



Not Taking No

Jenny

Chapter 1

It was the glance to the vehicle on the road that did it. Heading back the thousand miles and more he'd driven fuelled on hope and the promise of the life he'd been waiting in expectation of for twelve years, he remembered that glance. Sly, shy, scared look to see if they were being observed. Two girls sitting in the car behind them, two men just talking, yet Ennis looked like they were going at it down in the dirt.

If he'd not remembered that look, if that look had not fuelled anger for the next hundred miles when he had nothing else to think about but bitter, hot-tear disappointment, Jack would have gone back to Texas and waited for his next fuck-summoning. Because he understood why things were. Understood, if not agreed. But he did remember the look. It pissed him off. It made him think maybe Ennis talked a crock of shit. Fires of resentment stoked in his belly. He had no thought to go back and beg for something he was never given. He meant go back and make Ennis miserable and sorry, see how he liked having his fucking heart broken.

For once, Jack wasn't willing to take no for an answer.

It was the sorriest looking place he'd ever seen, though he'd only seen it for a few minutes and then from the outside and only when he had time to spare from looking at Ennis. With child maintenance and the chunk Alma would claw off, he guessed Ennis was fucked. Jack had no sympathy. He'd given up his fat life in Texas and driven over a thousand miles on the back of a phone call—not just the telling of him that Ennis was now free, but that Ennis had called at all; that when he most needed someone, Ennis had called him; that Ennis had cried and needed him a thousand miles away and Jack had just come. He'd come to be given a sly, shy, scared look to a road that made his reasons for coming seem like dog shit beneath his feet.

Ennis wasn't home. Jack considered options and chose a place: far side of the river, full view of the shack and close enough to hear a shout. He reckoned he'd hear one or two of those before he was done.

By the time he saw truck lights, he was sitting by a fire, eating ham and eggs.

Ennis climbed out, engine ticking, reached behind for his rifle and came closer.

Jack heard a round being engaged, said mildly, “Hey, Cowboy.”

“Jack? That you?” Ennis waded the stream. “What the fuck ya doin’?”

“You hungry?”

Ennis walked around the tent, shook a rope. “I were expectin’ you t’ be halfway back t’ Texas by now!”

“Texas, here: same difference.”

“I said I were sorry you come all this way, but I told ya how things had t’ be.”

“Well, I got me an issue with that. I sick of you tellin’ me how things gonna be. Why you the one t’ say? Huh? Tell me that, Ennis.”

“You gone loco? What ya gonna do? Camp here fur the rest of ya life?” And there it was again, that look, to a darkness maybe hiding righteous eyes.

Jack tossed a branch into the fire, sparks exploding. He got up swift, Ennis stepping back. “I aim t’ do jist that, Ennis. An’ don’t you think you gittin’ any a my favours, neither. You can go piss in the wind afore I bend over fur you or suck anything you got worth suckin’. I’m gonna be the rain ruinin’ yer day. I wanna see that look some more, Ennis; the one that makes me feel like somethin’ flies crawl over on a sheep’s arse. Everyday, I’ll be here, jist waitin’ for that look t’ make my day. Now, fuck off back t’ yer life, cus I jist withdrew m’ offer of hospitality.” He sat down and pulled out a bottle of whisky, well sampled. As an afterthought, added, “An’ if yer thinkin’ what I think yer thinkin’—don’t. I’m bigger an’ you, an’ I always use kid-gloves wi’ ya up t’ now. But I’m jist pissed enough t’ do some real damage t’ that face a yours, an’ that would be a pity.”

“This ain’t right, Jack. I jist lost m’ girls, an’ then ya do this t’ me.”

“I done give up m’ life and drove a thousand miles t’ do somethin’ else, Ennis, but you still ain’t havin’ it. Now yer making *not* havin’ Alma an’ yer girls yer excuse t’ not want me. So, I bin askin’ m’self, friend, if m’be I ain’t jist been chasin’ a rainbow all these years: every time I thinks I git close, ya jist as far away as ever.”

“You know how it gotta be between us. You know. Niver hear you complain—.”

“You know I ain’t never been agreed to this here situation, but I go along wi’ it cus of ya girls, an’ I know if I force ya t’ choose, you choose them. But you ain’t got them now, Ennis. What you got of them don’t need to keep us apart! Why cain’t ya see that?” He was weak, weak for Ennis Del Mar. Got up from the fire and came close, willing to give what he said he would not. “We could have us that sweet life now, Ennis. You got nothin’ if ya don’t.” He was just close enough to see another furtive glance into the dark and shoved Ennis back into his own shadows.

Ennis scrambled to his feet. “You need t’ be gone in the mornin’!”

Jack walked off, more angry with himself than Ennis.

* * * * *

Jack’s fire died within the hour. Ennis watched the faint light fade, torn. If he had not just driven his girls back to Alma, he reckoned he’d feel different. He had, so he didn’t. He was pissed off with Jack, thought he was selfish and weak, and wallowed in these feelings rather than others which would take him back down into that darkness.

He felt guilty as well; guilty that he had made the phone call which had brought Jack. Guilty and shamed. He didn’t show Jack his heart scraping, and that he had on a long-distance call made him prick with sweat to remember. He reckoned it was only guilt preventing him going down into the darkness for another, less loving reason. Despite Jack’s boast, he could take the son of a bitch any day, for Jack cared more. If you cared about living you were less likely to die trying.

Warring emotions skirmished all night, his body the battleground of their conflict. When he and Jack were together, they were bodies joined. This distant closeness confused the hell out of him. His heart told him to go down to Jack, make things right as he always did, send Jack back to his life, not happy maybe but accepting. His head told him that this was his only place to bring the girls and what he was, what he wanted to do inside Jack, sullied them. Head, heart, head, heart: always so with Ennis, and the feuding made his belly sour, stole sleep.

He peered out of the window in the early light, Jack stripped to the waist, shaving. Ennis walked down with a mug of coffee, which he kept to himself, squatting and watching. Jack kept an eye on him and on his mirror, scraping whiskers and mopping soap. “Mornin’.”

“I kin m’be take a day, Jack, an’ we kin go to a motel over in the next county. I’m sorry ya drove all this way fur nothin’.”

Jack considered. “What we gonna do with a motel?”

“What ya think we gonna do? I need t’ draw ya a picture?”

“Picture of us fuckin’? That I would like t’ see.”

“You in a Alma mood. Ya sound like a dumb fuck.”

Jack laughed. “Niver thought on that afore, but I gits my time a the month an’ all—when Ennis Del Mar say he gonna con-de-send t’ see me. Yep, I got me my time a the month, Ennis.”

Ennis flung the dregs of his coffee at Jack and stomped back up to the cabin.

He had no choice but to go to work: owed his money to Alma and no way round it. Jack appeared to be asleep in the sun, shirt off, hat over face.

