

A vibrant red flower, possibly a poppy, is the central focus, set against a clear blue sky. A bright sunburst effect emanates from behind the flower's center, creating a lens flare. The petals are layered and show some texture and color variation from deep red to orange. The overall mood is bright and cheerful.

Spring, Bax
& Butterflies

Riina Y.T.

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

SPRING, BAX & BUTTERFLIES

By Riina Y.T.

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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SPRING, BAX & BUTTERFLIES

By Riina Y.T.

Photo Description

The photograph shows us two blond teenage boys on a sunny day, in front of a stadium. Both are quite buff and wearing identical maroon-colored rugby jerseys. The taller boy has an arm around the other in a gentle embrace whilst pressing a kiss to his forehead. Both appear to be happy and not the least concerned about their public display of affection.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

This is the last day of our senior year of high school. It hasn't been an easy year for us, but we've made it. Please give us a story.

This picture of us can represent the beginning, or the end, of your story for us. How did we make it to this point or where are we going from here?

I love a contemporary, New Adult or Young Adult, romance. On-the-page sex (can be sweet & romantic or hot & steamy) is major a plus. Please no cheating, no vampires/shifters and no BDSM. I love me some angst but an HEA/HFN ending is a must.

Sincerely,

Justin2

Story Info

Genre: new adult, contemporary

Tags: high school, barely legal, first time, coming of age, sports, slow burn/UST, coming out

Word Count: 59,945

Dedication

Justin, this is for you! :)

Acknowledgements

I'd like to send a big “*Thank You*” to all my friends who never fail to make me smile, the Goodreads (M/M Romance) community for giving me the opportunity to participate in this wonderful event and of course everyone who encouraged me in one way or another—you know who you are! You're the best.
:) x

SPRING, BAX & BUTTERFLIES

By Riina Y.T.

Chapter 1

January 14th, 2012

Jacob

The second week of January, Jacob looked out of his bedroom window, over the perfectly manicured lawn, from the recently paved sidewalk to their neighbors' weathered tree house, and realized everything was just as bright and peaceful as always. Alarmingly idyllic. It wasn't exactly surprising since, judging by the weather and sunshine, spring never was that much different from any other season here in southern California. You couldn't really tell when it started or ended, but he knew it would arrive soon. Jacob's eyes caught sight of two white and yellow butterflies dancing beautifully outside his window before they eventually disappeared into the bright sky. Like any other morning, he spotted the McKinley's skinny Siamese cat making her way across the empty street, toward her favorite corner on Jacob's front porch. Outside the Keller's house, a small group of kids, probably around the ages of nine and ten, seemed to be having a great time playing hopscotch and chasing each other down the street. Today appeared to be just like any other sun-kissed and rather uneventful day in suburbia, if it hadn't been for that unnerving feeling Jacob just couldn't shake. Another month, or so, and it would be that time of the year again. *Spring*. The time for love, birth and new beginnings, that whole '*trees bloom, flowers blossom, fruits ripen, vegetables grow and animals reproduce*' thing.

Spring may never be as evident in The Golden State, but it still happened. Spring was unavoidable, no matter how much Jacob tried to erase that season.

The only fond memories of spring were from those days he spent with his grandpa, long before he hit puberty. After the first rain falls in winter, his Grandpa Peter would take him out into the valleys in a rental Jeep to explore. With the beginning of March, you could see carpets of orange-hued California Poppies, pools of deep blue Wild Delphinium and blankets of bright yellow wildflowers. Out in the canyons of Death Valley, they would watch the flowers bloom and breathe moments of life into the dry desert. A few times, Jacob had caught glimpses of small groups of wild horses up on a faraway hill. Jacob looked back on those memories of their spring weekends with a bittersweet smile. Times where his grandpa would pick him up and take him out on real adventures were long gone, and since then not many good memories had followed.

Jacob wasn't sure what he expected to see when he scanned the neighborhood, or what he hoped not to see. All he knew was that spring had knocked on his door once again and changes were just around the corner. People say spring holds the promise of good things to come, but reality proved it wrong more often than not. The earliest memory of *spring gone bad* Jacob could recall was from when he was seven, and the morning when he woke up with a *thousand* red spots on his face. Jacob could still hear his mother fuss about his *magically* appeared measles. Being the outdoors kid Jacob had always been, it felt like the end of the world when he wasn't allowed outside for *days*. The unfortunate events continued that first week of spring the following year when he played in the backyard and Molly, Jacob's hamster, ran away. He was eight and heartbroken for months. *Who knew hamsters were that fast and wouldn't come back when you called their name?*

Jacob had no recollection of any tragic happenings from the age of nine, but when he was ten and his parents got divorced, the curse of spring lived on after all. Jacob and his family had all gathered in a nearby park for one of their infamous spring picnics, complete with painted Easter eggs and Grandma Clara's bunny-shaped carrot cake. It had been one of those rare occasions where everyone Jacob loved came together like a real *family*. He had thought of it as the best day of his life, up until that moment when his parents decided they couldn't live under the same roof anymore. What started with a disagreement over lunch ended with Jacob being left alone with Sarah, his nanny. The argument itself hadn't been surprising, because his parents seemed to constantly shout at each other whenever they were breathing the same air. Jacob knew something was wrong when his dad never came back home after that, and he only got to see him on odd-weekends, which eventually stopped altogether. They had never been really close, and after his parents separated, any relationship with his father was non-existent. It still hurt almost eight years later.

The following year, in early April, Jacob and his mother moved in with his Grandma Clara. She had been lonely since Grandpa Peter passed away so suddenly the year before, and Jacob's mother had struggled with paying the bills after his parents' separation. While they did not move out of California, leaving his friends and starting at a new school was scary. As it turned out, living with Grandma Clara hadn't been all that bad; in fact it had been a true blessing. Jacob had settled in quickly at his new school and made a bunch of good friends, but he would never forget how terrifying all those changes really

were. The year when he turned twelve came and went almost too quietly—no spring incidents, no lost hamsters or fathers. That year they had even planned a family vacation, and for the first time Jacob looked forward to spring again. It would have been his first real vacation, if Grandma Clara hadn't gotten sick so unexpectedly. Instead of a weekend at Disneyland, they had spent that spring and the rest of the year at the hospital, where his friends' parents would drop Jacob off after school. Since his mom was a doctor and spent most of her time there anyway, he refused to stay with some new nanny he didn't know. Jacob had had enough of that all through his childhood, and for once, he just wanted to be with his *family* and not be shut out.

When Jacob turned thirteen, his Grandma Clara died. He was devastated; she'd meant the world to Jacob. With Grandma Clara's exciting stories, silly games and art projects, her caring smiles, tight hugs and kisses, she'd made him feel safe and loved, like he was part of a real family again. He knew his mother loved and cared for him, but she always put her job before him.

That March, when Jacob was thirteen and the world came alive in the bloom of spring, they had laid Grandma Clara to rest.

Today the world appeared seemingly peaceful, but Jacob had a feeling that the changes of spring were just around the corner once again.

On his way downstairs to grab breakfast before heading out to rugby practice, Jacob nearly collided with his mother on the stairs—dressed in her work clothes, her long chestnut brown hair neatly pulled back in a tight pony tail, she was ready to leave for the hospital. Again. He had hardly seen her this week, and probably wouldn't catch her again today. Saturdays were one of her busiest days.

“Good, you're still home, honey. I have wonderful news.”

She looked really excited, Jacob noticed, a little tired but more excited than he had seen her in a while. Maybe she finally got that new position she had recently been telling him about. He didn't know much about it, since she kept most of the details to herself, but Jacob could tell that it had to be of great interest to her.

“They thought you were the best doctor they could have, didn't they?”

Jacob had to admit, he was curious what could be so special about this particular hospital. She had been changing positions a few times over the past years and never had he seen her so secretive and wired. He liked witnessing her excitement about something, whatever it was.

“Yes, isn’t that great? This is going to be a brilliant opportunity.” She smiled and offered him a hug, which he greedily took. There weren’t many hugs anymore these days, after all he was seventeen now, but he missed them nevertheless.

“There will be a lot to think about and not much time, Jacob. I wanted to surprise you. The Gold Coast Heart Centre I told you about, they’re located in Australia, where your Aunt Betty lives.”

Aunt Betty. He had heard a lot more about her in the last few weeks; it should have been a clue. Jacob wondered briefly why they were going to see her now, after all those years when he had never talked to her on the phone. He hadn’t even known his mother had a sister until a couple of years ago.

“We’re going to move to Australia, honey. Isn’t that fun? You might want to pack a suitcase with everything you think you’ll need right away, the rest will be boxed and shipped.”

Wait, what? *Australia? As in far-far-away-Australia?*

It sure was a surprise, and whether he liked it or not, Jacob didn’t know yet. Leaving his friends *now* didn’t sound very exciting, but moving out of the country? That was far from thrilling.

“*When* are we leaving?” By the look on his mother’s face, he was certain that she meant what she said about not having much time. He might not even have dinner at home tonight.

Why Australia? Why now?

“In a few days... There’s still a little time, sweetheart.”

Well, at least he would be able to play the game tomorrow, and say good-bye to his friends. Jacob tried not to be upset, because he could see that this must be a big deal for his mom, and he’d do anything to make her happy. He might be upset with her workaholic lifestyle more times than not, but he would never do anything to stand in her way. She was his mother after all, and he loved her.

But moving across the world overnight? So not cool.

“Don’t give me that look, Coby. If you want to stay and finish senior year with your friends, we might find a way, you know. We’ll talk about the possibilities tonight, honey. I’m sorry, but I’ve got to go now or else I’ll be late. You know how I don’t like to be late.”

“Sure. We’ll talk tonight.”

Jacob didn’t know much about Australia, he watched the occasional TV show, and yes, he knew they talked funny, at least some did, and that they had rugby. A lot more rugby. Oh wait, rugby!

The idea suddenly didn’t sound that bad anymore. Jacob wasn’t a fanatic, but playing rugby had been his *thing* for the past few years and going to a school where they played proper rugby sounded pretty thrilling.

He might get to see some real matches, championships even, with his favorite teams and all.

In a stadium. Yeah, he could do Australia.

February 6th, 2012

Baxter

Walking down the school corridor had never felt so nerve-racking in his life. Baxter’s heart hammered like crazy, and his palms were uncomfortably sweaty. On his way up the stairs, he nodded to classmates who were welcoming him back with cheerful smiles, but ignored them otherwise. Coach Connor was the only one he wanted to see and Baxter had to find him before his first period began. His nerves were going haywire and he wasn’t so sure how long he would be able to keep his breakfast in him. He couldn’t afford to be late, especially not today after he had missed the actual first day of school two weeks ago. The missed classes weren’t what bothered him, it was far worse than a few lost hours of maths and chemistry. Baxter had been on edge for the past five days since Matt texted him the terrible news. Coach had replaced him on the school’s rugby team. *Unbelievable*. Never would he have thought Coach Connor would bench *him*. He was his best prop. No, Baxter was his best player altogether.

Apparently, some thought that the new transfer student was better. Baxter shook his head. Could that even be possible? Not to sound vain or anything, but he was a bloody good player, especially for his eighteen years. His good reputation was well deserved, too. Practice had been Baxter’s life for as long as he could remember. He basically lived for footy, and he had promised himself that he would do anything to make his dreams become reality. He was going to become a pro player for the rugby league. Senior year wasn’t going to be easy and Baxter had to be part of it. He would make it too. There was no arguing it;

he needed *his* spot back and to play, for the sake of the school, his future, and most of all Baxter's sanity. If Coach would bench him for the entire season, he was certainly going to go insane. And how was he going to make the Schoolboys if he wasn't bloody playing?

A sudden collision with a solid body shook Baxter out of his thoughts.

"Watch where you're going, mate." A mumbled sorry came in response; anything else the guy might have said positively drowned in the loud chatter coming from the other students around them, laughing over shared stories from the weekend. How everyone could be so awake at this hour was a mystery to Baxter. He wasn't a morning person, and in a perfect world, mornings were for sleeping. In all this frenzy, Baxter didn't spare the guy he had just collided with, a second look. The panic over the rugby team was too overwhelming to be his usual, friendly self.

He pushed through the thickening crowd when he felt a sudden chill *zap* down his spine. Baxter threw a quick look over his shoulder, and caught a glimpse of an unfamiliar face. For a long heartbeat or two, the guy's dark, probably brown, eyes locked with his before he disappeared completely into the crowd of students. *Strange*. He couldn't pin down that odd feeling he had just experienced. With an inward shrug, Baxter turned and pushed his way through the crowded halls.

When he rounded the corner leading towards his biology class, he ran into another, more familiar but just as solid body. Bloody hell, he had to watch out better. An injury would be the last thing he needed.

"Hey, B! You're early." Baxter was glad to see Matt as cheerful as ever. Leave it to his best friend to hand out good vibes.

"I was hoping to find Coach C.; you haven't seen him by any chance?" He still had ten minutes or so if he caught him quickly. Matt shook his head and winked at him.

"Come on, I let you copy my notes from Friday. Mrs. Brown wasn't pleased with your absence, I'm sure she is going to be on your arse today." *Great*. Baxter bloody hated biology, and maths. How he was going to survive three *long* periods filled with macromolecules and juggling numbers, when all he could think of was that damned newbie who might take away his position, was anyone's guess.

“B-Man is back! Woot!” Baxter couldn’t help but smile at the rest of his mates welcoming him back, as they waited for Coach Connor to arrive. He truly loved his friends, and there wasn’t anyone on the team he wouldn’t call a friend. They were his *brothers*, an awesome bunch, and everyone played with their heart and soul. The moment he looked over Matt’s broad, athletic shoulders across the field to see where all the commotion came from, Baxter’s eyes instantly settled on a new body amongst the group of his teammates. Alex, their fullback, was most likely telling jokes again, because that’s just what he did. He was a real dag. The new guy’s extremely bubbly laughter instantly reached Baxter’s ears and he thought it was irritating as hell. Baxter willed him to shut up, a sudden reaction that truly surprised him.

“Come on mate, you gotta meet Knight. Plays ball like a pro.” Matt threw his arm around Baxter’s shoulder, gave him a playful tug and led the way. *Knight? So that was the intruder’s name.* Baxter suddenly stopped in his tracks. Maybe he should gather more information before confronting the newbie.

“Where is he from?” Baxter was fairly certain the guy couldn’t be from around here if he seriously thought he could butt in like he belonged.

“Said something about California, I think.”

Cali-what? “A Yank? You’ve got to be kidding me.”

Out of all the places, he’s got to be from overseas.

Grinning at Baxter, Matt nodded knowingly when he saw his friend’s alarmed expression. They once had an exchange student from Beverly Hills, and let’s just say it hadn’t gone well for him. Francis, the guy’s name was, had acted like he had come straight out of a bloody TV show—all sushi and champagne, kiss my arse and high standards. Mr. fancy-pants had lasted a total of two months. Baxter almost felt bad for the poor sucker. *Almost.* Luckily for him, he had his rich parents fly him straight back to his mansion in *Wonderland* on a private jet.

