, helpless, between Alma’s uncomprehending dullness and Jack’s uncompromising need.

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“What the fuck you come fur, Jack?”

Bravado and fun at getting Ennis away from Alma and in his truck again, heading to the river, deserted Jack. “We ain’t as quiet as we might be, Ennis. When we gits t’ goin’ I reckon we shout us up a storm.”

“Shit. Yer daddy heard?”

“Yep. Course, he could’a have his ear pressed to that ol’ door, far as I know. Leastways, he throw me out. Give me this, an’ all,” twisting around and lowering his pants to show Ennis his butt.

Pick-up swerved; Ennis grabbed the wheel. “Shit and fucking piss, Jack! He branded ya?”

“Caught me when I ain’t lookin’ else I’d have him down now. I ain’t seven no more and reckon I could take ‘im, fur all he bein’ the champion state bull man two year runnin’.” He peered, trying to see the burn. “Jist as well it don’t say rotten. It don’t, do it? This all your fault, Del Mar. I wants ya to know I blame you fur this. If you ain’t climbed in my pick-up easy as a whore an’ come wi’ me, this niver happen.”

Ennis held his hand to the mark, thumbed it. “Fucking pissant goddamned snow.”

“Huh?”

“Nothin’. I like jist like cussing snow. Shit, Jack, where ya goin’ t’ go?  
You got money?”

“I got Brokeback money still, but it won’t last fur long. Cain’t waste it  
on a motel or I’d take ya t’ one and jounce a bed wi’ ya fur a while.  
Gonna look for some rodeo’ing. Good money, if ya kin stand the  
hurts.”

Ennis looked at the sky, assessing cloud. Saw no hope of snow.

“Short-handed on the ranch, if yer a mind t’ it. They got a bunkhouse  
an’ all.”

Silence after the offer, then, “I ain’t gonna watch ya git married,  
Enins.”

“Don’t want ya there.”

“M’be I’ll try an’ stop ya. Tell Alma, m’be.”

Ennis punched him and fought him, still driving and they swerved and swung. Jack, cursing and spitting, Ennis stronger. “You leave her outta this! Ain’t her fault! I’m the wrong one.”

“What if it not wrong?”

Jack pulled over. Ennis climbed out, hunting for a cigarette, shaking. “You a fool, Jack Twist. Course it wrong. We gits married an’ has kids an’ that’s the way a the world. What the world be if men—. Shit, I cain’t even say it.”

“What? If men married men? Tell, me, Ennis, what so wrong wi’ that?”

“Shit, Jack, I don’t know. Life ain’t Brokeback Mountain.” He climbed back into the truck, blowing smoke out of a crack in the window. “I ain’t gonna git into this again wi’ ya, Jack. I camp out wi’ ya tonight, cus I cain’t stand t’ listen t’ Alma’s brother snoring no more. But we ain’t gittin’ into anything. Jack, quit it. Jack! Someone drive by an’ see ya!”

“Not down here they ain’t.”

“Shit. Well, keep yer head down and stop bobbin’ up an’ down.”

“Did ya miss me?”

“Don’t start that girl talk wi’ me.”

Jack sat up, wiping his mouth, essence of Ennis a thin trail off his lips.

“Why cain’t ya give me somethin’, here? Tell me ya miss me. Tell me ya need me. I hates that ya hold back from me, Ennis.”

Ennis zipped up. “I tell Alma I love her an’ I want t’ gits married. What’s tellin’, Jack? What’s tellin’ t’ do wi’ hearts?”

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“This here a right pig of a situation, Jack. Cain’t git into this wi’ you again.”

“But, Ennis,” Jack, by their fire, slid a hand where Alma’d not yet gone. “I’m yer best man.”

“Quit it! We ain’t even got us a tent! Quit it. This ain’t Brokeback, Jack. Someone’ll see us fur sure.”

Jack stood up, blankets falling away, naked. Pointed to his cock, gleaming and hard, pale in flickering firelight, unnatural defeat of gravity marking it out as *man*. Shouted, “This here is Ennis Del Mar’s Best Man!”

Ennis wrestled him down, clamping mouth first with palm then lips, the cock taking Ennis where he knew he was never going to go with Alma when all the running supposed to be his. He straddled Jack and lowered, something they’d never done before, for what man sits on another’s cock, willing? Their coupling on the mountain resembled taking, not giving, to remain men. Ennis, so near a wedding that would shout man to the world, sat like a woman, stretched and riding for pleasure. The pleasure that would have to last him a lifetime.

Jack shivered like a nervous horse beneath. “Christ, Ennis. Feel like I’m being milked. Com’ere.” They kissed as Ennis rocked, saliva, teeth and Ennis whispering best man, best man, over and over, like he could brand it on their faces with his breath.

When Jack was done inside Ennis and the shivering stopped, he helped Ennis, rolling him off, sliding down and using kisses and saliva

and teeth as well, Ennis laughing and wriggling and knowing the fun was going out of his life like light from a dying fire.