* * * * *

It nagged Ennis all day that Jack was there, that he would be there when he got back. It took away his excuse for sullen closeness that constantly missing Jack allowed. It was kinda hard to miss the son of a bitch when he was camped out in your front yard. He left work early, said he'd make it up and redlined on the flat.

Jack heard the truck but didn't look up. He concentrated on Ennis-sounds—walking, clothes brushing, the sounds his boots made—and re-dipped his brush. Ennis stood at his side, head tipped back, considering. “You bin busy.”

Jack cast a quick glance.

“Ya wastin' yer time an' yer money. Though I'm sure Lureen appreciate you paintin' somethin' a hers.” He skirted a newly painted patch on the porch and went into the cabin.

Jack studied the shut door for a while then shouted. “I ain't painted nothin' a Lureen's fur a long time.”

Ennis came out with two beers. Jack added, sly, “Guess that's two a us goin' wi'out the opportunity fur a littl' dippin' a the brush.”

Ennis snorted, took a long drink. “I told ya I wanted ya gone.”

“That why ya come home so early? T' see if I gone?”

Ennis stared into the distance. Jack laughed. “Thought so.” He ran the cold bottle over his neck, undid a button and pushed it down to his chest. “Sure hot paintin'.”

“Quit it, Jack. I ain't a fifteen year ol' gal, impressed with the likes a you.”

“That so?” Jack darted his hand out, confirmed, laughed then tipped his beer up, watching Ennis as he drank. “I'd call that impressed enough, cowboy.”

Ennis glanced around. Jack noted the look. “You wanna come inside?”

Jack followed him in, sticky soles of boots on wood. Ennis’s hands heated him more than hot sun all day, white glare in his eyes darkening Ennis now. Ennis tried for a kiss, but Jack wanted more hands, his shirt opening to Ennis’s insistence. He could feel blood pulse, taste the sex that was to come, hear rasp of hair as Ennis’s hands roamed his chest. When they went to his belt, he stopped them. “Guess I’d better be gettin’ back an’ gettin’ a fire started ‘fore night.” First time he’d ever stopped Ennis. Never seen that look before and liked it.

Ennis wiped his face, grabbed Jack’s sleeve. Seemed unsure what he wanted with it though.

Jack looked at the work-worn fingers. “How it feel, Ennis, to want somethin’ ya can’t have?” He extricated and left, the brilliant whiteness now misting his eyes.

By the time he reached the river he reckoned he was the dumbest jackass in Wyoming, possibly the United States, and he wasn’t ruling out the whole goddamned world. Twelve years of living for the very thing he’d just rejected left him with an ache he knew wasn’t gonna be gone any time this side of Christmas. He strained to hear footfalls behind, felt in his mind arms slide around him, Ennis rocking, soft sounds of childhood, dimly remembered. Arousal sank like a stone, depression deep in his gut. He had no idea what he was doing here and was pretty sure he wasn’t going to get it from Ennis anyway. Temptation to turn and accept the motel, sharing sweat and spunk, overpowered him. Maybe just give Ennis some time. Divorced man might come around. Few months, maybe a year, maybe more.

He turned to see Ennis climbing in his truck and leaving.

Chapter 2

Ennis had a small-man mean streak when he wanted. Feelings bottled so hard fists were like corks, losing it to pressure. Didn't make him popular.

Drove home on whisky fumes and blood choking down his throat from a bloody nose he couldn't stem. Didn't need to hear warbling notes of an old harmonica. Struck him like blasphemy would the self-righteous.

Stumbled in the river, wet and bloody, and stamping in frustration. "You pissin' me off now, Jack! I cain't have ya here like this! Junior sayin': who he, daddy? an' talkin' 'bout ya all the way home. What I 'posed t' say?"

"What you tempted t' say, Ennis? M'be if I heard it from ya occasionally I wouldn't be here!"

Ennis shook, words trapped and pressure building. He picked up a coffee pot and dashed it on the ground. Kicked it out into the dark, drop-touch of fury.

Jack laughed though he regretted his pot. "What ya gonna do with it all now, Ennis? Now you ain't even got Alma t' let off some a that steam a yours? You gonna beat the whole goddamned world up? Cus I know ya, Ennis. I bin the one you blast that steam int' when the mood come on ya. Bet Alma niver really see the real you, huh, cowboy? You drill her like you go at me, shouting till we hoarse and hurtin'?" Ennis stumbled toward him, tried to get a good punch, but Jack caught him, sweaty, fume-bitter bear hug. "I come here t' make ya miserable but I forgot: ya do that real well t' yerself. Shit you stink an' ya got blood all down yer goddamned chin." Lowered Ennis none too gently to the ground and tossed him a cloth. "Ain't gonna tend ya! Don't like ya."

Ennis, surly comment under his breath, "Why you here then," not a question to anyone because both knew the truth.

“Jesus. Give it here.” Jack took the cloth and tipped jaw-clenched face to the sky, dabbing. “You damn near broke ya nose here, Ennis. An’ if ya lose a tooth, you ain’t gettin’ it back this side a heaven.”

Ennis curled his lip. “You the prutty one, fool. Not me.”

Jack’s expression melted the darkness.

Had no effect on Ennis. He knocked the hand away. “Quit it. I’m all right.”

Jack sat back on his heels, contemplating the other. “I could sure use some coffee right about now. Pity about m’ pot.” Waited to see if Ennis made the offer.

Ennis studied his cracked knuckles. “If you come in, will ya leave in the mornin’?”

Jack considered. “That offer includin’ coffee?” and got one of Ennis’s rare smiles that made getting older on nothing more than promises worthwhile.

* * * * *

Jack, nosy and not shy, poked around Ennis’s things. Ennis leant on the old table and watched, cradling coffee. Only the second time Jack had come further into anywhere of his than the porch, and the first time he hadn’t been thinking with his brain. “What Lureen think a all this?”

Jack was testing expressions in Ennis’s shaving mirror and shrugged.

“What ya tell her ya doin’?”

“Told her I were leavin’ her. Thought I was. Had me this phone call from a crazy cryin’ man sayin’ he needin’ me and I had t’ come an’ that—.”

“Shut up. I told ya I sorry fur that!”

“Sorry don’t make a shit of a difference now I done told Lureen I leavin’ her.”

“You gonna drink this coffee now I made it or stand there like a fool makin’ faces at yerself?”

Jack grinned. “Jist seein’ if I look prutty. Got told I was.”

“Fool musta bin drunk.”

“Or tryin’ t’ get int’ my pants m’be....”

Ennis chuckled. “Never had to offer no foolishness t’ do that.”

Jack came and pushed Ennis’s thighs wide, stepped between them, no resistance. “You sayin’ I’m easy, Del Mar?”

Ennis glanced down where crotch pressed hot to crotch. “We got into this already t’night, Jack. Got me nothin’ but a bloody nose. Ain’t gonna start an’ have you say no again.”