But that new guy right there looked nothing like their former exchange student, which seemed to unsettle Baxter even more. He might be here to stay. There was nothing that screamed glitter and champagne about that one. Even from afar, Baxter could tell he was quite tall and intimidating, probably a few inches shy of his own 1.90 m, which was still somewhat impressive. That fitting maroon and white training jersey did nothing to hide his extremely broad shoulders, and you couldn’t miss those biceps if you tried. The guy’s body screamed strength.

Baxter had to admit the guy looked capable, but that didn't mean he had any right to waltz into his school and take over his life just because Baxter had been ill. He had to find Coach Connor or Mr. A. as soon as possible. Matt snickered beside him, and he could feel his breakfast make its way back up. The real problem was that there wouldn't be a regular position for both of them. It was either newbie-boy or him. Now, Baxter was not a violent person, and he would rather avoid conflicts than be the cause for one, but the moment he saw the guy's innocent smile when their eyes met, Baxter's irritation bubbled over. Without thinking, he marched toward his teammates with every intention of fighting for his position. He wouldn't give it up to anyone, and definitely not to this newbie Yank.

Within the blink of an eye, Baxter crowded Knight and invaded his personal space like he owned it. He didn't know what overcame him just then, but without a second thought, Baxter punched him right in the centre of his muscled chest, gazing down into Knight's slightly flushed face as he wobbled on the spot.

"Think you can come dancing in here from your fancy place in Hollywood and take what's mine? Think again, mate. That's not how it works over here."

For a heartbeat or two, they just stared at each other. Baxter realised that he was the guy he had seen this morning in the school corridor when he'd felt that weird *sensation*. Now, the tension was almost palpable, and when the guy looked nervously into his eyes, Baxter was sure his heart lost its rhythm for a moment too long. The feel of the guy's body heat so close to his own, and the sight of those flushed cheeks on his rather fair skin, made his head spin. For a second, he almost had rather inappropriate thoughts make their way into his brain. *Wow, no way Baxter, back off.*

"Excuse me?"

The guy eventually spoke but still gaped at Baxter, all flustered and in shock. And damn the sun for lighting his innocent, brown eyes and nearly taking Baxter's breath away. They were the bright kind, the kind that reflected beautifully in the sunshine—the kind that could do some serious damage if you let them. Those warm caramelly eyes didn't match the guy's powerfully built body. Despite being a few centimetres shorter, he had quite a domineering stance. God knew why, but Baxter had never felt such a strong pull towards anyone, and it totally threw him.

Get a grip, Bates. This is the guy who wants to take over your life. Exaggeration or not, Baxter had never felt that threatened before, and he didn't know what to do with the sudden overload of anger and irritation.

“Excuse me, my arse. I'm this team's number one prop, not you or anyone else for that matter, got that? Great. Now, get out of my sight before this becomes bloody unpleasant. Yank.”

Those eyes. It took all the strength Baxter could muster to break his gaze and stomp off. That unexpected fury coming alive inside of him freaked Baxter the hell out. Matt quickly came up beside him, and a heartbeat later, he felt a hard smack right into his shoulder.

“Chill the fuck out, B-Man, will you? Don't freak out like a girl who got her make-up stolen. That's weak, mate. Especially for you.” Matt was right, he didn't do shit like that.

“But Coach is going to dump me. For him! He can't do that, Matt.”

He wondered how he'd get out of this mess, if Knight really was that good...

...no he couldn't even finish that thought.

Jacob

Frustration was becoming an all too familiar feeling to Jacob. Wasn't it enough that his mom had dragged him across the ocean in a hurry, and then dropped him off at his aunt and uncle's house like a puppy she'd bought on a whim and realized she wouldn't have the time for? Jacob didn't like to think his mother wouldn't want him around, but sometimes he just hated that she worked day and night. Jacob hadn't seen much of her since they arrived in Australia, and with this new job position, she was going to be a lot busier than before. It hurt.

Jacob thought Aunt Betty was nice enough, and Uncle Eric seemed all right too. So far they hadn't had much time for any bonding to happen, and he had to spend his free time by himself. New house, new city and nothing to do, looked like his new *family* was going to be just as busy with work and their own lives. It was times like these when he truly missed his Grandma Clara the most. She would have known how to make him feel better, wanted and welcomed, with just a smile and a hug. The new school made an extremely positive first

impression; it almost seemed surreal, his teachers and classmates were all very friendly and welcoming. Yeah, except for that encounter just now.

Seriously? What the hell? What was wrong with that guy?

Jacob watched his teammate, who had just gone batshit on him, walk across the field. There was definitely trouble in the air. The guy's friends, Matt and Jai, Jacob thought their names were, quickly crowded the jerk's space and escorted him toward Coach Connor, who chose that moment to come out of the gym. It all just added up to Jacob's frustration, this morning. At least, he would have his books and video games to keep him company until he made proper friends. Jacob had seen a game store down the street, as they passed a strip of shops this morning. He couldn't wait to check it out, and hopefully get the new Nintendo game he'd had his eyes on for a while. There was also a comic book store somewhere close, his aunt promised. Jacob was definitely going to check that one out as well. One could never have enough to read and play. But Jacob also *needed* to play ball, and he had been *so* thrilled when Coach Connor made him prop of their team. Prop! For some reason, he just seemed to enjoy being prop the most.

Now, with that Bates guy throwing a hissy fit and accusing him of stealing his position, Jacob felt frustrated all over again. He didn't want to get benched or have to quit, the team had been fun so far. The guys all seemed pretty decent, and if Jacob loved something more than his comics and video games, it was rugby. Jacob wasn't quite as tall and scary, but it didn't mean he would let that jerk push him around like this. If Coach Connor wanted him to be prop, Jacob was going to fucking be prop.

When Jacob was six years old, his Grandpa Peter gave him his first baseball glove, ball and bat and taught him how to play. From the age of ten, he had spent most of his time chasing soccer balls across the field with his friends. He fell in love with football the moment his neighbors, Tim and Jessie, tossed him a brown egg-shaped ball, and he knew rugby was going to be *his* thing when he got into eighth grade, back when they lived with Grandma Clara in Grossmont. Graig, one of his closest friends at Grossmont Junior High School, talked him into joining the San Diego Aztec Rugby Club, which, so far, had been Jacob's most thrilling experience. It had been real rugby! Maybe they hadn't played as hard or as much as Australians did, but it had been great. He already missed his guys from back home, but he knew pining over it wouldn't help him now. Jacob had been sure that the friends he had made back in Grossmont would be friends for a lifetime. *Guess you shouldn't take anything for granted.* Jacob had to move on, be strong.

But why do I have to go through all this again my last year of high school?

Jacob knew it wasn't a punishment, and there were worse things than changing schools, but sometimes it just wasn't easy or particularly fun. Like right now. When Coach Connor had asked him on his first day here at Keebra Park, what position Jacob could play, and whether he thought he could handle prop, Jacob thought it was a sign, and he wouldn't let it slip away now. Without having to think twice, Jacob told him he would be the best prop he ever had. Coach Connor seemed rather pleased with that, and in fact Jacob had played a mean prop for the past three years at Grossmont High School, especially the last year when he had been at his best. He didn't think he would disappoint his new coach.

Every position has set specialties that are crucial to the performance of the entire team, and some may say that prop is the toughest position. It didn't mean much to Jacob because playing ball in any position came quite naturally to him. If he had any say though, he'd really like to continue playing prop.

“Coach! He is *not* going to replace me.”

Out of the blue, the guy was in his face again and damn was he tall. Jacob stood quite an impressive height himself but Bates had at least three inches on him. No, he wouldn't let that scare him. Impress maybe, but not scare.

“Why not? Obviously, I am the better prop.” *Ha! Take that, Bates.*

The guy gaped at him; he probably didn't think Jacob would dare to open his mouth after that weak first attempt earlier. Truthfully, it surprised Jacob too, since he wasn't naturally mean and didn't carry himself like a king as he'd seen some of the guys do. Something about that Bates guy provoked him to the bone, and he would stand his ground the best he could.

“Coach, please. You can't do this!”

To everyone's surprise, Bates seemed to lose it and actually *cried out* with desperation. The guy had either had a pretty rough day or was testy. Coach Connor seemed taken aback for a moment, and Jacob thought it must've been a bad day for him, and he felt almost sympathetic. He wondered briefly whether the guy would start stomping on the spot like a toddler too, but all Jacob got was a death glare. Jacob let out a sigh he hadn't noticed he was holding.

“Knight, Bates. Go grab a burger tonight. I want you two to work out those issues before tomorrow, you hear me?”

Jacob's first impression of Coach Connor had been incredibly cool. He seemed like a good coach, approachable and supportive. But, the fire in those eyes told Jacob he could probably become quite unpleasant if his team wouldn't behave. Jacob had no interest in challenging his patience.

"Yes, sir," both answered in unison.

"Good. Because I won't have my two best players go at each other like girls a second time." They exchanged quick looks, and one thing was clear—neither of them had any idea how to solve this issue.

"But Coach, what are we supposed to do?!" Bates complained his voice deep and rough but barely a whisper when he turned to Jacob. "I'm not going to be benched all season, you hear me?"

Was he threatening him? Jacob shrugged and gritted his teeth. "Loud and clear."

Damn that guy and his intimidating height. It didn't help that he had the greenest eyes Jacob had ever seen. They appeared to shimmer in some shade of gold in the sun, which was ridiculous, if not impossible.

"You go figure it out, boys. For now, you'll behave like the proper guys you are and get your arses on the field. Push-ups in five!"

Bates shot him one of his intense death glares he seemed to have been practicing before he stomped off toward the open field. Jacob watched his new teammates as they all claimed their familiar positions. He tried to shrug off that tingling sensation he felt in his stomach. *Dammit*. Jacob had to admit one thing, Bates was dangerously gorgeous.

This was going to be anything but an easy task. Working out important issues over dinner with a guy that pushed all his buttons?

Please, someone shoot me now.

Baxter

How could he prove to Coach that he was the better player? Was he even the better player? Baxter was afraid to find out. During practice, they had done a lot of tossing the ball, tackling and running and shit. From that alone, Baxter couldn't tell how good Knight's game really was. If he was *that* legendary, there would be nothing Baxter could do. He had been proving his *talent* for the

past few years, and nobody had ever had a reason to doubt him. His heart was in the game, and he couldn't lose this over anything, not now. This season was going to be the toughest yet, and he couldn't afford to be driven away by some newbie. His future as a pro player was at stake here.

“Morton is going to quit the team.”

And just like that Matt dropped the bomb. The call came while Baxter drove to the restaurant where he was supposed to *grab burgers with Knight*.

“What? How'd you know?”

Tom Morton was leaving the team? And, obviously, Matt had known it all along, hadn't he?

“He told me. First day of school. His parents had been on his arse for a while now.”

That was right. Baxter remembered Tom complaining about his parents telling him to quit footy, quite frequently. “Dropping grades, huh?”

Tom had always been a good player; he had the physique, the technique and the love for the game. Nobody believed he would have to quit because of his grades. Apparently, his parents didn't want him to go pro, at all. Baxter had always felt bad for him and was all the more happy that his own parents were rather thrilled about his high ambitions. He wouldn't know what he'd do if he had to quit.

“Why hasn't Coach said anything? He was all like *'You figure it out boys'* and shit.”

Matt chuckled. That bastard.

“He enjoyed playing mind games with you?”

Damn that guy. The nerve he had, to get his kicks out of a situation like this. Baxter wasn't done with him yet, that was for sure.

“You could have said something to me, you know? I'm your best mate!”

But of course, the Matt he knew would enjoy this little game just as much.

No real surprise there.

“Listen...” Jacob looked nervously around the family restaurant where they'd met twenty minutes ago, chewing on a crispy fry. “Baxter,” he offered with a shrug before taking a bite of his double cheeseburger.

They hadn't officially done introductions yet, but back at school Baxter had overheard his friends addressing the guy by his first name. His friends never called Baxter by his real name, it was always just *B* or *B-Man*. For whatever reason, those nicknames had simply stuck with him ever since and he had never bothered to find out why.

"That's a cool name. Wish my parents had thought of something cooler, too. Like Hercules or Caesar."

For the first time, Baxter saw a real, genuine smile on the guy's face. He noticed how his teeth were all perfectly straight and the tiniest dimples appeared on both his cheeks.

"Why do you want to have such a bloody weird name?" For a brief moment, he wondered why he even cared, it wasn't like wanted to become best friends forever with the guy.

"It's not weird. I think it would be cool to be named after a *divine hero*."

That honest smile and those deep brown eyes did something surprisingly irritating to his stomach, something unfamiliar and strange. *For crying out loud. This isn't the right moment or person to get funny feelings for.* Baxter desperately willed his body to listen.

"Are you all right? Is your food bad? You look a little... green?"

Crap. A sudden chill made its way down his neck, and Baxter felt unexpectedly nervous. *Focus.* Could he trust his voice or expression to not make him come across as *weird* right now?

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm good. You were saying?" He had to get this conversation over with and be gone as fast as possible, before god knew what those eyes would do to him.

"Right. I just wanted to apologize. I had no idea I would be taking away anyone's position, honestly." Jacob looked away for a brief moment and took a drink before their eyes locked again. "When Coach told me I could play prop it felt like a sign, like a promise that this was going to be a good year after all. You know, I didn't want to move across the ocean just to start over. I was already partly through with senior year and then, *this*. I'm still not exactly thrilled." Jacob shrugged defeatedly.

"I only knew everything would be easier if I could at least continue with rugby, you guys seem to know what you're doing, you know?" Jacob chuckled.

“But taking away your position doesn’t sit right with me. You must’ve earned it, and Coach choosing me to play this season doesn’t seem fair, so I understand why you’re upset with me.”

Baxter didn’t quite understand, the guy would just give up the prop position for his sake and be benched? Didn’t he transfer to Keebra on a scholarship? Didn’t he want to become a pro player? There must be something he was missing. And why were those damn eyes bothering him so much?

“Wait, what exactly are you saying?”

Baxter watched Jacob relax into the seat and take a bite of his burger, chewing carefully, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand before speaking again. “I mean I would be happy to play any position I was given. Prop or whatever was available. I just need to play, whatever position is fine.”

Baxter raised an eyebrow, unable to resist the teasing. He knew he must be smirking and he enjoyed it.

“So, you’re basically saying you are bloody awesome in *whatever* position?”

Blinking once, twice—Jacob coughed and nearly spilled his juice. Baxter joined the laughter that followed and thought he might just be able to like the guy after all. When their eyes met across the table, Jacob grinned almost wickedly.

“Maybe. Something like that.”

They shared another long look, and Baxter felt himself return the grin equally wide. He didn’t know why, but it felt like this might actually turn out to be fun.

Jacob reached for his drink and sighed, their eyes locking again, and this time Baxter didn’t like the expression they held. “I would ask if you think whether there would be a chance for me to be on the team without being benched all season, but I guess it isn’t a real option since we are already packed with players.” Baxter hated seeing Jacob’s smile dying as the realisation sank in.

“I have to tell you something.”