They fought some when they were done, as they had on Brokeback after the snow didn't come, when the possibilities of all things were closing in on them. A chance remark by Jack, Ennis taking offence because his heart was hurting, and then Ennis had a black eye for his wedding from Jack's elbow.

Jack was sorry, wanted to be let in to comfort, but Ennis wrapped around his misery and watched the fire die. Only the cold brought him back to Jack's arms, smelling his own spunk on Jack's body with sweat, whisky, piss and shit and all the good things of a man that he would never more know.

"I'm real sorry 'bout yer eye, friend. Kin ya see yet?"

"No."

"M'be that because it dark?"

Ennis snorted. "You more dumb than yer horse most times."

“Don’t git married on Saturday, Ennis. You’d be cheating if yer do, an’ I think you know it. This ain’t jist foolin’ around goin’ on here.”

Ennis was stroking Jack’s hair, though being mad for the eye he couldn’t remember starting. “This is jist what dogs do, Jack, when they cain’t get a bitch.”

“You’re a fool, Del Mar. You ever gonna talk like this to that gal, Alma? You gonna tell her how you like yer cock sucked jist so, like you done tell’d me? Hell, you gonna have pissin’ matches wi’ her? Shoot yer spunk in her hair when she sleeping to piss her off, like you done t’ me?”

Ennis grunted quiet amusement at the memory then cussed the snow for not coming and stopping this when they were still just dogs rutting in a yard.

“Tell me, Ennis, she make you hard all the damn time like I do? I swear, cowboy, up on that mountain, toward the end? We were either goin’ at it, thinkin’ on it or recovering after. We always hard and horny an’ needin’ it. You think she gonna let ya be like that? Bendin’ over whenever the need take ya, like I do fur ya?”

“Leave her out of this. I told ya, it ain’t her fault.”



“I ain’t sayin’ it is. It your fault, Ennis. Yer settin’ yerself up fur a lifetime a misery an’ me fur a lifetime a tryin’ t’ find someone jist like you. Christ, Ennis, feel down here, an’ we only jist got through doin’ it. Hurts I need it again s’ much. Your hand gonna enjoy somethin’ on Alma like you enjoyin’ touchin’ that?”

“Shut up, Jack, you talk too goddamned much.”

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Later, when Jack was sleeping and Ennis watching over things as he always did, feeling the weight of all the worlds on his shoulders although they had never been that broad, he said clear and dangerous, “So you plannin’ on findin’ someone else like me?” Didn’t take sleep for an excuse not to get into this and punched him awake. “You gonna find someone else?”

Jack, grumpy and not wanting to feel the hard ground on his burnt butt, cussed him out.

“You better answer me, friend; you was the one who wanted t’ get back int’ this.”

“Didn’t have nowhere else t’ go, Ennis because of you and yer damn hollerin’ and moanin’.”

Not wanting to explain again that it was snow and the not coming when it should, Ennis repeated patiently, “You gonna find someone else? After me?”

“I ain’t gonna git into *after you*, Ennis! I told ya: don’t marry her.”

“Jack, jist give me a goddamned answer!”

“Yes, I’m gonna find someone else. What you think? I’m gonna wring ‘em out thinkin’ a you? That I’m gonna come along every few years, hoping for a taste a yer cock, if it don’t taste too strong of her? Shit, Ennis, we gone too far fur that. I ain’t gonna let yer do that t’ me. This is it fur me, or I’ll find it someplace else.”

Ennis lost some shaky grip on things that allowed him to keep walking his unsteady lines. Later he remembered fighting Jack and it didn’t seem worse than what they always did, him already with an eye going yellow. It was worse though and when it was done they were bad, Jack something broken and Ennis missing a finger nail, although he could never work out why or where it had gone. He was bleeding from his ear, too, and when he put a hand up, shaking and tears from the

shock, it hung looser than an ear ought. Jack's mouth was bloody and Ennis reckoned he'd been bitten. "Git outta here, Jack. I've got me a weddin' t' go to, an' you ain't invited. I got me a life to lead an' you ain't invited." He began to dress, sick and dizzy.

Jack watched him. "You damn near kill me fur needin' something you ain't willin' t' give me. That ain't fair, Ennis."

"You livin' in the version of life where it fair then?"

"What'm I supposed to do?"

Ennis had no answer for that. In the vacuum of unanswered questions he fell to his knees, face to the cold earth. "I cain't." His cry encompassed a whole world of deficit.

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Jack drove Ennis back to Alma's place, knowing a parting was coming. Ennis was silent and bleeding, gritty and broken. Jack could hardly turn the wheel, but had known worse from the bulls. "Alma gonna skin my ass when she see the state a you." Jack wanted to touch him but didn't.

Ennis lowered slowly out of the pick-up, hat so low no truths escaped.  
“Reckon this it then.”

Jack, biting his nail, looked anywhere than at Ennis. “Cain’t be. I ain’t gonna accept that, Ennis. Cain’t drive off. Cain’t. Gone too far fur that.”