Jack shifted weight to the other leg, zipper rasping on zipper. Pushed Ennis back, lying on the table. “You already started.” He bent and tasted whisky-sour breath, no sweet kiss but hard stubble reddening raw skin. Faint taste of Ennis’s blood, strong smell of sweat and nothing to hold but sinew and bone and dirty-blond curls like reins. Knew Ennis was into it now, just as hard and wondered where his make-Ennis-miserable plan had gone. Knew he should stop again, learn him a lesson. Had no lessons left in him he cared to teach.

Then Ennis said no.

Jack lost it for a while, not so pretty, but Ennis took his arm, pushed him to a wall and held him. “Jack, listen. Jack!” and after a time, “You gonna listen t’ me now?” against his cheek, soft enough to melt mountain snow let alone Jack Twist’s anger. “I cain’t do it on the table!” At Jack’s look, an abashed, “I just done cooked fur ‘em there. Rolled pastry fur a pie, an’ all.”

And if they shared nothing else they shared laughter, finding the only real humour in their lives when they were together. Jack began and Ennis carried it on until only kisses could mute them, kisses now of something deeper and more abiding than had been promised on a table.

Jack whispered against eager lips, “Where then, friend? Because one thing fur sure: you could tell me ya’d niver see me again, but I need t’ get this thing on wi’ ya *now*.”

Ennis steered him, press of arm and nudge of thigh, to the bedroom, glanced at Jack and mumbled, “They don’t niver come in here.” Jack felt more was being said, but he’d promised to leave in the morning and that was that.

It was all different and they couldn’t make fingers work or tongues do their job. Hot, redline urgency of the mountain, when they fucked so raw they hurt for hours, wasn’t there. Ennis’s pack of smokes lay with a discarded shirt on the bed. Coins on the nightstand, old socks on the floor, sniffed and allowed another day. So then their kisses took on soft familiarity too. Even a murmured comment or a dry laugh before they were both naked and the bed took them. Ennis lay on Jack, as they mostly always did, Ennis needing to be whoreson drunk to let Jack do the topping. “Told m’self I’d niver do this.”

Jack, quick understanding, which made Ennis glad. “Well, Alma ain’t never goin’ t’ be in this bed, friend. I’m sorry to say it, but it true.”

“You ain’t sorry fur that, Jack. You lyin’.”

“I were sorry fur you, Ennis, fur yer pain. Still not being loved, however you look at it, and I reckon you deserve t’ be loved better than that.”

“We don’t come int’ this world deservin’, an’ I ain’t done nothin’ since t’ earn it.” His hands on Jack’s shoulders, pinning him down as they spoke, shifted, thumbs slipping into armpits, warm and wet for Jack’s reply.

“Then I guess you jist one a the lucky ones who gets t’ be loved fur free.”

When they kissed and rolled and took what they wanted, Ennis could smell Jack on his thumbs, and later all over his fist and belly, so that sweat and come would forever speak Jack's words to him, that he was loved for free by a man who had no reason to care.

The sex had no frightening sense of wrongness and need, so scared them both for that. Fear made fingers tentative, looks uncertain and long, considering then shying away from answers. Ennis bubbled early, a clear slick that tasted like mountain streams, or so Jack claimed. Ennis just held tighter, fingers in long dark hair and blessed the night for the saving of blushes. Didn't stop him pushing harder into Jack's mouth, second best place he liked, when all was said and done. When he held Jack off, rounds clicking too soon into chambers, he was wet with Jack's spit, skin pulled back tight. Jack fought to be back on, lips sucking the skin back over and Ennis, shivering and needing it, rumbled, "You thinkin' a yer daddy again?"

Jack pulled away, sharp laugh. "You remember that?"

"I hardly gonna forget him pissing on ya with that big ol' dick, and all you thinkin' on was that danglin' skin. That one a your best stories." Dragged Jack higher so he could kiss him and taste his own taste. "Reckon that what drew ya to me: you watchin' me washin', up on Brokeback that summer, thinkin' on yer daddy an' what we got in common." Jack left his hand down, playing with Ennis, thinking, pinching high then rubbing loose over tip. "An' I'm gonna shoot wide a my aim, if you keep doin' that." — "Jack! Quit it!"

"I ain't niver thought on my daddy while I goin' at it wi' you! Why you go an' say that an' make me now?"

Ennis, laughing so rarely, that when he did he shook. "Shit, now ya made me need t' piss!" Pushed Jack off and hopped, bare feet tangling in discarded clothes, toward the door.

Jack, missing him, followed.

Rickety old outhouse only took one, so Jack leant on it, studying the stars. “Got me a marble one imported from some goddamned country I ain’t even heard of.”

Ennis’s disembodied voice over a stream of piss. “Had me a real rattlesnake in here last week. Never shit s’fast.”

“Cain’t be, fool. More like m’be a gartersnake?” But looked anxiously at his bare feet anyway.

Ennis emerged, held the door for Jack. “Told m’ girls an’ now they won’t git in it! Had t’ take ‘em t’ town.”

Jack eyed the inside, wouldn’t step in either. “Fuck this,” and pissed off into the dark, high arc catching light from inside. Ennis, gleeful, wrestled him down, pale naked bodies, hard from bed-play and needing it. Then Ennis was enjoying the inside of Jack before the pissing finished and they rolled, wet, dirt plastering them, Jack riding Ennis like he rode the bulls. Ennis jerked up into him, looking like a man trying to escape. Jack leant down and pinned his arms. No escape for Ennis Del Mar. Only gave Ennis more space for the humping and Jack was rammed hard and fast, cock inside him scratching an itch he’d had since Brokeback four months previous. Kinda itch you’re willing to bleed to relieve, nails digging deep and leaving welts, but, oh, the pleasure of the scratching. He arched, crying out, heard an answering bay from a wild creature slinking close, then shot and rained down over Ennis as itch faded to throb. Ennis wasn’t near done scratching and went at it, hard and fearless in the dark, Jack on his back, Jack on his hands and knees, Jack any way Ennis wanted him, filling him, thumping in and panting, saying all the things bottled up inside that only Jack released, climbing inexorably to where he needed to be. Took an hour or more, but with Jack groaning, the smell of him, feel of muscle and hair, Ennis finally found the place and hung there, shivering, firing off and knowing his only rightness in a world of wrong.

River was icy, but they needed more than water in a bowl so waded in, splashing and cursing, stepping on stones in the dark. Jack sat down, coldness where he most needed it and stretched back, washing hair and all. It was an easy thing then for Ennis to follow him to the tent, and curl up under horse blanket and tarp, naked and wet. “Damn bed

too small anyways.” Jack grunted, ridden to exhaustion. “What you gonna tell Lureen when ya turn back up?”

Jack yawned. “Dunno. Got me a long drive t’ think on it though.”

Ennis had nothing to say to that.