He probably should come clean about now as it wouldn’t be fair to put Jacob through more when he was obviously worried about their *little* disaster just as much. It surprised Baxter, he had to admit, but it made the new guy less

threatening and a lot more likeable, and maybe they could actually be real friends now that they would get their issue out of the way.

“You have met Tom Morton, right?” Jacob nodded, chewing on his burger, so Baxter continued. “He is going to quit the team.” At that, Jacob’s jaw literally dropped and the guy gaped at him like he had seen *Santa*.

“I know, right? Coach played us. He knew all along that it wouldn’t be necessary for either of us to be benched.” Baxter could just imagine what might be running through Jacob’s mind right now. He’d felt at a total loss himself when Matt had told him the same thing.

“I don’t even know what to say to that.” Jacob suddenly began to laugh then, and damn if it wasn’t contagious.

While they carried on with their chat and ate their meals, Baxter felt himself relax immensely. Their casual conversation about music, rugby players, matches they were going to watch on TV this weekend and random topics alike turned out to be quite fun. He genuinely enjoyed Jacob’s company; the guy knew how to tell a fun story. The more time passed, the more intriguing Jacob became. In sharp contrast to his powerfully built athlete’s body, there was something almost *naive* about him, which Baxter really liked. Those shy, and sometimes almost sad, smiles he caught glimpses of made Baxter want to reach out and lift all the troubles of the world from his shoulders.

“So tell me, did you live in a fancy mansion in Beverly Hills? With a butler and chauffeur? A maid? Oh! You probably had your own chef too, didn’t you?”

Jacob burst out in that bubbly laughter that Baxter was starting to become quite familiar with. For the ninth time his heart beat twice as fast when Jacob beamed at him with that trademark, eye-krinkling smile from across the table. His body’s reaction still freaked him out, but less each time.

Was it really a good idea to develop a crush on his new teammate? A very *male* teammate at that?

“Are you serious? Man, I’ve never stepped foot in a mansion! Can you imagine? That would have been so awesome. I would *not* have left the country if I owned a mansion, with butler and all.”

And darn is he gorgeous, was all Baxter could think, unable to tear his eyes away for the life of him. Gorgeous, his arse. He had never called a guy gorgeous, and he wouldn’t start now.

Or would he? Not aloud, he wouldn’t.

Baxter was well aware of the flush on his face because it was bloody burning, but he watched Jacob finish his burger with one last, big bite. Those lush lips drew him in, playing tricks on his mind that he couldn't seem to stop.

Are they as velvety as they look?

What would they feel like underneath his fingertips?

Would they fit perfectly against his?

This time Baxter didn't fight the grin or the thoughts that crept into his mind when Jacob spoke again with his mouth full. It was almost cute. "No really, I didn't live anywhere near Hollywood, if that's what you are implying. California is large, you know. And besides, we couldn't have afforded a butler if we wanted to."

It made sense, and Baxter found himself nodding in response. Truthfully, he hadn't given it much thought before, but he knew he shouldn't judge people like that. Stereotyping was so not cool, and he had learned from experience how hurtful it could be.

Baxter couldn't believe how fast the time in Jacob's company passed. While they had a lot of fun just talking and getting to know each other a little, he realised Jacob wasn't such a bad guy after all. He was quite funny, easy to talk to and absolutely *chill*. Almost adorably shy too, despite all those muscles and strength he obviously had in him. And those tingling sensations, he discovered he got from looking at Jacob, intrigued him like nothing else. Could he seriously be attracted to a guy?

There were times when he had wondered what it would be like being with a guy, and in theory it didn't sound so bad, so eventually he admitted to himself it might just be okay if it happened. He always thought some guys were quite hot, and he could appreciate both genders as far as he was concerned. Since Baxter had never felt an attraction towards any guy though, he had dismissed the possibilities of actually being with a guy, and blamed it on curiosity or sexual confusion, *maybe?*

Hell, I'm not planning on falling in love with the guy. Friends though, that he could do.

Now that nothing stood between them anymore, it felt stupid to fuss about their initial disagreement. If they would have met under different circumstances, they would have gotten along pretty well right from the start, wouldn't they?

“Guess I should apologise too.”

It would be stupid to miss out on a friendship and hold an unreasonable grudge. Plus, they had to get along anyway, if they were going to be on the same team after all.

“About what?” Jacob gave him a confused look, and the only thought Baxter had was, *cute*.

“I might have overreacted a little when we first met. That’s not my usual temperament.” Baxter tried to sound as nonchalant as possible, and Jacob smiled understandingly.

Baxter knew from that moment that there was no doubt, they would get along well. He also knew he was in over his head here; something about the guy might just be the death of him.

With a single look his head began to spin, his palms became sweaty and his throat clogged up, leaving him just a little breathless and brought him close to dizziness. *This shit is crazy.*

And yet, for another long moment Baxter couldn’t unlock his gaze from those eyes in front of him. Even in the dark of the poorly lit restaurant, they seemed to sparkle with life and humour. They were the most intense shade of golden brown.

Unnerving and irritating as hell.

Jacob

Outside the restaurant, they stood in front of Baxter’s white Ford Mustang. It was one of those old models that could tell you a hundred stories—all those places the car had seen and people it had met. Was it from the early sixties, maybe? It had obviously been well used, but also excellently taken care of. Jacob thought it was the coolest thing he’d ever seen. Cars had never interested him that much, he preferred action figures over collecting little automobiles, but he could appreciate beauty when he saw it.

“You should come and *actually* try out for Morton’s position then, or at least impress Mr. A. I don’t know how exactly you got to play prop, but I am sure *he* won’t make it that easy for you.”

Holy G, that accent. It had been the first thing Jacob noticed this morning, how deep and rich his voice sounded, and it was challenging to focus on

anything but how he spoke. For the first time, he thought it didn't seem so *funny* how everyone here talked. Well, at least it sounded pretty hot on Baxter; he could probably fall in love with his Australian accent alone.

"Mr. Who?" Jacob couldn't remember any Mr. A. He had met quite a lot of teachers and everyone involved in their rugby team, or so he thought.

"Coach Anderson. Ah that's right, Matt told me he was still out of the country last week to look at possible scholarship candidates. I honestly don't know why nobody has fully informed you about how things work here, but I know from experience our teachers and especially the coaches love to mess with us. They're a cheeky bunch."

"So, there is a lot more that I need to know? Any warnings?"

"Maybe. You might have already realised that we take our footy here serious and everyone expects us to work our arses off, but that shouldn't be a problem when you really want to play. I've learned a lot since I've been at Keebra, and it's become my second home. You saw how awesome everyone here is, and being out on the field together, literally every day, is what keeps us going. You're welcome to join the extra hours of training and working out at the gym with me and some of the guys whenever you want." Baxter winked at him playfully, and Jacob felt his stomach flip.

Does he know his smile is insanely beautiful?

Leaning against the white car, Baxter looked stunningly good in his red leather jacket and those tight fitting dark jeans. But then, he probably looked good in anything.

"Saturdays or Sundays are usually match days, and we often go away for the weekend or on random weekdays. You'll see fast just how much we really play here."

Jacob could only smile and nod. This sounded amazing. Playing ball all the time, whenever he wanted to? Weekends away? He couldn't wish for anything better. Jacob might actually have a great school year after all.

"Basically..." Baxter visibly held his breath before he continued once their eyes met. "We get to spend time playing ball until we burst and shit stars."

They shared a few more laughs before Baxter offered him a ride home, which Jacob was grateful for. Not only did he want to test-drive that awesome car, but he also didn't want to take a bus. Nobody had had any time to truly

show him how to get around yet, and the last thing he needed was to get lost and be attacked by a kangaroo. Were there even wild kangaroos around here? Come to think of it, he hadn't seen any, except on the occasional road signs. He would have to ask Baxter about it some time.

As for transportation, so far, either his aunt or uncle drove him to school in the mornings when one of them headed to work. Usually, it would be Aunt Betty since she was an English teacher at their school. How convenient, huh? Apparently, she also had some influence on his transfer, so he guessed he should be more grateful. The timing had been perfect though, what with the school year here beginning in February. While getting to school wouldn't be a problem, he still needed to figure out the whole *getting home* part, without having to wait for his aunt all the time. He probably had to get used to the bus system soon, or get a bike.

“Meet me in the parking lot tomorrow after class?”

The ride to his aunt's house went by in a blur, and that gravelly voice coming from the driver's seat startled him.

“Umm, sure?” When had they made plans to hang out? How could *that* have slipped by him?

“For your tryout? You know to impress Mr. A? He wouldn't want to miss out on a star player like you, huh?”

Oh. Right. Jacob felt his cheeks heat a little. The teasing in Baxter's voice was clearly evident and set off a series of shivers, starting at his neck and going all the long way down Jacob's spine. He had almost gotten used to it; after all, it happened *a lot* over dinner tonight. *Almost.* It still felt foreign and unnerving, and whenever their eyes met, he thought he could almost taste the static electricity in the air surrounding them.

What is all that about? From the moment he had seen Baxter, he had felt the attraction, but now it seemed almost as if Baxter felt it too. The way his eyes would linger and his voice would drop so low, until it was barely a whisper sometimes. But that couldn't be, could it? A guy like Baxter couldn't be interested in him.

“Um, right. Yeah, I'll see you then. After class,” he managed with a nervous smile as they exchanged phone numbers, just in case.

While Jacob had been well aware of the fact that he *liked* boys, it was all still very new for him. Looking the way he did, all beefy and butch, he'd never felt comfortable enough to approach a guy. Being in high school also meant

there hadn't been that many opportunities to find a boyfriend in the first place. And being outed at the age of fifteen? Being a jock on top of all that? He certainly would have never heard the end of it. Therefore, staying in the closet, as everyone seems to enjoy saying, felt rather safe. Lonely, but safe. Jacob wished he could find a real boyfriend someday. Maybe by the time he went to college, or university, he would get a chance at living his life properly. Maybe then people wouldn't give him shit and accept him the way he was.

When he got home, the house was dark and quiet. His aunt and uncle were probably already in bed, and he was quite positive his mom was still at the hospital. She was always on call. Once he was through with his nightly routine, Aunt Betty appeared in his bedroom door.

“Did you have a good time?”

She gave him a caring smile and held out a stack of what appeared to be fresh towels and the body wash he had asked her to pick up for him. There was this vanilla and coconut wash he just loved. Jacob smiled; he couldn't wait for his shower in the morning.

“Yes, it was fun. I went out with someone from the team.”

Accepting the towels with a *thank you*, he turned to put them on the sink. He never had his own bathroom, and Jacob thought that was pretty cool. A far cry from a mansion and butler, but still cool.

“It's great that you are already making friends, Jacob. Your mother will be very happy.”

Maybe. If she remembers she still has a son, Jacob thought bitterly. Well, he couldn't blame her, could he? After all, she did save lives, and many at that. Who knew how many people wouldn't have made it if his mom had never become who she was now?

Jacob kept telling himself that it was for the best the way things were, and anyway, he had gotten used to it over the years, he just wasn't fully convinced yet that the whole *moving to the other side of the world* thing would work out. But things appeared to take a positive turn, and his mom was offered a great position, as well as the chance to reconnect with her long lost sister. He would be happy for her at least, and maybe they would get to be a happy family after all. So far, he felt quite comfortable here; everyone seemed nice and caring enough.

His aunt and uncle's house was also big enough for the four of them and with the adults gone most of the time Jacob had a lot of space and freedom to

do whatever he liked. Not that he particularly needed the entire house to himself, he preferred to be in someone's company a bit more than being all alone all day, but maybe he would find the answers to that in new friends. Maybe he could find a close friend in Baxter—they had gotten along well tonight after all. Jacob smiled, remembering just how chaotic today had been and how interestingly it had ended. He really liked Baxter.

“All right, you better get some sleep. It's already late. I'll see you in the morning.”

Oh yes, sleep sounded good after a day like *this*. Jacob still couldn't believe everything that had just happened, really had happened. And how could one day be so exhausting?

“Okay. Thanks for the body wash and everything.”

“You're welcome, Jacob. If you need anything at all, just tell me.”

“Thanks, Aunt Betty. I will. Goodnight.” She then left with a smile and *goodnight*.

Jacob let himself fall onto his bed and stared at the ceiling, recalling today's events just one last time before settling to sleep. He was looking forward to tomorrow, Jacob wanted to join the team properly and get their issues out of the way. And wouldn't that be a great start? Maybe spring this year wouldn't turn out as terrible as it had started. He would get over the move to a completely different country and living with total strangers for god knew how long, depending on his future plans. Honestly, Jacob had no idea how this new school would work out. He had always been an excellent student, and despite the many hours he spent at practice, for whatever sport he played at the moment, his grades had never suffered. But what if his previous grades weren't good enough to get him into the university he wanted in Australia?

Jacob knew he had to work harder to catch up on things he'd missed out on, and he also needed to check the possibilities for college soon.

Jacob was aware of his goals—one of them not being the rugby league—but he liked new challenges. The ironic part was that it was practically spring back in his home country, and fall in Australia was still a month away.

This year, Jacob would have to get through spring not once, but twice.

He had never anticipated that.

Chapter 2

February 10th, 2012

Jacob

“Good game, Knight.”

Matt gave Jacob a brotherly slap on the shoulder. *Yuck*. His shirt already clung to his back and chest while warm sweat trickled down his neck. Showers in this kind of weather were officially useless, but Jacob felt *amazing*. Today's rugby practice had been a blast, Coach Anderson seemed to *love* him, his new friends were fun, and there was a lot more rugby and some surfing on this weekend's agenda. It couldn't get any better than this.

“Are you ready for your first real game on Sunday?”

Jacob turned to see Matt grinning from ear to ear. He quickly learned the guy was one of those people who could laugh and smile all day no matter what, and it was rather contagious.

“Sure!” Maybe. “Piece of cake.” Hopefully. Jacob tried for his best *we'll-definitely-kick-ass* smile, and hoped he had succeeded in covering up his uncertainty.

Jacob had only been playing with the team for a very short time, and honestly he was nervous about his first actual match. Really nervous. *First times* always made him feel a bit anxious, and he hadn't settled into their routine well enough yet. The high hopes everyone seemed to have regarding his ability to play ball also didn't help much to reduce his nervousness, but Jacob was looking forward to the game and playing alongside Baxter more than anything. Bax had been evidently pleased with Jacob's fast acceptance by Coach Anderson and the rest of the team. To be honest, Jacob was a little surprised to take over Morton's position just like that. While he knew he wasn't a bad player at all, he still hadn't expected to be accepted so well and so fast. Coach Anderson must have been impressed with him. It was kinda silly, but he felt a bit proud and happy about it. Since he'd had a father who would never show any pride in whatever he did, and then wasn't around at all anymore, it was nice to be acknowledged once in a while.