“Ain’t far enough, Jack. Nowhere far enough fur us t’ go in this world. Nowhere. We need to be something else, an’ I aim t’ be that on Saturday.”

Jack nodded, still nodding as he spoke, as if setting to something. “Then I’m telling ya, Ennis, every time you lay wi’ her you kin think on me and the man I’m gonna be laying. We’ll git a littl’ place together an’ have that sweet life you an’ me could’a. Think on that, friend.” He slammed the gear into reverse and swung dust and noise out of Ennis’s life.

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Alma froze him worse than mountain river water on balls. He shrivelled under her silence, not understanding this way of fighting.

She stitched his ear, nothing for the pain, but the pain was so minor compared to his other he didn't care.

His brother and sister arrived on Thursday. Felt fourteen again and entirely under their power, kicking against the saddle. But they knew him well and saw he was sick. He could not say heartsick so there was no comfort to be had.

He tore his stitches that night in a nightmare, thrashing, and woke to find blood soaking the pillow. He'd bled the first time Jack had taken him, nothing to ease entry but need and that hot and for keeping, not slippery. Jack had first blood. Couldn't change that.

Brother invited him and Alma to eat with them on Friday night, diner of the motel. He drove in Alma's daddy's pick-up, Alma alongside him practising for her life. His ear hurt, but it was nothing to the rest of his pain, so no comfort to be had. He drove though he could hardly see for darkness, nothing to do with his eye, which throbbed out of synch to his heart.

He drove around the back of the motel, and there he was, sitting on a step, smoking. Ennis saw that Jack wasn't looking for someone else and that from the look of him he wouldn't be any time soon. Man looked run over, beat down, and red eyes told of crying he didn't ever

let Ennis see. Ennis moaned, pulled up in front of the diner, tipped from the truck and threw up.

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Ennis went through the pretence of a meal. Brother and sister lightened Alma's mood, telling her how all men sick before their weddings. Ennis went for a piss with K.E., tried to see the brother he'd known in this man and asked him if he was happy. "Ain't about happiness, Ennis. Where you git that idea?"

On the road home the snow came, only light flurries but enough. Enough to remind Ennis how it should have been for his wedding and how it actually was because it had come too late.

The darkness then was so bad that when they came to a curve, Ennis drove on, foot down hard and seeking something in space and darkness and flurries of snow that he knew life would never give him.

### Chapter 3

He took no credit for it, but Ennis's first thought on being told of the accident he could not remember was Alma. He asked about her as if life depended upon the reply. She'd been thrown clear, broken hip mending slowly, which was more than could be said for Ennis, his worst injuries being of the kind that could not be treated. After Alma, he thought on Saturday and that it had not come. Not a deep thinker, he nevertheless got that his darkness had little to do with actual days, for he was still lost and no way out.

Six days on and he had no money for hospitals but was not asked back to the Beer's. No option then but his sister's offer to stay with her and her man. She helped him dress, old shirt cut to fit a broken arm and shoulder, pants over the busted leg. "Hush, Ennis, you too big fur that now. You in pain? You want I fetch someone?" Ennis shook his head and could not explain the darkness. "It real prutty outside. Bin snowing since you here. Reckon that's what made ya skid off like that. Alma'll come round, Ennis; weren't your fault. You'll be back in wi' her in no time, you'll see. Stop it, you ain't no baby now." Her man, Wilbur Junior, was waiting in the car. Didn't get out to help, and Ennis saw the lie of the land.

They pulled away from the mean-looking brownstone building, Wilbur Junior and Susan talking over Ennis as if he weren't there. His sister was right. The snow was pretty. Pity it came too late.

They farmed a poor piece of land not far from a ranch lost to another curve, life still lived hard. Ennis felt right at home. Wilbur ran some horses, dug a living from dry soil. Susan worked in a store. They put him on the couch when he couldn't make the stairs. Broken leg in a car, forty miles, had all but done him in. He needed to piss but couldn't stand and hold. Had to ask Wilbur and would rather have swallowed his piss. Wilbur grumbled, levered him up none too carefully. "Don't envy that friend a yours. Cocky son of a bitch git what he deserve, ask me."

Ennis was in so much pain, being manhandled, that he couldn't ask. Had to wait for an hour and some pills later then found his voice and croaked, "What Wilbur mean? What son of a bitch?"

Susan touched his hair. "We cain't leave ya all day on yer own, Ennis. Not till you kin get about, leastways. That friend a yours said he'd be proud t' help ya, best man an' all. He come all this way an' the weddin' off; shame fur him. Don't you remember?" She came over and sat next to him, feeling his forehead. "Jack Twist done come to the hospital every day when you were first brung in. I had to work, Babe, couldn't git away t' come. Felt better knowing he were there. Though



Wilbur never took to him. He right forward in his opinions 'bout what you needed and didn't need and pissed the nurses off most times. Pissed Wilbur off because you know what he like 'bout doing things by the book. What's wrong, honey? You hurtin' bad?"

Ennis couldn't breathe, couldn't speak. "Jack gonna be here?"