Chapter 3

Ennis was alone when he woke, stiff, sore, headache and bad temper. Could hear Jack outside, making a noise and climbed out, blanket-wrapped, hurting, knowing he said things in the dark, inside Jack, that shouldn't ought'a be said if parting to be done. It was half-light, so didn't glance too fearfully but went some ways off, bitching. Reckoned he had a lot to bitch about, wanting something he was the only one stopping him having.

Jack heard him out, loading his truck, breaking camp, methodical and slow.

"I gotta git t' work. Make up fur yesterday. So tired I could m'be sleep till next week." — "You snore like a bear, ain't hardly had me a wink." — "Got a goddamned bite on m' neck, Jack, so help me...."

First sun hit the river and nothing left to bitch about till he saw the cabin. "God almighty! Ya made a right pig's ear a that." Half-painted, it looked like their relationship: undecided.

Jack stowed the last of his things, came over. "Best ya learn how t' finish off by yerself, Ennis."

Ennis heard the implication, hung his head. This was harder than he knew, only Jack doing the leaving. Brokeback-leaving kept him busy and all. Busy and not thinking. Only Jack leaving now. Only Jack. Lot of thinking being done. "You m'be stay an' finish it? Jist fur t'day?" Couldn't look at Jack though he'd stared into him well enough last night.

"Christ, Ennis, if you were a dog I'd fuckin' shoot ya, turnin' on me one minute and bitin' m' fuckin' hand, next rubbin' up m' legs t' get off. What I supposed t' think? If I stay, I gotta go through all this again t'night! You killin' me here." Put his back to Ennis, staring up at the cabin, unfinished. "Cain't go, an' I cain't stay. There no place fur me, Ennis. You done took me outta everywhere an' I jist lost."

Ennis came, stood close behind, opened the blanket and took Jack in. Didn't need to say that Jack not the only one wandering. Jack knew this well enough. Didn't need to say any damn thing. Bound to be lost if no place under God's thumb they could be.

* * * * *

Jack stayed, as they both knew he would. Ennis went to work, but finished early, foot so hard on the pedal it ached. Cabin was almost done, pure white. Jack, half-naked, was also white though not so pure. Ennis brought him a beer, pointed out where he'd missed some and Jack painted him: big sweep to Ennis's shirt. Ennis brought him down, dirt sticking to paint and wrestled the brush away, laughing and running for his life. Jack tackled him and crashed, bringing some blood to Ennis's lip. Ennis kicked out and got to his feet, losing his shirt, which was clutched in Jack's hand. Jack had the brush though, so Ennis kept running and was only caught when he turned, laughter bringing him down, gasping for breath he couldn't find at Jack's wild-white-hair look. Jack had no mercy and plunged the brush deep into Ennis's pants then went there himself, down in the dirt, hands urgent. Ennis surrendered, letting Jack go where he wanted, do what he wanted and they rolled in paint and dust and sweat still laughing because they knew laughter would fade more quickly than white on bodies. No laughing for the lost.

When Jack was done, he helped Ennis to his feet, dressed him. Ennis's eyes were on him and no place else. Made Jack feel good. "Hungry?"

* * * * *

Jack had cooked. Meal laid out on the table for two, but the food sank to Ennis's belly like lead. He sat close to Jack, seeing no need to pretend.

Jack combed his fingers through blond curls, darkened by sweat. "I gotta go now, cowboy."

Ennis made no reply but Jack argued against him anyway. "I cain't do this. Came t' make ya mad enough t' want me. But I cain't afford t' know what I missin', Ennis. Better t' jist have ya on Brokeback fur a few days an' not know this kinda sweetness."

Ennis had no voice, his throat raw from Jack's taking but no words anyway. He closed his eyes and rasped, 'Goin' t' Lureen?'

Jack stood, wiped his mouth. "Nope, decided t' go t' m' daddy's. Cain't see Lureen jist yet. M'be call her furst—test the lie a the land."

Ennis-quick look at Jack was gone before secrets told. "You a mess. Cain't go like that."

Jack hung his head. "Jist paint." They both knew that wasn't what Ennis meant, but the mess Jack was always in at leaving him couldn't be sorted, so no point saying.

Jack was going only he wasn't moving. "When we gonna see each other?"

Ennis pushed out from the table, old friend sickness in his belly. "If I gets some time now, I gotta spend it wi' m' girls. Cain't be getting away till fall."

"Christ, Ennis." But it made the actual moving easier.

Ennis followed him out. "What you thinkin' on? I know you, Jack. You be thinkin' to m'be fill the time?"

Jack wheeled around, poked Ennis. "You got no right t' ask me not to."

"I ain't asking, Jack. Be very sure a that."

Jack was about to bite back but saw the discarded can of paint, forlorn brush whispering of fun and laughter. "Ain't gonna find this even if I wanted. This here thing wi' you a right bitch, but it got me good an' proper. Ain't gonna find what I need someplace else."

"Ain't s' much the findin' I fear as the lookin'. Cain't be told that either, Jack Twist."

Jack opened the door of his truck. "Alma done remarried 'fore your side a the bed cold, Ennis. Ain't heard you complain on that."

Ennis said clear as day, “You ain’t Alma.”

Jack had no trouble looking at Ennis then and did, long and hard. First time he’d heard from Ennis what he needed to hear. What he needed to be able to wait till fall. What he needed to drive away without bitter tears. He wasn’t dog shit after all. He was what Alma wasn’t. And what Alma wasn’t had always seemed to Jack a considerable thing.

He nodded and climbed in. “If I leave m’ daddy’s I’ll let ya know where I’m at, friend.

“You got t’ let go, Ennis, or I cain’t drive.”

Ennis peeled his fingers off the doorpost and watched Jack leave. The warmth sucked out of the night and he shivered.

The cabin, sterile white, beckoned him in.

* * * * *

Ennis woke with his head someplace else. Thumping this bad couldn’t be his. Dry mouth was his though, rolling belly, vomit and kicked whisky bottles, running to the outhouse, all his.

Mess in the kitchen, pots and pans, was Jack’s so Ennis began again, vomiting and head missing where it ought’a be.

He heard a truck. Had a moment of complete clarity in the pain and sickness that this time he would not say no.

Wasn’t Jack though. Was Alma, small and bundled in something that made her smaller. He’d been in a better place to see Alma and went back inside to rinse his mouth, cold water on face, no time for more.

“Ennis?” — “You...?”

He met her on the porch, pulling on the shirt Jack tore off him. Buttons missing but a lot more missing besides. "What's up? Girls okay?"

"They in school. They fine."

"What ya want then? I gotta git me t' work, Alma. Ain't got time to stand around."

"Why Jack Twist here, Ennis?"

Ennis could think of a number of questions, couldn't think on which to ask though.

"What you mean?" seemed a safe bet.