Going to a brand new school in a different country, playing his favorite sport and hanging out with great guys was all very exciting, and Jacob had to

admit he felt especially flattered with one particular person's unexpected praise and apparent interest. Bax had been admiring his moves on the field and had complimented him on his weight lifting last night, when he'd invited Jacob to go with him to the gym. He basically wouldn't stop asking Jacob to join him until he finally gave in, which was rather sweet. Bax showed him all his favorite workouts and gave away a few of his tips and tricks. Bax said he spent a lot of nights working out, especially before a new season, and he planned on putting some extra hours into his routine this year. *Apparently, he was aiming really high.*

Jacob admired his willpower and devotion. Playing rugby had always been just a hobby to him, one that he loved like nothing else, but it was still simply something to pass the time and get exercise while having fun. He truly loved to play, but not with the same goal most of the guys had. It was quite obvious that pretty much everyone attending Keebra Park was very serious about it, especially the boys who wanted to become pro players. Some of his class mates were here on scholarships, hoping for the best rugby and academic education. He learned that Archie came all the way from England, and as expected, was an incredibly good player with a lot of motivation.

Everyone in their team worked their asses off from early in the morning until late at night; it was like nothing he had ever seen. The school year had only just started and Jacob already felt exhausted at times, and despite his very good stamina and willpower, he quickly learned just how tough it was going to be. A few of his teammates had felt threatened by him because they thought he would eventually take away their spot in the limelight. Jacob had no such intentions, and he hoped he could show Baxter that he would never be a threat to his career. That he would rather they played alongside each other like a real team. The season would be over too quickly and Jacob promised himself he would give his best. It might just be the last real chance he would get to play to his heart's content, and he would make the most of it.

Bax came up beside him and pushed Matt out of earshot, before he whispered close to Jacob's ear. "I hope you like Matt, because he is going to be on your arse now that you've made the team with such ease."

"Shut up, Bates." Matt shoved their friend playfully, apparently having heard every word after all. "I'm only going to be on your arse, mate."

Jacob had wondered briefly what the guy's deal was, he had only seen them together what, three days? And they already appeared to be glued together by

the hip. Would he get to spend more time alone with Bax? Jacob tried not to be jealous of his new friend. He liked Matt a lot. There was absolutely no reason for him to be jealous. Right? They were all just going to be friends. Jacob wished like hell that didn't feel so disappointing.

"No surprise, you're always on my arse." Baxter chuckled and threw one arm over Matt's shoulder, squeezing him tight as they walked down the street to where they had parked earlier. As soon as they reached Bax's Mustang, Matt grabbed his school bag from the back seat and put on his white baseball cap.

"Sorry boys, but I've got places to be today. See you tomorrow at practice!" Matt winked at Jacob, fist-bumped Bax, and then left for the bus stop. Jacob also wished he didn't feel so excited to finally be alone with Bax.

Damn heart, you traitor.

Inside Baxter's car, Jacob felt nervous just sitting in such close proximity to his friend. It had been okay the first couple of times, well close to okay, but the thought of being driven around daily was getting to him, which he thought was a bit strange. Shouldn't it be the other way around? Shouldn't he be feeling more and more comfortable with Bax by now? Instead, Jacob had sweaty hands, and his heart beat twice as fast. It always did whenever he was close to Bax.

Jacob was grateful, though, that Bax decided to take him along wherever they went, and then drive him home. He also liked calling him Bax. Yesterday, he'd told him once again just how cool he thought his name was, and asked if he would mind if Jacob called him Bax because, obviously, that was the coolest nickname you could get. Jacob loved how it sounded on his tongue and wanted to say it aloud as many times as possible.

"Sure, whatever makes you happy, Jazz."

He answered with that deadly smile and a twinkling wink that made Jacob weak in the knees. It appeared that Bax had come up with a pet name himself. Payback? Jacob didn't mind, he thought it was fun to have a pet name for Bax, and he liked being called something that unusual in return. Nobody, besides his mother, had ever given him a nickname before, they all just called him Jacob, which he thought was way boring. The fact that Bax had bothered enough to come up with one made him feel special somehow, and Jacob knew how silly that was.

"Hey, Bax, do you have any plans for tonight?"

“Um, the usual workout? Nothing that couldn't be cancelled, why?” Bax beamed him yet another blinding smile from the driver's seat and started the car. “What do you have in mind?”

“Nothing exciting. I guess I just wondered if you would mind going to the comic book store with me?”

Baxter raised his left eyebrow the way he so often did. “The comic book store?” The surprise was clearly visible on his face.

Jacob shrugged. “Yeah, and maybe go for a movie later.”

Now I sound like I am asking him out on a date. Shit. Why do I have to be so weird sometimes? We're friends. Guys. No movies. No dates. And definitely no kisses.

Jacob groaned inwardly, he had to stop thinking about Bax *that* way. He knew it couldn't be *that* way. They couldn't be *that* way.

“I mean if there is a theater close by... Or not. We don't have to watch anything. The comic book store is fine. I mean, if you have time at all.” *Smooth, Jacob, very smooth.*

Baxter chuckled, apparently amused at Jacob's terrible social skills. *Way to go.*

“Anything you want, Jazz.” Baxter smiled at him fleetingly before fully concentrating on backing the car out of the parking lot. Jacob felt relieved at not being the center of his attention for a moment to regain his cool. Maybe his heart would stop pounding so fast too.

“Great. Thanks. My aunt didn't have time to show me where it is and I'd rather not get lost again today. You'd be my hero.” *What the hell? Brain, please come back, nap time is over.*

“No problem really, it's quite close actually. Wait, you have family here?”

Oh right, they hadn't quite gotten to that part yet. While they talked about a lot of things and Jacob had heard the occasional story about Bax's family, he avoided talking about his where he could. Not that there were any real secrets, but Jacob preferred not to talk about family stuff, and he usually wouldn't bring it up unless someone asked something in particular.

“Yeah. I would like to say *it's a long story* but it really isn't, and it's not very interesting.”

“Try me,” Baxter offered with that dangerously sexy smile he had going so very often.

Being that attractive doesn't help those irritating thoughts of wanting to kiss Bax to go away.

At all.

“So your aunt is your mum's sister, and she's originally from Maine, just like your mum, obviously. She got married to an Australian police officer from Queensland, is an English teacher at our school and has never been home since then?”

“Yep, that's them.”

“And you've never met either of them before last month?”

“Aunt Betty and Mom hadn't seen each other since they each got married, which was only shortly after I was born. There hadn't been many opportunities.” And as far as Jacob knew, there had also been a few misunderstandings and things that had made them lose touch.

“Because they left the States,” Bax said matter-of-factly. “And now you and your mum moved to Southport because she was offered a position at The Gold Coast Heart Centre that she just couldn't turn down.”

Jacob continued to nod away as Baxter clearly enjoyed recapping their entire conversation, he even made a game out of guessing his aunt's name and finding out what classes she taught. Bax seemed to be curious about everything and wanted to know every little detail. Jacob didn't mind so much if it meant spending more time together.

“Yep, she's a good doctor. I think she'd wanted to move here for a few years, wanting to reconnect with her sister, you know? With my grandmother's passing, all of our relatives in the States are now literally gone, so when the time was right, there would have been nothing to keep her from moving to Australia.”

Jacob was past his initial irritation with their move by now. He just wanted to make the best of it, and he would. Jacob had a lot of fears and weaknesses—he was human after all—but giving up wasn't one of them.

“Couldn't you have stayed with someone until graduation? You must have left a lot of friends behind.”

That was probably true. Jacob had made a lot of great friends and he had looked forward to graduating with them, then going to the college he had already picked out and working hard for his dreams. A slight change of plans didn't mean he would miss out on anything; he had learned that early on from his mother, who had always been a great role model in that respect. It was just easy to lose focus sometimes, but Jacob promised he wouldn't now.

"Mom is all the family I have. No graduation or friends were worth staying behind, and really, after graduation I would have lost a lot of friends anyway. I am sure everyone will choose to go different ways, you know?"

"Mh, yeah, I guess I get that." Baxter seemed to concentrate on the traffic ahead of them and it took him a few minutes to speak again. "What about your dad?"

The one topic he absolutely dreaded. It had to come up sooner or later. Jacob was a little surprised it took until now, people usually brought up the *What's your dad do?* question right away.

"I'd rather we not talk about him, ever." *Please?*

"Mhh, okay." The unreadable look Bax gave him unexpectedly tugged at his heart, and Jacob suddenly missed his father, whom he hadn't thought about in a long time. The sadness quickly turned to anger, and he wished he could erase every single memory and thought of the man.

Jacob looked out the window and, with surprise, realized they were still on the road. Had they gotten that engrossed in Jacob's *little* storytelling?

"Bax? Why are we still driving? I thought you said it was close."

"Uh, yeah it really is." Baxter suddenly brought the car to a halt at the curb in front of what looked like a very expensive hotel. One Jacob was sure he would never be able to afford. Jacob turned to look at his friend, when their eyes locked he wondered briefly why Bax always seemed to smile at him like he ate spoonfuls of sunshine with his cereal. His cheerful expression could be a bit unsettling at times, or maybe Jacob just wasn't used to the butterflies in his stomach.

"I guess we drove around in circles for a while." Bax beamed him yet another of his bright, confident smiles and unbuckled his seat belt. Watching his friend from up close didn't make it easy to mirror the simple action.

"Did you get lost or something?"

“No, I enjoyed listening to you talk, Jazz.” He grinned and punched Jacob’s arm playfully. “We are here now, so let’s go.”

That accent still gave Jacob the shivers, and combined with that grin, it was almost too much.

Get a grip Jacob, for crying out loud.

Baxter

The comic book store, huh?

Well, if that wasn’t a surprise. Baxter had honestly thought Jacob was kidding, at first, but then his expression changed into something close to actual embarrassment, and he knew he wasn’t kidding. But really, the bloody comic book store?

Baxter tried his best to keep a straight face all the way to the small corner shop. He remembered passing it a few times with his mates before but had never gone inside. Not that he had a problem with comic books or anything; he just couldn’t see the appeal. And to be completely honest, he would have never pegged Jacob to be into something that geeky; he didn’t seem to fit in with the crowd any more than Bax himself.

The moment they entered the store Baxter found himself wondering if anyone would give them shit for coming in, and whether he had to actually follow Jacob through the entire store, maybe even talk about comics. It made him feel a little nervous. There was no way to impress Jazz here, since he knew nothing about these kinda things. Maybe he could take him bowling or something later, any place where he felt more at ease. When Matt had left them alone earlier, Baxter had hoped he could invite Jazz out and show him around the area, but one thing was for certain, the comic book store hadn’t been on his list of things to do.

“Seriously? This place is called Dark Moan Creations? Who’d think of something like that?”

The question left his lips before he realised he had voiced the words. It wasn’t like he had any interest in finding out the answer or meeting the owner. That thought made him shiver.

“I take it you don’t come here often?”

Baxter laughed, “No. It’s my first time, to be honest.”

“Not much of a reader then?”

Jacob gave him a challenging look, and Baxter found himself quickly getting lost in those big brown eyes. *Stop it. Look away.* And he did. But the guys in their colourful tights and with their big weapons on all the walls around him felt somehow intimidating enough for him to avert his eyes again to something less dizzying. Which Jazz's eyes weren't. *Well, crap.*

“Do you honestly consider comic books *real* books? Aren't they just ninety percent pictures?”

“Ohhh, listen to you. That's a bit harsh, man. They are graphic *novels*, and it may be applied broadly, but they all tell stories in written words, so yeah I'd say they count as *real* books.”

“With more pictures than words, sounds like cheating to me, mate.” Baxter was trying to be funny, not offensive, but the look Jacob gave him told him he failed big time. *Crap.*

“Seriously? You're going to diss my comic books? In a comic book store? You are on dangerous ground here, Bax. Are you that suicidal?”

“Hm. You do have a point. I better shut up before Batman attacks me.” Baxter winked at Jacob, trying to lighten the mood a little. He hadn't intended on saying those things, that was pretty dense, but sometimes his mouth was faster than his brain.

“Good plan.” Jacob rolled his eyes at him and Baxter thought it might just have been the cutest thing he'd ever seen. Well, if that wasn't worth the whole trip already.

“Lead on then.”

When he wasn't looking where he was going, he bumped right into Jacob, who literally squawked in surprise. *Oops.* He had been a little blinded by the countless colourful magazines and posters to his right and left, and basically all around him. There were half naked men and barely dressed women, drawn of course, monsters and spaceships, glass boxes full of very expensive merchandising and *toys* literally everywhere. It was almost frightening.

“You can wait outside if you want.”

The uncertainty in Jazz's voice and the nervous smile he gave Baxter made him wonder if he had been a little too mean earlier, and hope he hadn't hurt his friend's feelings with his bullshitting. Maybe Jacob just felt sorry for him. Just how much could he sense about how out of place and intimidated Baxter felt?

“Excuse me? I can handle a comic book store all right.” *Great, I’m such a loser. I don’t even sound convincing to my own ears.* He didn’t know what his problem was, it wasn’t like anyone would attack him for his cluelessness and the monsters certainly wouldn’t come alive and chase him to hell.

I have to get a fucking grip.

“Come on then. As long as you don’t diss anymore superheroes and keep your hands to yourself, I think you are going to be just fine.”

Oh crap, I just hope he doesn’t ever want me to go to conventions and shit.

A comic book store he could manage, probably. Hopefully. But a real life convention?

Baxter wasn’t so sure if he wanted to find out what that would be like. Although, with those arms and that chest, Jazz would probably look bloody good in a costume. Yeah, he’d make a dangerously hot Superman. Or Spiderman. Hell, he would even look good as that blue, furry Beast. Nobody looked good as a blue, furry Beast.

Baxter wasn’t sure if they all dressed up at conventions now, but he’d seen a lot of guys in costumes on TV and the Internet. He smiled to himself. Baxter would suggest a good one for Jacob if it ever came to that. And, then, stay the hell away from this scene.

“So, what are we looking for exactly?” *Please don’t talk comic books to me, please don’t think I know shit, please, please, please.*

“Um, let me go find someone who works here. We can grab the issues I need to catch up on and then leave. I’ll be quick.” *Thank god.*

Jacob gave him an apologetic smile, and Baxter wondered if it really was such a big deal to him, those comics. If it was, hell, Baxter would be the last one to ruin it. He’d play along however long he needed to. He would, at least, try. There is nothing wrong with being in a comic book store.

“It’s okay, really. Take your time.” *I’ll just follow you around like a puppy.*

Which wasn’t all that bad, Jacob had quite an attractive behind. Baxter swallowed hard. The moment he realised the meaning of those thoughts, he felt his cheeks burn feverishly. *Fuck.* It happened again, Baxter was thinking about his mate’s arse in *that* way. Like it was something bloody beautiful, something forbidden and tempting, asking to be touched. Begging him to do the touching.

He had seen Jacob's arse in the showers, just briefly, really, he hadn't been staring. It was one beautiful arse though, he had seen that much. And whatever shorts he wore did nothing to hide it. That dark green and orange pair he wore now did certainly nothing to hide its beauty.

It was difficult to ignore the tingling underneath his skin as the itch to touch Jazz's arse, naked preferably, was becoming stronger.

Somehow, he just couldn't bring himself to feel ashamed enough to look away.