"He kin go out in that old trailer. It cold an' damp, I reckon, but Wilbur say he buy some heating fur it. I'll be glad if Jack kin help Wilbur out this win'er, now I cain't do the liftin' an' all." She held his hand to her belly. "Uncle Ennis."

Ennis snatched it back, life it carrying burning. She patted him, mistaking. "Don't worry, hon; I'm gonna go see Alma. She a good girl, an' you an' her be makin' nice babies yerself soon. You ain't gonna be like this forever."

Ennis was in too much pain to contradict her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jack's arrival was as subdued as it could be, one man seeing another so bust up and knowing the truth behind the pain. He held his hat,

turning it endlessly, nodding when anyone spoke. Only when Wilbur went out and Susan to get ready for the store did he come closer. They had nothing to say to each other that would not fly out on the back of fury.

Finally, Ennis said cold, "I fuckin' hate you."

Jack sat on a chair opposite. "I reckon you do." He flicked his eyes up to careworn face. "I'm gonna ask, friend. When you better, I'm gonna ask, an' I want to be told the truth. I hear accident, but I don't see accident in your eyes."

"Thought you'd be real glad, wedding off an' all."

Jack stood, took a step. "Don't think you too sick t' punch. You ain't broke yer face." He slumped down again. "Fuck, Ennis, what you go and say that fur? You think I glad you all busted up?"

"Kin you do something fur me, Jack?"

"Shit, Ennis, anythin'."

“Git me over that telephone, if it’ll reach. I got t’ call Alma an’ start to make this right.”

Jack hung poised between up and down, disbelieving. Ennis added, spiteful because he could be, “Got a new weddin’ date to set.”

Susan came down. “You gonna be okay, Jack? This real decent of ya. Wilbur be back fur lunch, but he’s all yours till then. If ya need me, this the number at the store. He a right baby when he sick; guess he missed mom an’ needs it made up now.”

They watched her leave.

“Brung it over here.”

“Fetch it yer fuckin’ self.” Jack went to the kitchen to find some coffee, made unnecessary noise, came back just as abrupt. “You an’ me need to have some talk ‘bout this here situation. You ain’t gittin’ into that thing with Alma again.”

“That why you here, Jack? That why you turn nurse all of a sudden when I don’t remember you bein’ able t’ do shit with the sheep when they needed somethin’. Were always: Ennis, it’s cut its leg; Ennis what

this thing; Ennis it bleeding! What you think? That anything change by this?”

“I ain’t here t’ nurse ya. I’m gonna make your fuckin’ life a misery, an’ you won’t be able to tell that sister a yours without you tellin’ her why I got cause to hate you like I do. I’d piss on ya ‘fore I lifted one finger t’ help ya. You ruinin’ my life, Del Mar! Why you go and do this, jist as I had ya married an’ off my mind.”

“Yeah, I was right off your mind when I done see’d you at that motel, Twist.”

Jack, up close, thrust his face to Ennis. Paused. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothin’.”

“You gone a funny colour. You hurtin’?”

Ennis nodded. Jack went into the kitchen, came back with whisky, opened pills. He sat, easing Ennis’s leg over. Ennis began to breathe rapid, put a hand over his eyes, didn’t take the pills when offered. Jack nudged him. Ennis croaked low, “Jack,” and all his hurt was in the word. Jack found a way to hug, though it wasn’t easy, busted shoulder

and arm. Found a way and held him close, as he had in the hospital, unknown, rocking until pain was only that of bones broken. “Don’t, Ennis. Where I gonna find someone as ugly and dumb as you? You a fool, Del Mar, if you believe half the shit I say.” Words not planned, but out of comforting, Jack whispered, “I bin busted up far worse. Don’t take on so, ya baby.” And the word was repeated and took on a different meaning. “Hey, baby, don’t.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Hard as he tried, Jack couldn’t care for Ennis on a couch: Ennis never comfortable, sweating, clothes rank, wounds throbbing. Up or down, made no difference. He told Susan he was moving him to the trailer for the bed, that he would sleep in his pick-up. She protested. By the time she came home, he’d done it, and no more was said. Noticeable tension between her and her man eased with the house to themselves.

He struggled Ennis across the yard, around the barn to where the trailer stood. No paint on the outside, and inside, paint hanging, cannibal trophies from the ceiling. The place smelt of gas from a heater and was barely man-clean. Ennis saw only a bough of winter berries thrust in a jar, a bright new yellow towel that lay on the bed and soft blankets he recognised from a mountain where snow had not come. Jack nicknamed Mrs Twist then, annoying Jack equal to amusing Ennis.

Jack peeled him out of clothes, threw them out of the trailer into slushy snow, brought a bowl of hot water and a sponge and began to clean, inch by inch, on the spread yellow towel. Ennis watched from lowered eyes, considering. Jack kept his on the task in hand but observed low and deep, “Thought you was in pain.”

Ennis, watching Jack’s blackened nails, the way the fingers eased over his skin, feeling the gentle rasp of sponge and trickle of water, replied, “Reckon he jist lining up fur his turn at the washin’.”