"Girls askin' me: who Jack? Jack a friend a daddy's? What I gonna tell them?"

Didn't like hearing his questions to Jack in Alma's voice. "He jist a friend. Ya know that."

Alma stepped around him, went inside, uninvited, eyes wide at the mess. "He a dirty friend, Ennis."

Headache too bad to do this. Heartache too bad to care. "What you want, Alma?"

"I come t' tell ya that I ain't happy fur ya to see the girls no more."

"What you sayin'? Alma? What you sayin' this fur?"

Shrunk in her bundling, small and spiteful. Righteous though, so all right. "Ain't havin' them here wi' you and dirty Jack Twist, an' don't go an' tell me again he yer fishin' buddy. What you bin fishin' wi' him ain't somethin' I want t' eat!"

"Shut up! Yer don't know nothin' 'bout it."

“M’be. Don’t reckon I want to. I saw you!” Ran her arm over her mouth like wiping something nasty. “You thinkin’ on him when you wi’ me?”

Ennis lost it. Turned nasty. “Well I sure as hell ain’t thinkin’ on the little I ever git from you.” Remembered why she’d come and tried to make it better. “You got no call t’ mix the girls up in this, Alma. Ain’t about them.”

“You think I gonna have them here when he here? M’be he be dirty wi’ the girls an’ all, Ennis. You think on that?”

Ennis swallowed, hard-boiled kind of swallow pain. His voice was small now. Nothing left inside to make words. “Don’t do this. You know I love m’ girls. They everythin’ t’ me.”

Small and bundled had all the power, and she knew it. “Everything but when you needs to go fishin’. Everything but all the times we niver went nowhere. Niver took me nowhere. Niver took the girls nowhere. Every day you ever had given over to that man so you and he could—.”

“I got t’ see them! I’m beggin’ ya here. Don’t make me beg.”

“Then ya got t’ stop wi’ Jack Twist. Cain’t have it. Won’t have it.”

Nothing left. Wasn’t even allowed to be lost in his heart.

Ennis nodded.

Chapter 4

Ennis waited till Saturday and drove to Lightning Flat. Never been so far north and felt the cold. Grocery store knew John C. well enough. Ennis took the direction and headed out.

Place awed him that something of such light and colour, in his mind anyways, could have come from a place so scorched. Swallowed the thought that he was most likely taking away that light for good.

Heard singing inside, old voice telling of a Jesus that never brought his promise of heaven to Ennis. Knocked and found a tiny person, smiles and wrinkles, and saw where Jack got some of his light. “Evenin’, Ma’am. Sorry t’ trouble you, but I’m lookin’ for Jack.”

She shaded eyes lookin’ into the west. “You a friend a Jack’s, Mister—?”

“Del Mar, Ma’am. Ennis Del Mar.”

“Del Mar? Ennis from Brokejack that summer a... when was it? Sixty three or four?”

“Sorry?”

“Oh, don’t mind me. Come aways in. Jist something I say. Jack always Brokeback this and Brokeback that, but I say Brokejack. He never the same after that summer. You’ll take some coffee, Mr Del Mar?”

“It’s Ennis, Ma’am. Is Jack here?”

“He gone with his daddy t’ look at a new mare.” Went to get some coffee and cut a large slice of pie for the too-thin man. “Ennis Del Mar. Well I never. One time it were Ennis this and Ennis that. Feel I knows ya already.”

Ennis pushed the pie away, mumbled apology but took the coffee, grateful. She saw him glance at the clock. “They be back fur supper. Only went t’ the next place. I thought it’d be good fur Jack. He been awful bad since he bin back this week, though he niver once t’ let on when he really hurtin’, only bitchin’ like a baby at small things. He done broke up with Lureen, seems, and it hit him real hard. Real hard.”

Startled Ennis to realise that this person knew Jack too. Maybe better. In other ways. Wanted to know what she knew so his knowledge would be whole. But wasn’t what he’d come for. No knowing Jack at all after this.

The woman filled spaces in talk like she was used to silence and talking to herself. “You seen Jack since Brokeback that summer? He a different man now. Went up there a boy and come down a man. Up and married that Lureen in Childress, Texas, so far away, an’ I know then she wrong fur him. Couldn’t tell ‘im. Said he’d had a disappointment and needed to. Lost the light in his eyes. He always have that light, even as a little ‘un. Even when his daddy take him outta school t’ work on the farm. Near broke Jack’s heart that did, but never once said it. Don’t seem right if someone like Jack cain’t find gladness in t’ world. He always bin my sunshine. Cain’t live without sunshine and the good Lord. You a religious man, Mr Del Mar?”

Ennis didn’t reckon he was and said so, but added the boldest thing he’d said in a long while, “Sure do appreciate sunshine though, Ma’am.”

“Ain’t clever t’ say it, but I reckon make hay while the sun shine about the best advice I ever did hear. Make hay while the sun shine. Good Lord knows I try.”

Ennis felt spinning beneath his feet. Only time he’d felt it before was when the snow had come and Jack had said they were going down. Whole two months with Jack lost, and the world had spun so bad he’d sat in a meadow, holding onto the earth. Spinning now. Never thought to wonder why Jack had married Lureen. Just what men do and nothing strange in that. Never thought to question what Brokeback once or twice a year was doing to Jack. Hurting so much himself he hadn’t heard Jack over the pain. For the first time Ennis understood: Brokejack—and he’d done the breaking.

“There they is now. You’ll stay fur supper?”

Jack didn’t see him at first. First time Ennis had seen Jack when Jack didn’t know he was Ennis-watched. Ennis saw a different man. Slow, heavy, like he was carrying the whole world on shoulders meant to dance. Jack glanced up to the porch, saw him and something hot and hard gripped Ennis by the balls, wouldn’t let go. Felt like he was about to be castrated. Jack looked worse.

Small man climbed out of the truck and spoke to Jack. Strode past Ennis without asking, spat in the dust and went inside.

Ennis wished he’d written the news now. Was going to but couldn’t find the words to say I’m killing you and make it easy.

Jack lifted a saddle from the back of the truck, gave Ennis a look and went toward the barn.

“This a surprise.”

“Surprise me an’ all.”

“What you want?” For all his trying to sound like a grown man, Ennis heard the boy beneath asking for something he was never given enough of.

“Alma come visiting after you gone. Knew you’d bin there.”

“Ain’t nobody’s business but ours, Ennis.”

“It is, Jack. I made it her business when I done married her.” And he saw that Jack now knew why he’d come.

“Jack?” Mother’s voice cut between them. Jack, leaning to the wall, shook his head.

“Jack? Supper on the table.”

Ennis watched the man, not seeing his Jack, but Brokejack. Hiding it just as well as he ever did behind bluff and bluster, but Ennis saw deeper now. Saw to the heart of things and how it was for Jack, how it had been and what it would be. Ennis now saw through a mother's eyes as well.