February 17th, 2012

Jacob

Being followed by Bax all the way through the comic book store, last week, had been a lot more awkward than he would have expected; he re-played that day in his head every night before bed. *Geez, he must think I am a total weirdo already.* Clearly, Bax had no interest whatsoever in comic books and he probably didn't like video games or sci-fi movies either. And god bless him if he knew what Manga and Anime were. Well, that wasn't so bad now, was it?

Just because I'm into geeky stuff doesn't mean he will like me any less, right?

Even though their excursion to the comic book store had been somewhat awkward, Bax didn't seem to mind or treat him any different just yet. After Jacob paid for all the comics he so desperately wanted, they took the short walk down to the shopping mall, grabbed pizza and went to see one of the movies Bax had been going on about ever since Jacob had mentioned the cinema. It had been quite a fun night, and it was probably just him who felt awkward, which had a lot to do with Bax buying dinner and insisting on paying for the movie. It felt a lot like a real date, which of course it wasn't.

They were just friends, and friends go grab food and watch movies all the time. And sometimes they paid for each other too. He would just have to invite Bax next time. No big deal.

Bax might not be interested in certain subjects that Jacob was, but they never seemed to run out of places to go, things to do and topics to talk about. Bax even took him bowling and playing darts the other day, which had been absolutely awesome. Jacob was good at the whole roll the ball down the lane

and kill the pins thing, but he still had to learn a bit about throwing darts. At least, it appeared to amuse Bax that he almost threw one out the window that night. The easiness between them made Jacob wish all the more they could go on a real date someday, do all those couple-y things everyone except him did. With Bax, he wanted to try them.

Like that's ever going to happen. Well, a guy could dream, right?

"I like your poster."

Bax's gravelly voice drew him back into the here and now, and Jacob turned to find his friend pointing at the huge framed Hercules on the wall right above his bed. Bax wore his trademark grin, the one that lifted his lip slightly on one side. The one that made Jacob's head spin and his knees weak.

Just why did I have to frame that damn poster?

Jacob started to feel a bit dizzy, and already regretted inviting Bax to study at his place today. The week had gone by in a blur with all the rugby practice, studying to keep up with his upcoming English assignment and trips to the gym and beach with Bax, Matt and some of their friends. For the first time in a while, he had Bax all to himself for the day, and night, which was a real first time altogether. It made Jacob just a little nervous. After studying for Chemistry, they planned on staying in watching movies, resting and recharging for tomorrow's practice and trip to the beach with the entire team. Today was Saturday, a day that had become Jacob's favorite day of the week. Apparently, Matt always had secret plans he wouldn't talk about on Saturdays, which was perfectly fine with Jacob.

Jacob assumed that Bax already knew he liked comics quite a lot, so he hoped it wouldn't throw him off completely now that he had seen his room. He always dreaded that first time someone saw that side of him, the other side, not the butch football player or rugby wannabe, which, honestly, he wasn't. People just always assumed he was one of those apparently air-headed sport fanatics, one of the jocks who couldn't read for the life of them, or whatever stereotypes they had in their minds. Jacob knew everyone had their stereotypes, it was quite inevitable, but despite what everybody thought, Jacob was a geek through and through. He might not look it, but his heart was in it. Like it was in sports.

He collected comic books and action figures, he had piles of gaming magazines in boxes under his bed and shelves filled to the brim with books and comics, especially Manga, Anime DVD's and all his favorite sci-fi and vintage

cartoon series. He also owned all of his favorite vintage video games and a bunch of walk-throughs. Jacob still had his SNES plugged in, and would give good old Zelda a run for its money whenever he could find the time. Time was a problem. Wasn't it always? But whenever he could, Jacob would squeeze in time to catch up on his geek boards online and update his *geek*.

“So this wasn't just a one off now, was it? You really are into those things.”

It was more a statement than a question, and yes, it made Jacob feel as self-conscious as every other time someone had discovered his love for comic books and superheroes.

“The comic books?” he offered nervously, hoping Bax wouldn't notice that he wanted to sink into the ground right now, or maybe vanish into thin air. He'd be fine with either.

“Yeah, and all that other stuff. Look at all those tiny figures, wow. You've got like a million here.”

Bax ran his finger along the wooden shelf which held half of his collection of figurines, the rest were packed away neatly in boxes, most of which were still mint in package and hopefully would stay that way.

“Not quite a million yet, but yeah, I do have a lot.” Jacob hated feeling like Bax was judging him for the first time and might consider him too weird to hang out with anymore. And if that wouldn't totally ruin his mood, and life.

“No kidding. But hey, I don't see any I know. Don't you have Batman or Spiderman?”

Jacob chuckled at Bax's confused expression. He guessed he wouldn't know any of those in front of him. Truthfully, most were Anime characters, his Marvel figurines hadn't been on display for quite a while.

“I do, but they're packed away. I put those I like the most on display. The others are wrapped up in boxes.” Jacob shrugged and tried to play it cool, which wasn't working. He felt sweaty and just a little more dizzy. *Great.*

“You have more than those? Seriously?” Bax beamed him a wide-eyed look, and Jacob could only shrug some more in response. “Guilty as charged.”

God, please don't let him think I am a complete freak.

Baxter

“You think I am a complete freak, don't you?”

Baxter looked up from his papers and was instantly met by Jazz's beautiful brown eyes. They held something close to worry in them, and Baxter didn't like it.

“What? No. Why would I think that?”

When he moved, his knees bumped slightly against Jazz's underneath the table. Sitting across from him in such close proximity had made that happen quite a few times today. Baxter liked it. If it were up to him, they would study like that every time. Jacob had moved his desk by its wheels into the centre of his room so they could sit on either side while they worked on their assignment.

“You keep staring at Hercules, like all the time, and then giving me that *that* look.”

Huh? Had he been staring that much?

“What look?”

Baxter wasn't sure how to respond to that, because yeah, he had been looking, apparently a bit too obviously, but he had no clue how to explain why he watched Jacob write when he should have been concentrating on his own assignment. Hell, he didn't know why he found Jazz writing more interesting in the first place. Well, he *might* have an idea...

“I don't know, just that look, like... like you think I am a complete freak.”

Oh. Oh, Jazz, I wasn't giving you that look, it was a completely different kind of look.

“I still don't know why I would think that, Jazz. What would make you a freak?”

“Maybe because I have Hercules on my wall? And I am basically drowning in geek... *stuff.*”

Darn, how could he explain that he had been staring at Hercules because he was pretty hot?

He couldn't. And he wouldn't try to explain, but he didn't like that Jazz thought he had any problem with his geeky stuff. True, he wasn't into it; thinking of Hercules as hot was a far cry from liking comics, in fact he still dreaded another visit to the comic book store, which hopefully wouldn't come

any time soon, but he didn't think of Jazz as a freak. He thought Jazz was brilliant with school stuff, fantastic at footy, funny and gorgeous, and the one person he wanted to spend all his free time with. But he couldn't tell him any of those things either, could he?

"Maybe I like Hercules?" He offered with what hopefully looked like an apologetic smile. "He's cool. And I don't think you are a freak, Jazz. If you like all this stuff you are drowning in, that's cool with me." *Please just don't ask me anything about Hercules because I have no frigging clue.*

"Really? You're not just saying that?"

"Why would I do that?"

Jazz shrugged and Baxter wondered why it would matter so much what he thought, and even more so why it would matter to Baxter what Jacob liked. Honestly, he didn't care if the guy liked Madonna and had her posters up on his walls. Although, Hercules surely was a lot more yummy to look at.

"Seriously, Jazz, I might not understand it, but it doesn't bother me and, of course, I don't think of you as a freak or anything based on what you like or don't like."

The relief on Jazz's face was clearly visible, and Baxter felt relieved himself; he hoped they wouldn't bring it up again, because he didn't have any problem with it. Hercules and those little *crazy ass* monsters and colourful heroes weren't all that bad.

"So what else is there I don't know about you, Jazz?" He beamed him a smile in the hope of receiving one in return. "Care to share?"

"What?" Jacob laughed nervously, looking absolutely gorgeous. "I don't know, Bax."

It was fun making Jazz nervous, somehow. He tended to blush easily and a lot more often lately, Baxter had noticed. It made it all the more fun to see his friend's expressions and catalogue each and every one of them.

"Okay, well, let's leave that for later then." Baxter grinned and closed the books before him. "I think we are quite finished here. So, show me your movie collection? We need to get started on our marathon before it gets dark out."

Baxter followed Jacob through the empty house like a well-bred puppy, which reminded him of the day they were at the comic book store, and that

reminded him of their movie date, which hadn't really been a date but absolutely fun and the *best movie date* he had ever had. Movie theatres always gave him the idea of a romantic date—the darkness, the big screen, the smell of popcorn and the obvious and unavoidable closeness. He guessed that those thoughts and the fact that Jacob had been sitting by his side, in the dark, for two hours had brought on that terrible case of butterflies in his stomach.

And that scent, darn that addictive, sweet vanilla that always seemed to linger around Jazz.

It drove him insane.

Now, looking through a shelf full of DVD's with Jazz close to him, he got a good whiff of that irritating scent that sometimes even haunted his dreams. Of course, that was rather crazy, he knew that, but Baxter could swear he smelled vanilla in some of those dreams where he remembered nothing but that scent.

He'd bet his life on it.

Jacob had a great assortment of horror movies, cartoons which partly seemed classic and partly just plain weird and spacey. There were also a few sitcoms and musicals. *Musicals, really?*

And he had a bigger selection of vintage films than their nearby library. Most of them appeared to be black and white and well, *really* old. He picked one up and inspected its cover, and back, and wondered just *how* old it was.

"They do have sound, right?"

"Sound? You mean if the actors talk?" Jazz grinned at him with that smug smile he had started to resent. *Cocky bastard.*

"Yes, Jazz. Do the actors talk? I mean, those movies look way older than my grandmother."

"No." Jacob laughed and shook his head in disbelief. "They're silent movies. Just moving pictures. No talking."

Why the hell anyone would want to watch movies where nobody talked was beyond him. Not to mention the obvious lack of action; explosives and anything along those lines. Baxter didn't see the appeal of black and white when he could have colour, high-definition and lots of *noise*.

"Okay, so no silent ones please. Don't you have a James Bond or something?"

"Something with fast cars and big guns? That's more your thing, Bax?"

Baxter growled at that but he couldn't deny that it was true. It wasn't his fault he liked action. And cars, preferably fast. "Your collection is weak, mate. Yeah I need something more action filled, or else I will fall asleep and we wouldn't want that, would we?" Baxter gave him a wink, which made Jacob roll his eyes.

"Well, my friend, I love horror movies, especially Japanese and vintage. If that's not your thing, I'm sorry. Oh, and yes, I do like to watch silent films every now and then as well, guess you have to deal with that. It doesn't mean we have to watch them together, though, so you can relax." Jacob winked at him in return, and he fought hard not to roll his eyes back at him. "My uncle has got a lot of DVDs that should be more to your taste, let me get them."

Thank god, they settled on a few action movies that had a lot of guns and fast cars. Jacob was right, that was more his thing, and as it turned out Jacob had just as much fun watching those. In between DVDs, they talked a lot, and during a few scenes they just ended up chatting about this and that and commenting on what was happening on screen. One time, they hadn't even realised the movie had ended by the time they finished their discussion. Jazz rewound that one to the part they both remembered stopping at, which took a while to figure out since both remembered different scenes. They settled on somewhere in between.

By the time they finished their third movie, it was already very late and neither Jazz's uncle nor mum had shown up yet. His aunt had been home for a few hours though, and Baxter thought she seemed nice. They all chatted for a few minutes before she disappeared fast and let them continue watching movies in private, which surprised Baxter quite a bit since it was already getting close to midnight and his family wouldn't go out of their way just so he could watch DVDs all night with a friend they didn't know. They were a lot stricter than Jazz's folks appeared to be. Baxter felt a bit jealous, he never enjoyed having friends over, and he hoped he could hang out a lot more often here in the future instead.

During their last movie, Baxter noticed that he had been comparing the guys on TV with Jacob and made a mental list of what *could* turn him on and what he was sure wouldn't. He hadn't kept track on the score since it quickly became obvious the pro's on Jazz's side outweighed pretty much everyone else's. *Hm*. Baxter hadn't often fantasied about actors *that* way, and never before had he thought of a guy his age like that, sexual and intimate.

He had turned eighteen in January and like most of his friends had had the occasional girlfriend. After meeting Jacob, he had realised quickly that nobody had ever been as hypnotising as him. Some of the girls he knew were quite intriguing, yes, and he did care about Amanda when they had dated last year. They had met through a mutual friend and gotten along quite well. Baxter thought she was a pretty nice girl, sweet and bubbly and did all those girly things that ought to drive him crazy, but he always felt like something was missing. It had never been enough for him to lose his sleep over. Jacob somehow managed to rattle his world and now Baxter was introduced to something, or rather someone, he could lose his sleep over, and he often did.

Before Jacob came along, he had never given the whole *thing* that much thought to be honest, he had been sure that he just wasn't as sexual as others. Wasn't everyone different?

Okay, so he had the occasional hard-on in the locker room but who didn't?

Could you really blame a guy? With all those wet, naked bodies in the shower you'd have to be impotent to not sport any wood, and hells, they were all a bunch of hormone-crazed teenagers. Baxter had to admit that sometimes he might have let his eyes linger a moment or two longer than he should have. But did he feel guilty for his ogling? Not really, because what harm did it do? Besides the obvious, being caught and outed as gay, when he wasn't even sure he was. Gay.

He never understood why it would bother anyone else if he were gay. He wouldn't mind if half the school were gay. What made someone gay anyway? Were there rules somewhere? Lines you had to cross? Baxter had only *looked* and maybe fantasied a night or two, but he never acted on it. Would it make him gay if he wanted men but never acted it out? It wasn't like there had been anyone Baxter had been attracted to, anyway. Nobody he wanted to get up close and naked with. He had thought about some hot movie star maybe, or one of them sexy rock stars in their tight pants and ripped shirts, getting all excited and sweaty on stage. Didn't everyone have those moments?

As for guys his age, it had always been a safe zone. There had never been anyone in his school that he found attractive—never met a friend of a friend who would give him butterflies in his stomach. Baxter thought maybe he was only into older guys, like those movie stars and rock singers he felt a little intrigued by. His team was definitely off limits. They were all his friends, and Baxter never wanted to mix friendship and sex. He just couldn't see himself with any of his friends.

Well, a little too late for that now, mate.

Maybe there were first times for everything, even those you thought would definitely never happen. He knew he had to give up and forget his *no sex with friends* policy, not that he had in mind talking Jacob into having sex as soon as possible; hells, first of all he had to admit that he had a serious thing for Jazz. *Admitted. Big time. I am totally crushing on Jazz.*

Baxter couldn't lie to himself if he tried. He was attracted like hell to the guy. For now he could accept that, admitting it to himself wasn't the real problem, but he was far from trying to admit it to anyone else that he liked Jazz, and that he might be gay. Or that he at least was into Jazz. He was far from acting on it as well, it was too difficult to judge whether Jacob wouldn't just rip his head off if he tried something like kissing him. The thought of kissing him made Baxter's head spin, like on an endless roller coaster ride with just a few loops too many.