Jack smiled. “I’m gittin’ there.” But he took his time then, sponging over chest, wiping with the corner of the towel over pebbled nipple and down breastbone, washboard under fingers. He moved to the good foot, smiling at a grunt of annoyance, began to work up, each toe separated and wiped, sponged and dried, calf, knee and thigh. “Gonna have to turn ya.”

“*Jack.*”

“Com’on. You niver had a problem turnin’ fur me before.” He lifted Ennis’s good leg, eased him over, settled shoulder and arm. Then, not cleaning but nursing of a different kind, he put a hand to Ennis’s crack, pressing. Ennis arched, pain forgotten, reason for all the pain

forgotten, just need for Jack and a young body recovering. Jack slid onto the bed, left his hand there, washed Ennis's back with the other, all ten fingers working. Ennis's body shivered like horseflesh under flies. Jack kissed into his hair, smelt deeply into unwashed-Brokeback smell, his need rising tight and hard. He pressed with one finger, working, licking Ennis's ear. "Gonna bring you off jist like a girl, Ennis. You hurt too bad fur man fun." Ennis, sweating, his eyes closed, clenched his butt on Jack's finger. Jack closed teeth on Ennis's neck, hard bite that still marked hours later. "You close?" He rubbed the mattress, breathing unsteady and hitching to pleasure. With a shudder, dog slewing water, Ennis sprayed droplets into the air, a release of more than seed. Jack finished, hot, sweaty, rough hands and stubble against his neck. "Shit. Should'a taken my damn pants off." Ennis began to laugh, a sound he had not reckoned on making again when he'd seen a corner as being his way.

Jack eased Ennis back, tucking into good shoulder. Ennis's stroked his hair, pulling until roots hurt, tangling thoughtlessly. "I made a mess a things, Jack."

"Things jist fine where I lyin'. 'Cepting yer damn bones, which curtailin' my fun. You itchin' inside those damn things?"

"Some, an' it aint' fine, Jack. I messed up; should a got rid a you up on that damn mountain when I hated ya and the goodbyes be easy.

Would'a if that fuckin' snow come when it ought. We could'a had lives like regular folks."

"An' what you done when the needin' come on ya? Tell me that, friend? When you woke thinkin' on Brokeback and me?"

Ennis ground knuckles into Jack's scalp, painful. "You got an awful big opinion of yerself, Twist."

Jack stretched for cigarettes. "I got a smashed up pick-up, broken bones an' a cancelled weddin' tellin' me 'xactly where I stand, Del Mar." He lit two cigarettes, held Ennis's out of reach for payment of kisses.



## Chapter 4

One week and Ennis was crawling out of his skin. Nineteen wasn't made for beds and helplessness. Drove Jack mad, complaining, so Jack gave Ennis a pot to piss in, a stash of food and went with Wilbur to work. Got back, late and tired, to Ennis cutting his leg cast open, scratching to bleeding. "Jesus H, Ennis!" Jack slapped him, pushed him over to take bloody sheet then slapped pale butt hard. Did it some more, flat palm ringing, heart racing. Pale butt reddened. He panted, "Christ, Ennis, I'm dying fur it. Bin thinkin' on ya all day." Ennis, breath shuddering, invited him in.

Careful lasted longer than clashes of hard body in mountain air. Jack held, levered over Ennis so nothing but cock touched and that only on the inside, sliding gentle and easy like oiling a favourite gun.

Ennis needed it just as much, more because he thought it lost. Jack's sweat dripped onto his back; at the best part, the whole trailer rocked, Jack goin' at him like he went at life: full throttle and thoughtless. Hit the right place though; brought Ennis off same time, didn't happen often but making them holler when it did.

\* \* \* \* \*

Nineteen wasn't made for beds and helplessness. Ennis was worse the next day, mad and bored. Jack absconded with Wilbur again, said he was needed. Ennis's day was spent waiting and thinking on Jack's body, wanting to poke it and willing the healing on. Next day, Jack didn't go. Hung around, being too big for a small space. Made Ennis some coffee and said he'd buy him magazines. Casual, passing the coffee, added, "You know Wilbur much?" Ennis said some when he was courting his sister. Said he'd never liked Ennis and glad to get shot of him when he was seventeen. Jack let it drop but in bed that night when confidences were easy said he didn't like him, that he'd be glad when they could leave this place. Jack's easy confidence that there was a they bothered Ennis, but with Jack's seed in his belly and on his tongue, he did not say so.

Susan came by in the morning, hollering outside the trailer, asking if Ennis was decent. She checked him over, asked Jack to help Wilbur once more, that fence lines were down and he could really do with the help. Jack went because she was giving them a home and food, because she was giving him Ennis.

When he was out, she said, "Alma Beers coming by t'day."

"Christ, why'd ya not ask me?"