Didn't have a blanket, but folded Jack in his arms as best he could. "Hush, we find a way, cowboy. Don't take on so."

"Wish I'd quit you that first summer, Ennis. You a goddamned rotten tooth I cain't pull."

He never knew where the laughter came from, but it came anyway. "You tellin' me I make ya throb?"

"Jack! Supper! I won't tell ya again."

He gave Jack a little shake. "Your ma cook better than you?"

"My horse cook better than me."

Ennis tidied Jack enough to pass as a man who still lived. Apart, they went toward the house, neither knowing what had been said, what decided, what left in between yet to give hurt.

Jack sat next to John C. and Ennis's laughter threatened to come again. Jack given that tiny man's diminutive was just plain wrong.

Jack introduced Ennis. John C. nodded like nothing Jack ever said came as a surprise. "You got business in these parts, Del Mar?"

Ennis was a man for all was said and done and made in his head a suitable reply. Out loud was polite enough though, man raised by knocks to respect. Wondered if he was going mad like an old dog he'd owned once, had to be shot. Couldn't stop the laughter,

thinking on this punchy chicken and his hanging of skin. Glanced at Jack but Jack wasn't laughing. Jack wasn't doing much of anything except staring at his plate. Ennis was almost proud he could give so much hurt to so many people. Some kind of man to have that power. Floor was spinning again, and he wanted to mention it, but no one else was holding onto the table. Besides, Jack's ma was talking. He strained to listen, but this big old Brokeback wind was howling and took her words. He shouted into it, needing to be heard, needing for someone to find him, telling them all just how very lost he was.

No one came and the wind took him down into the spinning.

* * * * *

"You a parcel a trouble, Ennis Del Mar. Should a known when I furst saw ya, standing like a scrawny colt in a coat two sizes too big fur ya."

Ennis didn't open his eyes. The spinning had stopped and he had no reason to want it back. "Jack?"

"Who else it be, you dumb fuck? Think my daddy gonna be nursin' ya? He right pissed about the table an' all the trouble you cause."

"Table?"

"Best you don't ask, only I ain't ever eating anything with pickle no more."

"Did ya hit me?"

"Huh? No, fool! You done passed out after like a girl at a dance an' hit yer head. Right pretty swoon. You bin eating the shit fur promises you fed me on these last few years?"

Ennis opened his eyes. Jack looked good, albeit through tears. "Alma say I cain't see m' girls no more, Jack. Not if I still seein' you."

Jack laid a sponge-cool hand over hot eyes, closing them so Ennis seeing nothing. “That better?”

Ennis turned his face into the palm and Jack thumb-stroked stubbled cheek. “Six years or so an’ they be able to decide fur themselves what they want t’ do.”

Ennis held his wrist, kept the hand on his face. “Six years?”

“Better than no years, an’ I kin wait.”

“You bitchin’ miserable when we only gits t’ see each other two times a year.”

“You come here t’ say we ain’t never going t’ see each other, Ennis. Six years a goddamned reprieve after that. I jist doing what I have t’ do and makin’ the best of it.”

Not seeing Jack ever he’d been able to accept because it was unthinkable like God: you got on with it, knowing in your heart it wasn’t true. Thinking on losing Jack for six years was real, real as night with no day. Two thousand days of darkness. Weakness took him again and he showed Jack heart-scrapings he never let loose.

Jack lay next to him on the narrow boy-bed. “Hush. Ma said you prob’ly ain’t eaten more thun whisky for a week and ya need t’ be quiet.”

Ennis tried to push him off.

“They out. Gone fur the day t’ pa’s brother’s place.” Kissed the side of Ennis’s mouth, liked that, so moved higher, taking full lips and some tongue as well. “Christ, growin’ up, dreamed enough times ‘bout doin’ this. Niver thought to be doin’ it here in m’ own bed.”

Ennis cupped Jack’s chin. Didn’t stop the kissing, didn’t think he could, but held him off just enough to ask, “You thought a kissin’ a man when you a boy?”

Jack laughed. “Thought on it somethin’ powerful. You tellin’ me you niver did?”

“Christ, Jack, I had fucked you afore I thought on kissin’ wi’ you!”

Jack gave him a sly look that clenched Ennis’s balls so tight he knew what would soon be coming. “Thought on kissin’ you that first time I see’d ya at Aguire’s.”

Ennis huffed. “Scrawny colt in a coat two sizes too big?”

Never bothered Jack being overheard in Ennis-love talk. “Sure. Wanted to wriggle right in there with ya, loosen up that clenched jaw a mite.” Kissed him to show him just how that loosening to be done. Wide mouthed and wet, they went at it, kissing like that all there was and all they ever wanted. Lost themselves in the pulling off to look, the coming back, the tasting and twisting of tongues. Hand’s pulled hair, fingers into scalps to tear and hold, pet and stroke. Jack slipped his hand under the blankets, Ennis naked but for his shorts, easy to enter. Met Ennis coming up to meet him.

“You dream about that an’ all?”

Jack laughed and knew again why he was willing to wait six years, if that was how it was to be. Knew sweet, funny Ennis was just for him. Wanted that more than the hardness in his hand, which he had considerable want for. Planned to give it some additional attention, but Ennis kept his mouth, wanting it wide to his and slapping wet lip to lip. Jack knelt up, leaning over Ennis, taking him with mouth and fist and speeding up, whole body yearning to finish this thing inside Ennis where he wasn’t often allowed to go. Tried to tell Ennis and ask and flip him over all at once and fell off the bed, hard to his butt, biting his tongue. “Awe, fuck!” But Ennis was laughing so hard his eyes sparkled like water on Brokeback, sunshine dazzled, which made Jack laugh too.

And Ennis knew then that a way needed to be found. Could live without spit and come for six years, maybe always, but couldn’t live without sun sparkling his eyes. Needed sunshine or he’d be in the dark, good and proper. Sat up, a good eight inches of him closer to Jack, slick clear and needy. Jack lips like a kidskin glove oiled on slick. “You a disgrace, Jack Twist.”

Jack, muffled, “You the one wi’ a tent pole lookin’ fur soft ground, friend.”

Ennis held Jack's head lightly, never reconciled to this, which was more than the lying on and taking natural in its way. Never let Alma do this. Never held her head, running fingers through her hair. Jack sucking on his skin and them both knowing it meant a whole lot more than Jack ever letting on. "Jack, easy. I close an' I don't aim t' shoot." Soothed him with fingers, deep in hair. "I took to yer ma, Jack. She a nice lady an' this her house."

Jack sat back on his heels, clear chain of spit and slick between them. "She niver able t' stand up to him though, Ennis. I think she regret that now. Blames herself an' fusses 'bout me though I all growed up and it too late t' fix."

Ennis pulled a blanket to his lap, head hurting to think but thinking needing to be done. "That what you think a me an' all? That I too weak t' stand up t' Alma and you gittin' hurt for that?"