Was he ready to kiss a guy? Even someone as gorgeous and exciting as Jacob?

Baxter was insanely attracted to the guy, yes, but would that be enough?

He should just give up on it already before he got in too deep, because he was forgetting something very important here. Baxter couldn't do this whole dating shit with Jazz, he couldn't be *gay* when he wanted to become a pro player. He just couldn't, there was no doubt about that.

“Are you up for one more?”

Jazz's cheerful voice reached his ears with a light purr, pulling him right out of his thoughts. Baxter caught himself smiling as he opened his eyes, finding Jazz's bright, brown orbs gazing right at him. Whenever Jazz smiled, he smiled. It was ridiculous.

What a bloody mess.

Chapter 3

March 24th, 2012

Baxter

What really bothered him were those hypnotising eyes. All warm hazel with glitter like honey and gold in the sunlight, framed by thick, black lashes and very masculine features. Jacob wasn't pretty in a girlish way, not with all those well-defined muscles and that hard body. Yet, it did nothing but make him all the more intriguing. Being in close proximity to Jacob proved to be barely manageable at times and, at best, was difficult. Baxter sometimes wanted to avoid time alone with him, like family dinners on Sunday... he just couldn't. Time with Jacob had become essential to his day, like footy and sleep.

“Sorry, what?”

He thought he heard something that sounded a lot like Jacob's voice, but he couldn't be sure because he had probably spaced out again. It'd actually happened once or twice before that he thought he heard him speak, when in fact he wasn't anywhere to be seen. *I might just be going completely crazy.*

“I asked if you wanted to play volley with us? Some of the guys brought their friends along, and they are *dying* to play a few games.”

Concentration could be a bitch, especially when Baxter came eye level with Jazz's upper body. He had to tear his eyes away from those beautifully defined muscles, outlined by just a thin, pale blue T-shirt that clung almost desperately to bulging biceps and a really, really firm chest.

“Think I'll pass on this one, and grab some refreshments first. Come and get me for the next round?” *Or not at all?* He thought bitterly, he hadn't felt that exhausted in quite a while.

Jacob pulled his T-shirt over his head and let it drop onto Baxter's towel, on which he was already sprawled out, ready to sunbathe and relax for as long as possible today. The last few games had seriously worn him out, and practice never was any less exhausting. He deserved the afternoon to rest for a change; who knew when he would get to do just that again with all the games coming up next week, and the following week and so on. He bloody loved his footy, but lately he wanted to spend more quality time with his friends. Or at least with Jazz.

“Sure thing. Catch ya later, then.” Jacob beamed him his trademark, eye-crinkling smile that never failed to make him week in the knees, before he turned and bounced down the beach towards their group of friends.

Yep, he is officially going to be the death of me.

Baxter groaned inwardly and let himself fall onto his back. He would have to get up to grab those *refreshments* in a bit, but he didn't want to move more than was necessary right now. There were days when he dealt just fine with his attraction towards his friend, mostly, especially when they were busy on the field. Then there were others, like today, that made Baxter want to crawl under a big stone and die.

Slowly and painfully.

It just wasn't right to be so desperate to hang out with Jacob, anticipating every moment they could have together, even ditching Matt's invitations to hang out more often than not. In fact, he had hardly spent any alone time with his other friends since he'd met Jacob, and somehow he always found excuses to go places with him instead. He knew that wasn't any more right than that he bloody loved the way Jazz's eyes crinkled and his dimples showed when he smiled. It also wasn't right to call him after they had just hung out just to hear his voice, sometimes making up excuses to do that, and hoping Jazz wouldn't notice that there wasn't any reason for him to call.

He probably bloody noticed the first time.

And it wasn't right to anticipate the tingling on his skin when their bodies accidentally brushed, and even less to initiate those *accidents* more and more often. Yep, lately there hadn't been many things right with him, if he just knew how to make it all stop and go away, he would. Maybe.

Baxter couldn't deny that they had grown quite close over the past month, and sometimes he wondered if anyone else had noticed as well. If they did, at least, nobody had given them shit about it just yet. Maybe the other guys thought they were best friends forever or something, but not even Matt seemed to take it the wrong way, now that he wasn't his number one anymore.

After their extra hours of training with the team, he and Jazz and some of the guys would either go down to the beach or to work out at the gym. Of course, they also spent time studying, and when the time allowed, the two of them would just hang out with movies and a lot of food.

Jazz turned out to be quite a decent cook, and every now and then, he would make something for them to munch on while they took apart his uncle's DVD collection or studied. Or at least attempted to.

Jazz blamed it on his mother's busy schedule and having to learn how to survive on his own early on, but Baxter could tell he really, really enjoyed it. Once he actually caught him baking, which had surprised him a little, but then again, a lot about Jazz surprised him.

Baxter wouldn't have thought the shy, beefy wannabe footy star he had met on the sports field that first day of school was in fact a shy, total and complete geek, who carried at least one book and his Nintendo DS with him wherever he went, and who also knew how to make homemade macaroni and cheese and caramel tarts with pecans for dessert. But that wasn't all, Baxter learned that silent movies and anything vintage, especially horror, meant a big deal to Jazz. His favourite actress was Marilyn Monroe, he loved white chocolate, peach-flavoured candy, and he was literally obsessed with Rocky Road ice cream, vegetable lasagna and potato chips with chocolate sauce.

Besides fooling around with a ball, of any sort, or lifting weights at the gym, going surfing had fast become their favourite pastime. After a long day of practice in the sun, a late afternoon by the water was just what he needed to relax and recharge before tomorrow's game. So here he was, watching Jacob join in on a game of volleyball with their friends, observing teasing muscles and sweat-covered, shiny skin. Even the afternoons were hot everywhere, the beach was no exception. A bright blue, cloudless sky and hot sun shining down on them. One of the guys Baxter didn't know by name threw the volleyball too high, making it impossible for Jacob to do anything but watch as it flew all the way into the water. With a sprint, he ran after it and basically *jumped* right into the water, *saving the day*. Baxter watched his friend's strong, wet and nearly naked body emerge from the ocean, volleyball in hand and a cheerful smile on his full lips.

With every step he made, Jacob's muscles flexed and jumped as he moved gracefully, showing off his strong abs and broad shoulders. *And damn those beautifully defined muscles*. His caramel-coloured skin glittered from the afternoon sun catching the water droplets covering his body. Surrounded by clean, white sand, the intense turquoise sea and the bluest sky, he looked like that divine god Jacob longed to be by name. In Baxter's eyes, he was already perfect as he was.

That gentle smile on his lips that showed off his dimples just slightly and crinkled his eyes only faintly, always made Baxter's heart rate speed up. Every

so often he wished he was a girl, so that he had all the right in the world to just get up from his towel in the sand, throw his arms around his friend's amazing body and kiss the life out of him. But he wasn't, and he couldn't. It sucked.

"From where I stand... you are beautiful."

Baxter couldn't remember where he heard that line, maybe on TV or in a song, maybe he saw it online while browsing Tumblr or some other random site he rarely went on. That bloody line had been stuck in his brain for days now and popped up at the weirdest moments. Yesterday for example, when they were running their arses off on the field, sweating and cursing, and he saw Jazz kick the ball into a corner by the end of the game, annoyed and worn out. His face was flushed bright red from exhaustion, his hair stuck out in every direction, wet and mussed, and all Baxter could think was *"From where I stand... you are beautiful."*

Yes, he'd been quoting that bloody line over and over and it was always directed at Jazz, of course. The guy drove him crazy, more and more each day. Lately Baxter thought everything Jazz did was bloody beautiful.

If he told anyone they would probably send him to see a doctor.

Not that he wanted it to go away, but it couldn't be healthy.

Jacob

He knew that things between them wouldn't work out the first time he saw Bax in his swim trunks. Jacob had never seen anything like it, and there was just something incredibly sexy about that tall, strong body, something that turned him on and made him blush with just one look. Bax was already insanely good looking in their boring blue school uniform and extremely sexy in their maroon rugby jerseys, but in just swim trunks? Yep, Bax was simply stunning from head to toe.

It wasn't just his body; Jacob also had a thing for his short, blond surfer hair, the way it would stick up on the front, just long enough to stay in place and buzzed short on the sides and back. It would probably tickle his fingertips if he ran his hands through it, something he thought about doing so many times, but of course, he couldn't. When it came to his *body*, Jacob had a *serious* thing for Bax's broad chest, with those tight muscles in all the right places. Watching them flex and relax was torturous. He had seen himself do that a million times in the mirror, but, of course, that was nothing compared to when Bax moved

those arms and shoulders. And that sexy, tanned skin was also a bonus, not to mention that ass, and those strong thighs were to die for.

Jacob enjoyed and treasured their friendship a great deal. Bax had quickly become his closest friend, the one person he looked forward to seeing every morning at school and would call for anything, knowing he'd be there for Jacob no matter what the time or place. Jacob knew it just *had* to work out because he wouldn't let anything come between them. Bax was too important to lose over some stupid craving to kiss the guy. Or touch him. If he assaulted him like a crazed teenager, it could mean the end of their friendship, and Jacob couldn't bear the thought of that.

But, he also knew that this just wouldn't go away. There were those moments when he watched his friend all exposed and tempting, with his gorgeous, half-naked body playing in the water or sunbathing right next to him, that drove Jacob wild inside. For the first time in his life, he was confronted by so many new sensations up close and personal that he sometimes couldn't tell up from down and left from right.

Most of the time, it took only that dazzling smile that showed Baxter's perfect, white teeth and his body became hot all over.

Just like now, returning from their quick swim, as Bax plopped down onto the towel next to him with his body all wet and sparkling in the sunlight. As usual, Bax squeezed two big dollops of sunscreen onto his palms and literally painted his cheeks and nose in an attempt to be funny. Silly would be the better word, Jacob thought. Bax would always do something *silly* just to make him laugh, which, oddly enough, worked every time. After tickling another laugh out of him, his friend stretched out in the sand, covered in thick white *war paint* and sunglasses, ready to sunbathe until one of them would get hungry, which would usually be him. It wasn't Jacob's fault that his body seemed to burn food a lot faster, and being out in the sun and close to the water always made him hungry.

With Bax close enough that he could smell his sunscreen, it filled his mind with other thoughts than food. What he would give to just lightly brush his fingers down his friend's neck and across his chest. The constant urge to reach out and touch his friend, even just to pat him on the shoulder, had become so strong it was nearly impossible to resist at times. It was nice though, being in each other's company, just if it was just lying in the sand and doing nothing for a while. Other than training and working out, going surfing together had

become one of *their things*, and he and Bax had grown quite close, something Jacob loved and dreaded at the same time. It was ridiculous, because he had never had that much fun with any of his other friends. Of course Jacob had great times with Andreas, Graig and Libby, and they still kept in touch via e-mail and texts, but that never felt the same and their contact was already becoming less each week.

Jacob knew it had something to do with the incredible attraction he had toward his new friend, and that made whatever situation more intense and just different. He remembered their first movie night and how much fun they had watching movies that Jacob wouldn't have picked out for himself. It had been a little awkward at first, showing Bax his room and all, but to his relief, Bax didn't appear to mind that Jacob liked to surround himself with weird, geeky stuff. He hadn't made jokes like most of his former friends, who always liked to tease him, especially about his *toys*. Bax, on the other hand, was cool about it. Jacob was glad that Bax also enjoyed their movie marathon, and they had even repeated it a couple of times since.

The whole sleeping over thing, though, was still not comfortable for him, and he wondered if Bax could actually sleep on his floor. Of course he had a mattress, one that you could blow up and looked comfy enough, but whenever Jacob woke up during the night, he found Bax lying awake. They never spoke about it and just pretended they hadn't noticed each other's restlessness, but that didn't help Jacob falling back asleep, he almost never could. The first time he woke in the middle of the night, Jacob had been scared shitless that Bax might have heard him say something weird in his sleep, or noticed he had a nightmare. Those were a real pain, Jacob had had them since he could remember, and they never made any sense. He would just wake up feeling scared and lonely, sometimes desperate to just get out of bed and somewhere safe, as if his room were suddenly dangerous and the last place on earth he wanted to be. He never knew what triggered them or when to expect them, they just came and went as they pleased. And recently, they had seemed to come back a lot more often, Jacob hated to think that Bax might have heard something, but if he did, he never mentioned it.

Besides the occasional awkwardness, there were just too many times when they had so much fun that he sometimes thought he might just burst from excitement. The main reason he liked Bax so much was probably that he was fun and always in the mood to mess around. Not in the way that had filled Jacob's mind lately, but they had shared some epic moments on the field, at the

beach and basically wherever they went. Bax never failed to make him laugh and turn a boring day into the most exciting. Jacob remembered one time in particular that was yet to be outdone.

“Baaaax. Are you going to take me to see real koalas?”

Jacob asked one afternoon, as they sat next to each other at a local coffee shop, which was close to Surfer's Paradise. It was a nice place where the staff always seemed to be in a good mood, and their drink selection turned out to be Jacob's favorite. Their vanilla latte was simply *to die for*. It was also right down the street from where they would usually hang out and close to home.

“Koalas? Really? That's pretty cliché, don't you think? Did you drag your pretty arse from your fancy place in California all the way here just to go koala watching?”

Jacob enjoyed it greatly when he was on the end of Bax's teasing, and even though he could be shy, it was always challenging to find out just how much of Bax's attention he could earn. Jacob wasn't particularly jealous of their other friends anymore, but it always felt the best to have one hundred percent of his attention on him.

“So? I am allowed to be all touristy once in a while. I have been in Australia for *weeeeeeks* now and haven't once seen a koala. Are they even real? Or are you guys only pretending to have those sweet bears that sleep in trees to be more cool?”

He might have exaggerated a little with his *need* to see koalas, but the other day he tuned into a TV show about koalas where they advertised certain facilities to see them, and Jacob had the sudden idea that it would just be the perfect lure to talk Bax into yet another activity they could do together. Seeing fuzzy little animals was also a bonus he wouldn't say no to.

“Seriously Jazz? Koalas are not bears. In fact, they're not even that closely related.”

“Duh, I know that.”

Well, to be honest he hadn't given it much thought; they looked like teddies after all so why should he question their species? Okay, maybe that wasn't smart, but he hadn't thought about whether they were bears or not.

“Are you sure?” Bax poked him in the chest, and Jacob grinned. “I was just trying to see whether you knew?”

Bax's raised eyebrow and frown indicated that he probably didn't believe him, but Jacob hardly minded. He would willingly look a bit more stupid in front of Bax because he knew it wouldn't matter to him, and he always enjoyed their banter.

"You little shit." Bax laughed and shoved him playfully, almost spilling his iced coffee in an attempt to smack his head, which he failed royally because Jacob was just a little too quick and moved out of range in time.

"I'm not little," Jacob protested with a grin, because he just couldn't be offended by anything Bax said, he knew it wasn't meant to insult.

"But you *are* littler than me, and a shithead." Bax gave him that *Now what will you do about it?* look, and Jacob thought he couldn't be any more attractive if he tried.

"You like me anyway, don't you?" Jacob didn't know why he asked that, he hadn't meant to, it had just slipped off his tongue.