“I’m askin’ ya now. You gonna say no? Weren’t your fault, Ennis; ya got t’ get over this. I cain’t keep yer here forever. You gotta make yer own life, with Alma.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Her daddy drove her over and she leant on his arm, no cast. Had been hairline, so she told Ennis, and healing well. She asked after him, talking to a stranger. He didn’t want to move on to other things, didn’t want to hear what he didn’t want to hear. Talked some of the snow and his brother and sister. Alma looked around. “How you managing?” Ennis, wearing Jack’s shirt, said his sister had been real good. “We gotta get things sorted, Ennis. Need t’ know what we gonna do.”

His leg throbbbed like jaws clamped round it.

“You be well enough come December. In our own place be better fur ya.”

He thought on a bear he’d seen, trapped, paw in bone-shattering teeth. Couldn’t pull, couldn’t stay; either way was death. Only difference, one was quicker. “Thought m’be you pissed wi’ me fur the accident. Didn’t see ya at the hospital.”

“They sayin’ now there were bad ice on the road that night. Said other cars done go off too.”

Ennis picked a nail, helpless.

She stood up, careful. “I’ll git daddy t’ book the church, Ennis. You work on being right.” Added to make her point and to let Ennis know she knew, “No fishin’ trips fur you afore this one. Cain’t have you being all wrong no more.”

Ennis watched her limp away, wrapping Jack’s shirt so tight around him it tore.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jack didn’t want to talk. Ennis didn’t care; left the need for words back on Brokeback. Jack didn’t want to mess around. Ennis didn’t care. They should have left that back on Brokeback, and all. He did not tell Jack about Alma’s visit, for what was there to say? After washing in a bowl—all they had—and sniffing shirts, Jack dressed and said he was going out. Ennis didn’t want to talk, but he didn’t want to be left either. Jack said there was nothing to be done because he was going anyway, and left, slamming the door.

Ennis pulled the remains of his tattered leg cast off, cut off the shoulder one as well then sat mutinous, waiting for Jack.

Jack didn't notice, coming in early morning, stinking and wanting to sleep. Ennis sat alongside him, recognising the smell. Even without that, scratches on Jack's back might have told him what he didn't want to know.

When Jack woke late in the morning, hungover and sick, Ennis relished where they would go then. If the snow didn't come on time, he would make it, fighting with Jack Twist over this so they could have their lives, separate and as it should be.

Jack ruined Ennis's plan by curling around his hurt, shoulders shaking, dry heaves of sobbing stopping the blizzard he'd planned on. Ennis eased his arm over onto Jack's scratches and traced them, wondering on the nails that made them, picturing Wilbur and not wanting to. "Jack, I aim t' know. You gonna have t' tell me, coming back t' me marked an' stinkin' of another man."

Jack rolled over, face wet. "Weren't—where your fuckin' casts, Ennis?"

Ennis hit him, regardless of big eyes wide, framed wet by dark eyelashes. “Tell me!”

Jack rolled off the bed, kicked the wall then hopped bare foot and bitching. He sat heavy on the bed, head in hands. “Wilbur been on and on at me, Ennis. Nigglin’ and goadin’ and lookin’ like I got that Rotten on my forehead again.”

“He knows? ‘Bout us?”

“Didn’t say right out, but always with talk about nasty things, Ennis. What he gonna do wi’ this girl, what he done t’ that. Got me talkin’ like it too, an’ what I know? I ain’t ever bin with a girl. Shit, by the time I were done boastin’ on it, I were stud duck a the whole pond a Wyoming.”

“Don’t git scratches from boasting.”

Jack glanced at him. “You right pissed about this, ain’t ya?”

Ennis hit him again.

“Thought so. Shit. It ain’t like you think. We went to a whorehouse, Ennis. Fuckin’ goddamned gen-u-ine whorehouse. You know there whorehouses in Wyoming? Sure beats the hell outta me.”

“You—? Shit, Jack! You had a whore?”

Jack jumped up, expecting fist. Saw the lay of the land and sat down again. “You fucked me up, Ennis Del Mar. I spent five dollars I ain’t ever gonna see again and got nothing fur it but a load of abuse I could’a got back here from you fur free.” Glance at Ennis. “You cain’t never tell no one, Ennis. You know I ain’t queer.”

If it had been funny, Ennis would have laughed, but all he could manage was a dry sob.

“I feel real bad fur Susan. Wilbur had himself a real party, if ya get my drift. An’, Ennis, just so ya know, I were planning t’ use a rubber, if’n I’d gotten... if it been needed, cus I ain’t no idea where those gals been, but Wilbur sure didn’t.”

“Susan gonna have a baby.”

Nineteen and knew nothing that could help.

Jack rubbed hands over face. “I just needed t’ prove somethin’. We gonna be okay ‘bout this?” Ennis didn’t have the heart to tell him it didn’t matter one way or the other, being no *we*.

Jack took silence for affirmation. “In that case,” he punched him. “Where your goddamned casts, Del Mar?”



## Chapter 5

Ennis set the date with Alma. He was stiff and sore but reckoned he could stand up with her and make the vows needed. Legs weren't the problem.

He let Jack do whatever he wanted with his healing body. Need to get crops in when you know snow coming.