Jack sat next to Ennis. "Cain't lie t' ya. I do some. Reckon she got you good fur no good reason."

"An' you the big man wi' Lureen an' tell her like it is?"

Jack, swift and sharp. "I done up an' left her. Reckon that tell her somethin'." Hard to argue when taste of Ennis in his mouth. He sank his head to his hands. "What we gonna do, Ennis? What we gonna do?"

"I gonna see m' girls." Quick, before Jack could rise, he held him down. "I gonna see them at Alma's. She cain't say no t' that. Hell, m'be I camp out in her goddamned yard till she so mad she give in t' me like a weak thing." Worth it to see Jack's grin and sly look of pleasure. "But here's the thing, Jack. I gotta work. I gotta see m' girls, so what time that leave fur Brokeback an' you I don't rightly see. I m'be see you once a year if I lucky. Gotta work, Jack. Owe Alma, an' she like to make me pay. This time now gonna mean I ain't got no more off till next year."

Jack tipped his head back, silent for a while, which was loud, for Jack. “Used to stare at that damn mark fur hours.”

Ennis lifted his eyes. “What you see?”

Jack shrugged. “Same as I see’d outta the window. Nothin’.”

Chapter 5

Ennis wasn't expecting Jack to like it. He foresaw some Jack-level bitching and was the more worried when it didn't come. He waited to take his leave of Jack's ma, eating something dutifully because he didn't look like no one ever fed him and it wasn't right these modern girls not looking after their men folk right. Wanted to catch Jack's eye but Jack found something else to be looking on.

Went to his truck and lingered, finding fault with tyres and wipers that worked like a bitch though it had not rained for months and not likely to now.

"I be seein' ya then." Wanted to speak of things he could not bear to think on. Jack and the things they did with their bodies done with another, but felt if he said it again Jack might do it just to spite him. Didn't want the image of Jack getting off in another's man's body in his head all the way back. Had it though and no way round. Felt bitter bile rise again, despite ma's food and wondered if he was really sick.

Jack held the door for him, strange look in his eye like Brokeback sky before a storm: impending. Ennis shivered. "You okay?"

Jack gave him a lopsided grin. "See ya."

Ennis, not a suspicious man, shivered again. "You...?" Had no words to ask what he didn't want to understand. "See ya." Ground was so dry he kicked up a storm leaving and couldn't see Jack for the dust in his eyes.

* * * * *

First visit to Alma's went real well. Alma'd won the bout and wasn't into punching Ennis 'less she needed. Ennis let her think what she thought. He was going to see Jack maybe once a year, so maybe she'd won after all. Seemed wrong to him, when from her belly he could see that she'd gotten hers, well and good. Good for him though. Drove a wedge between her and the girls, and they turned to him, old family unchanging. He drove them places, bought them things, took them home for the night and slept in his truck outside,

drove them some more the next day and the next and had no money for a year left when he'd finished. Took on an extra job, working in a bar weekends and three evenings. Reckoned one week he pissed for longer than he slept, but Alma took his money regardless.

Went back the following month and did the same again, Alma growing fat from another man's seed, his seed aching to be where it shouldn't go.

Fell into a routine that was maybe better than death, but he'd never been dead so didn't know for sure. Tempted once or twice to call Jack, even to write, but it was too dark where he was to see what needed to be seen.

Third month after, he took a cut in wages on the ranch. Boss bought a fancy new tractor, laid off two men and said Ennis was lucky he didn't get laid off too. Only kept him on for his way with the horses. Ennis signed on for another two nights in the bar. Gotten used to not sleeping; sometimes slept on his feet, the world passing him by, but he owned his money to Alma and she was making him pay.

Following week the bar owner took him off the bar. Said he could wipe tables and move the barrels if he stopped arguing with the customers. Liked Ennis despite his surly manner so didn't dock his wages. Work was harder though, no tips, and barrels weighing more than Ennis with a back strained from ranching and driving all day.

One evening, ranch boss came in with some men in suits, took a table and ordered drinks. Saw Ennis and was friendly enough. Bought him a drink and made him sit with them for a while, talk about the ranching. Suits were bankers, so Ennis pleased the boss by being cautious about the state of the nation. Was about to go back to work when the boss hollered and smiled. "Here he is. Folks this is the goddamned genius who sold me that new tractor a mine! Set up that swanky new place in town, Newsome's, fancy prices an' all. Jack, come meet everyone."

Jack was all smiles, flashy and white teeth. Shook hands and pulled up a chair, offering round cigars. "Jack here setting up the first Newsome franchise in the whole a Wyoming."

“Whole a the northwest, Lorne; first outside a Texas.”

Ennis didn't know his boss's given name so was grateful for being told by Jack Twist.

“Got some right sweet deals going fur the first month an' all. Offering zero percent on some a the prettiest pieces of equipment you ever did see. Didn't catch your name cowboy.” Turned to Ennis for the first time.

Ennis repressed a smile. He was mad and needed to remember it. “Del Mar.”

“Ennis here one a my best men.”

“That so?” Ennis gave him a look like Jack was about to confirm Ennis his best man too, but Jack only grinned and ordered for everyone, mister popular and smiles all around.

Ennis had to get back to work but was damned if he'd hump barrels or wipe anything of Jack's. Besides, he was curious enough to know where Jack was at and found out soon enough when Jack said he was buying the old Huscombe place and talked mortgages with a suit.

Deciding enough was enough, Ennis said work to be done and went out back into the cooler night. Enough barrels out there to keep him busy till kingdom come.

* * * * *

“Nice friendly town this.” A match rasped to light.

Ennis lifted another barrel and didn't turn.

“Got me a real sweet deal on the house.”

Wiped his arm over sweat, stretched his back and lifted another.

“Lureen practically bit m’ arm off when I said expansion. Only expansion of mine she been interested in fur a long time.”

Trapped his fingers under the barrel and bit back curses trying to save them.

“Member a the Businessmen League a Wyoming me. Got a real nice lapel badge an’ all.”

“You jist a fat man in a suit, Jack, with a head swelled t’ match yer gut.”

Jack laughed. “Now I know you listening cus you flinging out those fistycuff words at me.”

Ennis turned on him, eye-flick to check as ever. “What you have to come here fur? Ain’t the rest of the United States big enough fur you? You listen to anything I ever say, Jack?”

“Sure, Ennis, I listen to everything you say, cus you ain’t the biggest talker so when you do say somethin’ it always amusing to listen on. I come here fur you. I come here so we kin see each other more than once a year. I come here because I need you. Now, you got something else nasty t’ say t’ me, cus I got t’ go and plan some more on how I gonna sort this thing you bin unable to sort fur twelve years. Fuck you and fuck your dumb mouth.”