"That I do."

When Bax gave him that warm but somewhat melancholy smile, Jacob wanted to reach out and brush his fingers down his friend's cheek, comfort him, feel his skin. Jacob wanted to finally take a chance and ask him just how much he *really* liked him, if he maybe felt the same, but he didn't. Instead, he took the much safer road and focused on getting Bax to show him real, live koalas. Jacob wondered for a long time if it had been the right decision, or if he should have taken that chance.

Would he ever manage to find out? And would the answer hurt?

"So, when are you taking me koala watching?" Jacob asked with a grin that almost hurt his cheeks. He knew just how much Bax liked it, even though he pretended not to care. It would always earn him a grin in return, one that told him more than words ever could. And maybe he just had to be happy with what he got.

Jacob could always count on Bax. Despite their tight schedule and upcoming tournaments, a few days later, Bax surprised him with an evening outing to the Daisy Hill Koala Center, and as it turned out, there were actual koalas in Queensland after all. They met Celest, Faith and Elsa—the cutest little koalas you could imagine. Besides learning the signs and symptoms of a sick or injured koala, Jacob also watched various films about them and other threatened species. He didn't care just how touristy he was, because being with

Bax and seeing koalas had been so much fun that he wanted to stay there for as long as possible. They also climbed the observation tower where the tour guide told them they would *get a koala's eye view of the world* and maybe spot more koalas, which they hadn't. But that was fine with Jacob. It had already been one of the best days in his life. Besides seeing koalas for the first time, something else happened for the first time.

They were just heading back from the observation tower, which was surrounded by a lot of trees and bushes but besides the occasional tourist, located on a very empty road. Jacob still wouldn't be able to explain what really happened, but at one point, something brushed his arm, then something bumped into his shoulder and when he looked down he saw Bax's fingers wrapped tightly around his. Without any further comment, they continued to walk like nothing happened for about a minute or so, until he finally realized that they were holding hands.

Oh. My. Fucking. Geesecake.

Feeling Bax's hand in his, made his head spin just a little too fast, and Jacob suddenly felt a panic rise up inside of him so strong he couldn't keep it under control. For some odd and very stupid reason, he pulled his hand away and said he needed the bathroom. Seeing that confused and hurt expression on Bax's face made him want to throw up. Without another word, he ran off to find the toilet.

Gee, he had been so pathetic, he almost didn't come back out of the bathroom, but eventually he had to because he couldn't hide inside forever.

Outside the public bathroom, Baxter waited for him with a bottle of mango iced tea and a cheerful smile like nothing happened. He also acted like he hadn't just held Jacob's hand a few moments ago. Jacob felt relieved when Bax obviously ignored his immature behavior, but he felt a lot more crushed that he seemed to ignore having wanted to hold his hand as well.

Until now, Jacob couldn't wrap his brain around what all that meant. The incident, as he liked to call it, hadn't changed anything. Bax still acted like it never happened. Jacob knew he should feel upset and embarrassed about pulling away and freaking out, he really did, but somehow the thought alone that Bax had wanted to hold his hand, for whatever reason, still felt incredibly good. He just had to learn how to be bold enough to repeat it. Plus, figure out a way not to freak out immaturity beforehand. He couldn't mess it up twice. Jacob knew it was now up to him whether he would get a second chance or not.

He doubted Baxter would try anything again so soon, if ever. He had to be humiliated and confused. Jacob was quite confused too, to be honest.

Did Bax like him in the same way? The fact that Bax actually tried something should be proof enough that he might not be alone in this after all. It was just so hard to believe.

Besides his ups and downs regarding his incurable attraction toward Baxter, his life, for once, was going well. He still hadn't seen much of his mom, but the fact that she made time for the occasional dinner out together was an improvement overall. School was easy enough at the moment, but still kept Jacob busy. And playing on the team with Coach Anderson and Coach Connor was simply awesome. There were many people involved and they all gave shit about everyone on the team, taking how they played very serious. The times the whole team went away for trips always proved to be an adventure in itself, and when there wasn't an actual match, they would still quite often go to Brisbane and practice from early morning until dinner. It was tough altogether; he had never practiced any sport that much in his life, but Jacob enjoyed it. He was absolutely thrilled that he seemed to have settled in extremely well with the team and played his best game yet. Their recent away matches had been simply insane. If he said so himself, they absolutely kicked ass.

Jacob learned that they'd had some of the most important people attend their past few matches. It was a good thing they always won by quite a high margin. Jacob hadn't remembered any names in particular, as the scouts weren't what he was after. Those faces he took notice of were all but a blur by now. Bax, on the other hand, went batshit about it, for days. Jacob had to listen to him go on about it literally nonstop, to a point where it was almost becoming annoying. During those times, Jacob would turn on his automatic nod, accompanied with an honest smile, or so he hoped, and stare away. Bax probably didn't realize just how gorgeous he was, and that Jacob could stare for hours at that handsome face, those broad shoulders, and strong arms. With that sun-kissed tan, his skin always appeared like light macchiato ice cream, soft and creamy and just the right shade of brown. Bax always looked good enough to eat.

There were times when he just wanted to run away and hide, because he knew he had been caught staring, and instead of being offended, Bax always gave him that insanely gorgeous, flustered smile and rolled his eyes before he began a completely random conversation. Jacob was thankful for that, but he didn't know what to make of it. Because, a guy like Baxter couldn't be into a guy like him. Even after Bax's attempt to hold hands, and the many times Jacob

tried to talk himself into repeating the action, he simply couldn't wrap his brain around the possibility that he might actually have a chance at *love* here. If he could overcome his pathetic shyness first, of course. And if love between two guys like them was even possible.

If Bax ever thought of guys the same way he did, Jacob was fairly certain it wouldn't be him he really wanted. Bax would probably be into someone more delicate and pretty. Jacob thought if Bax were into guys, he would probably be into someone *adorable* and a lot more *twinkie* than Jacob was. Perhaps, he might go for a feminine guy, with long curly hair and a petite behind. There was just no way he could be attracted to someone as bulky and clumsy as him. And wouldn't they just look ridiculous together? Jacob was a far cry from adorable or *twinkie* and his ass was anything but petite. That thought almost made him chuckle.

Jacob wondered if he had never started working out and picked up ballet and dancing instead of football, soccer and rugby—would he have turned out to be more Bax's type?

Jacob couldn't picture himself as anything but bulky and full of muscles. He had looked like that pretty much since he was fifteen. It wasn't like he wanted to look all butch, he just enjoyed working out. A lot. Maybe if he didn't, he might make a pretty, boy next door. He could even let his hair grow and all.

Now, that thought actually made him snort out loud, and he regretted letting his thoughts wander like that. Not his smoothest move. Jacob dared to look up his friend's body and he wasn't surprised to find Baxter's bright green eyes on him.

“What's so funny?”

Bax grinned and pushed himself up so he could settle in a more comfortable sitting position next to him. His sunscreen painted cheeks and nose were still a great deal whiter than the rest of his face, somehow it never fully melted away. Jacob liked that, he looked absolutely edible that way. Like he had been sprinkled with cream cheese or—*Fuck. I've got to stop doing that.*

“Tell me, Jazz. I want to laugh with you.”

Bax winked, his face all flushed from the sun and a playful twinkling in his eyes. Jacob realized, horrified, that he had been caught daydreaming while staring at Bax sunbathing again, hadn't he?

Fainting from dehydration sounded good right about now.

Baxter

Jazz had the cutest, tiny belly button.

Baxter had no idea where that thought came from but he longed to dip his tongue inside and have a taste, along with a great number of other parts on his friend's body. Relaxing into the foldout chair, he closed his eyes, and, like so very often lately, he let his mind wander and his thoughts drift to that place that he had gone every night over the course of the past weeks. And just like every night when he laid in his bed, he pictured Jazz in those strawberry red boardies, his body still wet from their swim in the ocean.

He imagined what a single touch of his friend's chest would feel like. Would his skin feel soft underneath his fingers? How different to his own skin would it be? He wondered just how firm those well-defined muscles were that adorned his strong body. And what it would feel like to run his fingers down Jazz's shoulders, along his firm arms and hold him close enough to hear his heart beat against his.

He imagined what his sun-kissed skin would taste like, how salty it would be after a hard workout or a few hours on the field. Would he taste like the vanilla and coconut scent that always seemed to linger around him? The thought of Jazz's salty, sweat-slicked skin on his lips and tongue turned him on like nothing else. In his mind, he planted kisses along the sweaty inside of his friend's throat, licked along the underside of his chin and then nipped at his collarbone. He wondered if Jazz would like it if he pressed his lips against his throat—hard—and sucked long enough to leave little marks. Baxter thought little red marks would look incredibly sexy on Jazz.

Bloody hell, how badly he wanted this.

Baxter slowly opened his eyes to see what his friend was up to. Quickly, he spotted him just a few meters in front of the seashore, still engrossed in building a sandcastle with a few of the kids he had recently befriended. A gentle breeze brushed his skin, and he shivered. Baxter shifted uncomfortably in his seat as he watched the scene before him, admiring Jazz's beautiful and only lightly tanned backside. Baxter let out a low groan. His fantasy hadn't even reached the point where he imagined the feel of Jazz's thighs on his hips or the scent of his arousal, and he was already bloody hard and ready to explode. He had to stop those thoughts right now, before Jazz could come back and discover he had blown his load in his swim trunks. That would go down well.

What drove Baxter *really* crazy, were those mixed signals Jazz was still giving him. At first, he hadn't been sure whether Jazz would actually accept his advances, which he had been fighting hard at first, as well. Knowing that he wouldn't be able to fight it forever, he eventually took a chance. But when he did and grabbed Jazz's hand on their walk back from the koala park, the guy freaked out and ran off to the bathroom, possibly throwing up. At least, he looked pale enough that he might have been sick to his stomach. Baxter did his best to cover up his disappointment, and obviously pretending that nothing happened seemed like the best idea. If only it wouldn't feel so upsetting.

Despite the obvious rejection, Jazz still gave him all those lingering looks and bright smiles and seemed like he wouldn't back off and avoid Baxter or anything. It was like the whole awkward hand holding incident never happened. Baxter should be relieved about it, happy that their friendship wouldn't falter because of something stupid like that, but in reality he was crushed. Of course he felt disappointed, and confused, because if Jazz didn't want to be anything but friends, why would he continue to look at him like he wanted to rip his clothes off and eat him alive? Baxter often caught Jazz staring when he thought he wasn't watching, and when Bax wasn't watching, he still knew that Jazz was.

A silly part of him felt quite flattered by it. It drove him crazy because Baxter still wanted more, wanted all of Jazz. All the bloody time.

So of course, Jazz's almost obvious interest and mixed signals did nothing to push those thoughts and confusing feelings out of his brain. Just what should he do? Was there even something he could do that would be anything but weird and awkward?

Baxter didn't want to live through yet another *pulling away incident* from Jazz. He might risk their friendship for real because who knows just how open Jazz was to all of this. He might not even be ready to accept his own feelings.

That would definitely make a lot of sense, wouldn't it?

Maybe he could just bring it up and they'd talk about it, openly and all.

That made Baxter laugh; like *that* would go down well.

Chapter 4

March 31st, 2012

Jacob

Jacob gazed out the front window of Bax's car, admiring the incredible scenery that lay before them. It was a gorgeous morning, neither too early nor too hot, and the mellow country tune on the radio gave it a surreal feeling. With the windows on both sides down, the warm breeze tickled his skin gently as they drove along the clean, golden beach where the sun never stopped shining and the sky appeared endless. It was beautiful. It was also his birthday, just how much better could it get?

Jacob wished he could go on never-ending drives up and down the beach with Bax every day. With the start of a two-week break from school, they had decided to go camping together. It was only going to be for two nights though, since they had a championship starting in a few days, which would take up most of their *off* time. Two nights were better than none. Jacob was beyond excited.

Baxter had insisted on going away at least for the short time, since they basically went surfing every day, and he wanted to do something a bit more exciting than sitting around at the usual places on Jacob's birthday. Jacob thought it was sweet of him and gladly accepted the invitation to spend a couple of nights at a campsite. He had never been one for wild parties and things like that, and it wasn't like his mother would have anything exciting planned. She would be working, as usual.

Baxter eventually found a destination he was happy with, one that promised *a change of scenery and activities*. Jacob was thrilled by just how serious Bax took his *campsite search assignment* even though it had taken him until last night to finally settle on one. Jacob thought they might end up by their usual spot at the beach after all. From the website Bax had shown him this morning, the spot appeared to be a lot quieter and laid back than some of the places Jacob had suggested when he thought Bax would never be able to make a decision. At first, he found it rather funny that he would choose what looked a lot like a destination for the odd family vacation rather than a crowded touristy spot full of teenagers and parties. But then again, Bax never seemed to be into that kinda thing as much as their other friends, which was fine with Jacob. They spent a

lot of their free time in Surfer's Paradise, which was exactly what he didn't mind avoiding for a change. Jacob was looking forward to a couple of relaxing days with his friend.

Jacob knew he was being silly, but it was fun going on that short vehicle ferry trip over the Noosa River before arriving at the campground. Somehow, it added to the holiday adventure he'd never had. Now that they had parked their car and unloaded some of their drinks, food, and other essentials, he was ready to explore their new campsite and preferably get physical one way or the other.

"So, Mr. Adventure Planner, what's up first? What's our schedule?"

Jacob dropped his backpack on one of the two lime green fold-out chairs they'd brought with them. He hoped like hell Bax wouldn't be sleepy from the drive, which for him had been way too relaxing. He wanted to get up and do something fun now.

"How about we start with setting up a tent?" Bax took a long swig of his water before tossing him a small yellow package what appeared to be part of their portable lodge. *Setting up the tent?* That didn't sound too exciting.

"Fine. Let's be quick, we can set up everything else tonight, can't we?"

Jacob *really* wanted to go somewhere, do something and be active until his energy hit bottom and he could fall into the sand and relax. Maybe take a nap. Jacob always felt like he had to burn a lot of energy first, the whole relaxing part was so much more enjoyable when you were worn out. Bax, on the other hand, could be the laziest person he had ever known when he wanted to be. It was ridiculous. Jacob sometimes wondered just how much he would like to be spoiled and pampered. *Mhh*. He wouldn't mind being the one doing all the spoiling and pampering.

"I don't know Jazzy, I'd prefer if we could get everything ready before heading anywhere."

You're kidding, right?

"Well, if we have to." Jacob unzipped a small, plastic bag, which looked like it belonged to the tent. He'd never set up one by himself, he hoped Bax wasn't expecting him to know what he was doing.

"What do I get if I am good at this?" Which he wasn't, but he wondered if it would make Bax want to take over just to show him how it's *really* done. *A guy could hope, right?*

“Then, you may choose between fishing, walking along the beach or some bushwalking.”

“Bushwalking, seriously?” Jacob didn't mind a stroll through nature but it sounded just a little odd and boring to walk around aimlessly. Jacob threw a quick look around his shoulder and briefly wondered just what they could see out there, besides a lot of *bush*, obviously, trees, water, sand and a bunch of creepy crawlers.