After one hard coupling, shoulder hurting so much he'd taken pills and then some more to help other hurting, he said, "Alma an' me gettin' married in two weeks, Jack."

Ennis knew then that he had not understood the nature of Jack's need. Ten to nineteen with no love in between didn't give him the love-smarts to understand someone like Jack Twist. Thought it had all been about bodies. But Jack looked like a man on a cliff, fire behind and nowhere to go but down. Burn or drown, outcome the same. Whatever he said though, whatever he did, Ennis only replied, "Where, Jack? Where we gonna do that." Or, "How we gonna do that? How?" and for these questions, Jack had no answers. His answers were of his heart now and nothing to do with how or where.

In the end, heartsick and weary, Ennis turned to the wall.

Jack watched his back for sometime then said, “I’m gonna tell Alma why her man done busted her up. Reckon my daddy were right about me: rotten.”

Ennis turned. “You ain’t gonna do that. I know you.”

“You know nothin’ ‘bout me or you wouldn’t do this t’ me.”

“I ain’t doin’ it *to* ya. I’m doing it fur ya, an’ if ya cain’t see that—.”

“Shut up, Enins! I sick of hearin’ this from ya! You takin’ my air an’ ma sunshine away and say you doin’ it fur me! Well, I ain’t gonna have you married t’ her.”

He began to drag on pants over stickiness, tripping, falling, ripping them up in anger. Ennis struggled into his, first time with no help, tears at the pain. “Jack, wait up.” Jack didn’t, falling out of the trailer in his haste, wading through snow to the truck. It wouldn’t start, and Ennis had time to climb in alongside him, shivering. “You cain’t—.”

“I kin do what I fuckin’ like, Ennis. What you t’ me?” He pulled out of the yard, hitting the track hard. Ennis groaned at jolting. There was a falter but then grim hands on the wheel, willing not to care.

“Jack.”

“Shut up, Ennis. I done talkin’ t’ ya.”

“Jack, I wanna show ya something.”

“Ya said that once t’ me on Brokeback, an’ look where it got us.”

Ennis glanced at him and in all the horror there was a glimmer of humour and remembrance. Jack glanced back. He slowed, hand over face, stopping entirely. “Goddamn. Why cain’t I jist quit ya, Ennis? I hate yer enough.”

“Will ya come see something wi’ me?”

Jack looked at him. “It gonna change anythin?”

Ennis looked away.

Jack clunked the old truck into gear and followed Ennis's directions. He had no map for anything anymore.

\* \* \* \* \*

It hadn't changed, though he expected it to be smaller, being only nine last time. Maybe he was still small.

He climbed out of the truck, slipping and sliding, only a shirt and pants and still broken bones inside. Jack came round, hauled him up. "This madness, friend. Yer—."

"They drug him around some up here, I reckon, tied by 'is dick. Kin ya imagine that?" Kicked at Jack with his good leg, slipping on his bad, but hit where he wanted, Jack going down. "That only a kick! They drug him around by his dick! Laughin' prob'ly, and he knowing he gonna die and nothin' gonna change that." He began to walk along the bank, trying to remember.

Began to slide down but Jack caught him, grabbed his shirt. "You jist as dead as him, Ennis. You gonna be worse 'an him an' yer gonna do it to yerself! Rope yer own dick into a thin gold harness and have it

drug around.” He slipped, knocked Ennis who tumbled, snow and pain.

“What the fuck!”

Ennis looked up at the voice from hands and knees. Old man stared at him, pissing in the snow. Not pissing... whisky bottle upturned and an amber stain on white, growing.

Jack skidded down alongside him. “What the hell?”

“That what I just said, sonny, an’ wi’ more cause, seeing as you two pissants descended upon me when I were just mindin’ m’ own business. Where the fuck you come from an’ without coats? Shit, boys, you sure looking cold.” He threw the empty bottle down in disgust and began to walk away.

Ennis was staring at the amber stain, arms wrapped around his body, shaking. “This what you want?” He looked at Jack. “This how you wanna end up? You think if ol’ Earl could’a gone back an’ married a littl’ gal and had a decent life he would’a chose t’ be lyin’ there with his dick ripped out?”

The old man turned, considered. “Reckon he wouldn’t choose that, son, but he wouldn’t a changed anythin’ else about his life.” Glanced at Jack, flicking his head to Ennis. “He okay? He ain’t lookin’ s’ good.” He took off his thick coat and wrapped it, with no protest, around thin, shaking shoulders.

\* \* \* \* \*

“This us in nineteen-forty one. That the crew of the USS Louisville, ‘cept the cook, cus I do remember he had the shits that day.” He passed a creased photo to Ennis. “We saw us four years ploughing that goddamned ocean after the Japs attacked.” He paused. “You two dumb fucks done heard of this war, I take it? Earl an’ I worked out right off how things gonna be ‘tween us, though I swear neither a us ever thought on it before that ship.”

Jack glanced at Ennis, but Ennis was having none of it. Jack glared for a while then looked around. “This a real nice trailer. Wish I had me one a these.”