“Jack. Wait.” Winced when he caught Jack’s sleeve with his broken fingers. “I bin on m’ feet since six this mornin’. I workin’ seventeen-hour days now, an’ I still cain’t keep up. You should a told me.”

“Why, so you talk me outta it? So you kiss me and give me what I need and keep me danglin’ fur a few months more? Ain’t gonna be like that no more. I ain’t nineteen this time wi’ no more t’ my name than you, an’ no way a tellin’ you how I feel. I ain’t camping in yer yard, knowin’ I trespassin’ somewhere I ought not t’ go, but goin’ there anyway cus I desperate. I’m in a fancy big office and a real nice house. I got me more money than I rightly need and plans for what I don’t. What wrong wi’ that hand?” Held it gentle. “Christ, Ennis, look at the state a you. You so thin you ain’t even in those jeans; they staying up on good wishes. You done broke this, fool. No need to make that face; your fault fur being dumb.”

“Quit fussing. I gotta work t’morrow. I’ll wear me some gloves.” But he didn’t object when Jack drove him to the doc’s or waited while it was strapped good and tight.

“That your hand fur beatin’ off an’ all.” Ennis gave him the finger, wrapped, and climbed back into the new truck.

“This belong to Lureen too?”

Jack just grinned, things going his way and Ennis in his truck. “Reckon I married a better ‘un than you. We split up an’ she give me the money.”

Ennis felt very happy very sudden. Doc said he would. World like running water heard through horse blanket and nothing hurt. Tried to use his tongue but heavy in his mouth, moving sluggish and taking him to sleep. Spoke with his heart instead. “It jist cus you so prutty, Jack. ‘S all.”

* * * * *

Fingers throbbled like hell the next day. Stumbled out of bed needing to piss, did that with his other hand but couldn’t dress right. Left off his belt and had to snatch at pants all day. Hand throbbled up or down and wished he didn’t have to drive.

Boss man got told within the hour and came out. “Del Mar, what the hell you doin’?” Didn’t wait for a reply to the obvious and said, “Git int’ town and go see Jack Twist. He got somethin’ said I sure t’ like. Give yerself an easy day. Kin ya drive like that?”

“I cain’t lose this job, Sir.”

“Shit, Ennis, call me Lorne, will ya? An’ I ain’t got no intention of firing ya. Got me a bitch of wife an’ alimony payments, same as you. Make me mad sometimes, and I take it out on you guys. Seems t’ me the whole damn world splittin’ up with their wives. Swear I should a married me a good man, least ways then I don’t got t’ change m’ damn drawers every day.”

Ennis did as he was bid. Hand hurt; he was dog-tired, darkness now coming at him when he least expected it, so for once seeing Jack where Jack shouldn't ought to be didn't rouse him. Jack saw his mood right off, made coffee, sat him down and showed him a radio he'd procured for the tractor then let him sleep, feet up, hat tipped over his eyes. Jack thought he'd die from the pleasure but knew he'd never say that to Ennis.

Easiest day of earning money Ennis ever known, sleeping. Last hour or so he watched Jack from under his hat, admiring the view and thinking. Saw now he'd only known one Jack on Brokeback. The mother had shown him another. Never seen Brokejack till she showed him the way. Now Newsome Jack, suit and tie and wide smile Jack. Made Ennis feel that maybe he'd been talking a crock of shit all his life. Made him think that maybe he'd never left Brokeback Mountain; that he'd lived his whole life like he was nineteen, boy pretending to be a man. Made him think maybe it was time he started making some hay while he still had his own personal sun shining just on him.

He swung his legs down. Jack heard, turned, and Ennis saw that Jack's face waited for its expression, waited to see the lie of the land. Saw that maybe it had always been like this between them. He rode Jack's heart, flick of rein or twitch of knee deciding their direction. "So, friend, I git to see this house a yours, or what?"

* * * * *

Later, sitting on the edge of Jack's large, wide bed, bed made for Texas comfort, Ennis watched Jack undress. "I only here because my hand hurt an' I cain't work. Nothin' changed." — "You settin' yerself up fur a big fall. This house don't change the way things gotta be between us." — "You ain't listenin' to me! Quit that. Jack, the world still out there. There nowhere we can be."

"You hear that?"

"Hear what?"

Jack smiled sly and bit into a soft lobe. "Nothin'. I hear nothin'."

Ennis pushed him off, wiped spit from his ear, but lay down, a concession hard won. “This ain’t gonna work. Ya cain’t jist breeze in an’ think everything solved after all this time.” Took a while for Jack to get Ennis’s shirt off over the bandaged hand but they managed it together. “I kin m’be see ya at the weekends, but I gotta work and then there’s the bar an’ all.” Pants came off real easy once the boots were shed. “You could m’be come in, course, have a drink, occasional like. But it ain’t gonna be what you think, Jack. Cain’t niver be that.”

“That so? What you doing in my bed then, Ennis, nekid and wettin’ me somethin’ fierce?”

Ennis had to concede Jack had a point.

After some kissing that stirred them both, although both were waiting and enjoying the anticipation, Ennis said, puzzled, “Alma say I cain’t see ya, and somehow that mean I git t’ see ya every day—if I want, which I sure don’t, cus you too annoyin’ fur that.”

“I jist too prutty an’ need to be taken in littl’ doses, like that medication I think you been supp’in’ on in secret. Huh, if we see’d each other every day, we’d git t’ spend some time at the vertical, doin’ something other than this. That would be real interesting.”

Ennis was enjoying vertical in his own way and couldn’t reply.

When he was done, face flushed, heart beating hard, he lay back on the pillow, tucked his arm under Jack’s head and pulled close. “Reckon I’m fattenin’ up already.”

Jack stroked his hand lazily over Ennis’s ribs and belly.

“You need t’ buy yerself a good alarm clock, Jack.”

“Huh?”

Ennis twitched a smile, smiling full on and bright inside, knowing Jack would know this well. “If we sharin’ this bed, on an occasional basis only, then I needs me a reliable alarm clock t’ git t’ work.”

Jack sat up. “Am I hearin’ what I think I’m hearin’?”

“How I know what you hearin’, ya dumb fuck?”

“Tell me, Ennis, I need t’ hear it from ya good and clear and out in the open. Bin waiting twelve years.”

Ennis turned on his side, preparing for sleep. “You like an excited pup. Go lick yer balls or some such an’ leave me be.”

Jack rolled him back, straddled him. “Ennis!”

Ennis flung an arm over his eyes. “Jesus, Jack, you worse than Alma when she nag at me.”

Jack dragged the arm off. “Say it, goddamn you!”

“I got t’ git m’ beauty sleep, friend. I ain’t natural prutty like you.”

Jack attacked ribs so thin they were easy targets. “I aim t’ hear you say it!”

Ennis rolled his eyes, light in them bright enough to blind, laughing so hard he hardly had breath to bitch, “Shit, Jack, don’t you niver take no for a goddamned answer?”

The End