“Son, this a *Airstream*. Closest thing t’ ploughing over that damn ocean I could find. I sits up there cap’ain of my own ship. So, you gonna tell me why you an’ yer skinny friend down there lookin’ where Earl died?”

“How kin ya jist talk on him like that? Like he jist... died.” Ennis felt naked, no hat to hide.

“Well, how else ya want me t’ talk? Dead is dead.”

Ennis pushed the table, hadn’t got it was fixed to the floor, sat back down, abrupt. He still had Rich’s jacket on and hugged it close. Lifetime of nightmares. “What they did. Shit, what they did!”

“Son, life a risky business. Git killed crossin’ the damn roads these days. Thousands a ways t’ die. But ain’t nothin’ to life in the war. Changed us all, whole world changed and never be the same. Lost so many damn men we couldn’t count ‘em. Got to know what important in life. Put things into perspective, if ya get my drift. Earl an’ me had us a real sweet life for twenty years. Not many people git that. If I could change what happen, you kin believe I would. But give up those twenty years? Soon as give up m’ Airstream here. Own captain an’ goin’ where I like fur once. Now, you two punks have t’ be the funniest looking pair I ever did see. You starting a new fashion in Wyoming wi’ no hats and jist shirts when it two-deep in damn snow out there?”

“Ennis an’—.”

“Shut yer damn mouth, Twist. Nobody’s business but ours.”

“You made it his goddamned business, Ennis. *You* did. You brung me here to see where that old boy died so I’d jist wag m’ tail an’ roll over, let you go an’ ruin my life!”

“M’be you two’d like t’ take this out—.”

“You don’t git it, Jack! I ain’t queer! I’m goin’ have m’life wi’ Alma, an’ kiddies, an’ go to the goddamned ballgame and cheer fur the fuckin’ president of the United States of America on the fourth of July with all the other goddamned real men!”

“Like I said, boys—.”

“Like Wilbur?”

“Don’t you bring him int’ this.”

“He in it, Ennis! He yer example of the real man you wanna be?”



“Sit down, boys, you gittin’—.”

“You don’t know shit, Jack Twist, ‘bout bein’ a man. You—.”

“I know ‘bout being your man, Ennis. That what ya want to hear, cus I niver said as much. I jist want t’ be your man.” He glared at Rich.

“You got something you wanna say?”

“Hell, no.”

“You, Del Mar?”

“You killin’ me, Jack. You don’t answer m’ question. Easy to talk ‘bout love. I’ll say it if ya want me to. But there’s no more Brokeback fur us, Jack. There ain’t some damn place over the rainbow where we kin have a life.”

“California real prutty, if you’ve a mind t’come along.” Rich reached behind and pulled out another bottle of whisky. “Got me a littl’ place where I kin piss whatever direction I wanna piss.” Considering Ennis. “You gonna end up with a right odd lookin’ dick, son, if you tryin’ pissin’ in a direction that ain’t natural fur you. I could put some pressure on that busted-lookin’ arm a yours and say you owe it t’ Earl

to piss free.” He tossed back a long swallow. “But I don’t give a goddamned what ya do, so I won’t. I gotta go finish what I doin’ before you two real entertain’ folks showed up. Help yerselves t’m’whisky, an’ let me know when ya decided.” He shuffled out of the door.

Ennis’s knees gave way, sitting hard. “I cain’t do it, Jack. I ain’t made for something as big as you an’ this thing we got. I jist Alma-sized. If I do this thing? Shit, friend, I’d fall so hard into you there be nothing left.”

“Harder than you hit that damn tree when you try corners on t’ see if they fit?”

Ennis made no reply, head on arms on an unmoveable table.

Jack nodded. “Okay, Ennis. I niver thought I were big enough t’ do this, cus I always bin selfish, wanting what I want cus I never got nothing. I’ll do this cus you want it. I’ll do this fur you, Ennis. An’ regardless what I say before, I want ya t’ be happy, cus if you ain’t happy with Alma then that two lives ruined ‘stead a jist mine. Be happy, Ennis.”

He stepped out, blinding white, sound and sight muffled by soft, heavy flakes.

The sound wasn't so muffled that he didn't hear his name being called.

Heard that just as clear as if called in high, mountain air.

\* \* \* \* \*

They rode in back of the Airstream so Ennis could raise his leg, leaning back into Jack's arms, silent from awe at what they were doing. Whisky was helping. Asked the old man why he poured the good stuff on the ground. Said he wasn't going to bring the old coot flowers every time he passed. What kinda man brings flowers?

Jack, watching Rich at the wheel, captain and pissing free, muttered, "What the fuckin' odds, Ennis? What the fuckin' odds?" and later, passing Alma-close, "Too late now, friend. Ya called *my* name."

Ennis just replied, "Needed ya to open the whisky, that all."

They drove west toward the mountains. Snow thickened. Jack cleared the window, peering out, subdued by the immensity of all things. "Hot in California, they say. Don't never snow."

Ennis considered. "Jist fine wi' me. Reckon I like it better when the snow don't come."

The End