“Why not?” Bax chuckled. “You said you wanted an adventure. We take our compass, a map and who knows what we might find.” He winked at him playfully.

“Pirates?” Jacob was joking, obviously. He knew it was silly, and not to mention quite impossible to run in to actual pirates, but maybe they could pretend? Maybe not. But, perhaps, a stroll through the shrubs could turn out to be interesting after all. Even if there weren't any pirates lurking in the bushes, like Bax said, who knew what they might see?

“If we are lucky.” Baxter laughed and threw him a cold bottled water from the cooler. “You can wear an eye patch and pretend to be one, but I hope we won't get attacked by anyone or anything.”

You will not comment on this. You will not comment. There was no way Bax could have read his mind. He had to stop having those weird ideas in the future, just in case.

“It's the best place for some hiking, or so I was told. It might be fun.” Bax looked at him with that blinding smile and everything that came with it. *Oh. Hiking?* Well, that was that then. With a smile like that, Jazz would follow the guy to the end of the world and back if he had to.

When Jacob put the drink into his backpack, unopened, Baxter scolded him with his growly trademark “*take a drink, Jazz*”, which had been kinda cute at first, but sort of got pretty annoying after the fiftieth time.

“You can stop reminding me already Bax, I'm not a child, and I know just how frigging hot it is.”

At first, he found it a little weird that Bax always had water or mango iced tea with him, and later one for Jacob as well. Since it was damn hot all the time, Jacob would always welcome the drink from his friend, but when he would bug him to drink more, like all the time, it was just too much.

“Then why don't you bloody drink more?” Jacob noticed how Bax raised his voice a little, just like he did when he felt irritated by something. “Then I won't have to keep reminding you. Your choice.”

“Seriously, Bax. I drink when I am thirsty.” He knew Bax only had good intentions but he could take care of himself, and he had told him so often enough. *Why won't he let it go already?*

“Yes, but you have to drink even when you are not, the sun is bloody grilling you, and you know it.” Baxter rolled his eyes and eventually turned to gather his lunch and backpack.

“I know.”

And of course he did, he just hated drinking gallons of water when he wasn't thirsty.

End of story.

After they had efficiently set up their tent, together because there was no way to trick Bax, he knew right away Jacob had no clue what to do with all those tools. And, of course, he made Jacob help, and took the time to explain every little detail to him. Next time, Jacob might just know how to do it himself. Well, at least, he would be better the second time around. Once their lodge appeared to be steady enough, they made quick work of getting everything else sorted out.

Their bushwalking tour turned out to be fun, especially in Bax's company, and Jacob actually enjoyed it quite a lot. There hadn't been any pirates, obviously, and luckily no other dangerous incidents or creatures trying to attack or kidnap them. He was glad, though, that Bax agreed to not go far in case they got lost, as dying in the outback was definitely not on his to-do list this weekend. Since their little bushwalking excursion proved to be quite relaxing in itself, Jacob dug out their beach ball the very moment they reached the campsite, and challenged Bax to some rounds of ball.

The rest of the day went by in a blur. They hired a couple of trail bikes and later went for a swim while the sun was still out. Now they were going to have dinner in the form of a picnic by the beach with a few things Jacob's mom had prepared. To his surprise, she'd even made him birthday cupcakes with small rugby balls on top. They were pretty silly, but he felt happy that she'd found the time to do something like that for him.

It was already the most wonderful birthday he'd ever had, and only a kiss from Bax would make it perfect. If only.

Baxter

“So, what did you think about your birthday adventure? Exciting enough?”

Baxter asked, before finishing his iced tea with one long gulp. He thought he had done quite well, the campsite was quiet and clean and their biking had been pretty fun. He hoped tomorrow's plans to go four-wheel driving would turn out to be just as exciting. With Jazz by his side, he thought that, at least for him, it would be awesome as shit.

“Mmmh, it was real awesome, Bax.” Jazz beamed him that drop-dead gorgeous smile that showed all his perfectly straight teeth and made his dimples appear on both his lightly flushed cheeks. Gosh, he looked adorable today. “Yep, I'd say you did quite well. It was *almost* perfect.”

Was Jazz bloody winking at him? Like drop-dead gorgeously winking? And those deep brown eyes bloody sparkled with something other than their usual excitement. *What in the...*

Baxter noticed how the sun was just setting above the endless ocean behind Jazz, and the beauty of that moment made his head spin just a little. The fresh ocean scent, the peace and quiet around them just added to that whole bloody romantic experience Baxter dreaded. Not because he didn't like it, but exactly because he had an embarrassing *thing* for everything romantic, and he needed to avoid those moments with Jazz.

But, now they were having a bloody picnic!

At sunset, by the ocean. Just how much *worse* could it get? Despite all his worries and fears, this somehow felt like a sign from above. It was now or never. Would he dare? Oh, hells yes, maybe. Yeah. He just might go for it. A try couldn't possibly hurt that much.

“Only almost? What would it take to make your day absolutely perfect, Jazzy?”

Baxter knew he was in over his head when he thought that Jazz was making a move on him, but for once he honestly couldn't read his expression, and it did something weird to his stomach.

“I've only got one wish.”

“What’s that?”

“Mh, I would say *Dear Santa, all I want for Christmas is a kiss from Bax.*” Jazz blushed deeply, and Baxter watched his Adam’s apple bob when he swallowed. “But I don’t think I can wait until Christmas.”

“Bloody hell, Jazz.” He knew he groaned, and it sounded embarrassing to his own ears. He was probably blushing too.

“You asked.” Jazz chuckled. “Since Christmas is so far away... will you kiss me tonight, Bax?” Jazz moved a little closer, his cheeks a deep red, his brown eyes sparkling and locked on his.

The low, muffled sound of clothes shuffling and sand crunching underneath the blanket made Baxter suddenly really, *really* nervous. He could hardly breathe, not to mention move. Bloody hell, this was happening.

“Well, it’s your eighteenth birthday,” he somehow managed. “So, of course I will.”

He hoped like hell he didn’t sound as nervous as he felt, because this was a bad idea, a bad idea. Nevertheless, Baxter wanted it. And right now he desperately wanted to reach out and touch Jazz’s cheek with his palm. Wanted to run his fingers down his neck and then brush them over his just recently clean-shaved face ever so slowly. He wondered what that honey-coloured hair would feel like under his fingers.

Would he have permission to touch him as well? Or just to kiss him? Never mind that, his nerves overcame him, and he held back, refraining from crossing that line that had yet to be crossed. Jazz looked unsure himself, like he was fighting the same demons Baxter was fighting, even though *he* was the one asking for a bloody kiss.

With a low chuckle, Jazz broke the silence, only his hypnotising gaze still held Baxter captive. Those brown eyes were hard to fight, and right now, he lost all his will to do just that. He was done fighting. If only he knew how to do this right. He didn’t want to mess up their first kiss.

“Um. If we are going to do this, Bax, one of us has to move eventually.”

Baxter loved how Jazz’s cheeks turned an even sexier shade of red with the obvious embarrassment. Right. He could do this. He could kiss his Jazz. Baxter had wanted to kiss him ever since he noticed just how delicious those lips of his looked.

Without further thinking, Baxter leaned in, effectively crossing the point of no return, and Jazz met him in the middle. The gentle feel of Jazz's fingers unexpectedly touching his cheek startled him, but then their lips met, warm and soft, and it left no room for second thoughts. The kiss was soft and chaste, Jazz's lips parting just slightly. It was overwhelming. Kissing Jazz was different from kissing a girl, and knowing it was Jazz he was kissing was exciting beyond his wildest dreams. He was kissing a guy. Kissing his Jazz. How could he have ever doubted *this*?

Hesitantly Jazz deepened the kiss; his fingers now firm against the back of his neck. The taste of him combined with his vanilla scent was enough to make Baxter forget his own name.

"Jazz," Baxter whispered, pulling away just enough to speak. "Are you really okay with this?"

"With you kissing me?"

Baxter nodded. "Yes, with me kissing you, and with you kissing me."

"I am pretty okay with that." Jazz smiled shyly, and without asking for permission this time, Baxter dived right in to kiss Jazz firmly on the mouth. Bloody hell, this was good. *So good*. Resisting tasting those lips had been the most difficult challenge he had ever gone through. But now that he felt Jazz's warm, damp lips move in a gentle kiss against his own, he was in bloody heaven. *Finally*. Jazz kissed him back so leisurely, tenderly and lovingly, that it felt like they had been doing just that all their lives.

"You know, um, you are my first, Bax."

After long moments of kissing and enjoying each other's closeness, Jazz eventually broke the silence while they were lying on a blanket spread out on the sand.

"First kiss?" Baxter asked sleepily, wiggling into a more comfortable position. Somehow their fun day in the sun had worn him out almost as much as their usual rugby practice. Darn, he was getting old.

"First... well everything."

You little shit.

But wait, was he implying... no bloody way!

"Who says we are going to do *everything*?" Baxter raised his eyebrow and offered it in a teasing voice. His eyes slowly wandered from Jazz's sand

covered toes, up his slightly hairy legs, and over his floral printed boardies until they settled on his deep brown eyes. Yep, that was *home*.

“We aren’t?” Jazz asked in mock-surprise with his hand pressed against his clothed chest, his cheeks colouring a bright shade of red. Baxter loved how the thin fabric of his white Tee clung to his shoulders, hugging his muscles just right in every place.

“Mmh.” Baxter considered him for a moment, “Am I really your first kiss?” He couldn’t quite believe that nobody would have tried to kiss Jazz. There must have been someone. But Jazz nodded, and he knew he would believe anything that came out of that mouth. And, anyway, he had no reason to lie about those things.

“Was I any good?” Baxter couldn’t resist it.

“I’d say the best, but I wouldn’t want you to feel too cocky.” Jazz grinned. “And anyway, I have nothing to compare it to.”

“Mind if I ask why?” They both sat up and exchanged looks. Jazz’s gaze on him somehow made him want to squirm. He had been bloody aroused for too long already, this wasn’t helping.

“Why I haven’t kissed anyone? Well, for one thing, I never had the nerve to actually ask a guy out.”

“Mh yeah, I can understand. That isn’t something you do every day.” Just look how long it took them to get anywhere, and they were basically inseparable already. Yep, that definitely takes some nerves.

“No kidding.” Jazz rolled his eyes and let himself drop onto the blanket again, now gazing up into the darkening sky. “And I don’t just go around kissing strangers.”

Yeah, probably not.

“You said guys, but what about girls?” Baxter asked carefully.

“Uh, to be honest, I somehow never thought I wanted to kiss a girl.” Yeah, Jazz didn’t look like he’d enjoy that much, if the disgust on his flushed face was anything to go by.

“Well, I have. I mean, kissed a girl, you know.”

He had to say it just so Jazz knew, since that wasn’t anything they talked about before he wasn’t sure what Jazz knew or thought. Baxter hoped it didn’t

bother him, because the thought of Jazz kissing anyone else, even in the past, made him feel ill somehow. *Great, Baxter, that's very mature...*

"Guess I figured that much." Jazz laughed his bubbly laugh, which made Bax's stomach drop. Jazz turned and rolled onto his stomach, gazing right into his eyes. "No offense, but I mean, just look at you."

"Right. Just because I play sports and all you immediately assume I'm popular with the ladies. Aren't you very judgemental?" Baxter shoved him playfully. He knew just how everyone always assumed those kinda things.

"Well, aren't you? Popular with the ladies?" Jazz raised his eyebrow, giving him a knowing look.

"Maybe. I don't know, I mean I *did* have a girlfriend before, but that doesn't mean shit now, does it?"

Well, he hoped it wouldn't. Jazz had to believe that what he felt for him was as real as it could get, and whatever was in the past lay in the past. And besides, he couldn't remember the last time he looked at a girl, or guys for that matter.

"I guess not, but that's just what everyone assumes. You are incredibly good looking, you're fit and all, people will always judge you by your appearance." Jazz took a deep breath before he continued, "Just like I never thought you might be interested in someone like me."

"What do you mean, someone like you?" *Doesn't he know he is the most gorgeous guy alive?*

"You have looked at me, right?" Jazz moved into a sitting position, pulled his shirt over his head and threw it onto the sand, posing with his bare chest. Baxter laughed; of course he had looked at him. What a silly question. Without thinking, he slowly reached out and touched the top of Jazz's arm. The tingles he felt all over his body with one simple touch were a bit unsettling. *Crap.* Was he ready for this?

"I do like the way you look, Jazz." Baxter crawled forward. "I love those muscles. Your strong shoulders and chest. You have an incredible body, and you are extremely gorgeous to me, Jazz." Baxter leaned in and tugged him close for another kiss. When their mouths met, their lips were half parted and Baxter couldn't quite contain the small shudder of pleasure as Jazz's tongue slid inside and touched his.

He thought he knew what Jazz was referring to, they were both tall and

bulky, played footy and just weren't what you'd call most compatible based on their appearance alone. But that meant absolutely nothing to him.

They were bloody compatible in at least a hundred and fifty nine other ways.

Ways that were more important than looks.

Baxter woke to the sound of someone crying. He couldn't make out shit in the darkness of the tent, but he felt Jazz move next to him on the mattress. When his bare leg brushed alongside his, goose bumps slowly rose all over his body, and it wasn't from the cold. Baxter had been well aware of his friend sleeping next to him for a couple of hours, before sleep eventually caught up with him as well. Having Jazz lie only centimetres away from him was embarrassingly arousing and sleep just wouldn't come. Baxter never fell asleep easily, but with Jazz next to him, sleeping seemed nearly impossible. Those few times he stayed over at Jazz's house had proved that.

Tonight, after their unexpected and absolutely insane rounds of kissing, being close enough to touch without being allowed to, literally drove him nuts. How Jazz had managed to fall asleep shortly after settling for the night was beyond him. Baxter had been way too wired to relax. Going to bed had been a little awkward tonight, after all those kisses they shared it was sort of weird to just lie down and sleep. Not to mention that they'd both been obviously aroused. It was impossible to hide *that*.

It didn't help that neither of them seemed to know what they could do about it. Not that he was *that* clueless, thank you very much, or hadn't tried to move things further. It just wasn't the right timing, he guessed, because at one point, when Jazz began to pull back little by little, he knew that this wasn't happening. It wasn't like he had planned on seducing him anyway.

And then, Jazz gave him that adorable, apologising and somewhat embarrassed look that had Baxter suggesting they go to sleep and well, that was that. He didn't mind if it helped Jazz to come to terms with the thought of being with a guy, hells, Baxter himself had no bloody idea what he was doing here. But there was no reason to rush into anything. Wherever this was going, everything would be perfect if it was with Jazz.

There was another sob, and with more movement, Jazz's leg rubbed against his a second time. The shuffling of fabric told him, even without seeing, that

what was going on was that Jazz had most likely covered himself more with the doona they shared. When Baxter moved too, just because lying still and being absolutely quiet on command had never been his strength, Jazz froze. The quiet sobs stopped. Baxter didn't know what to do, pretending that he hadn't heard anything might work for Jazz, and he might eventually fall back asleep. But Baxter knew he wouldn't be able to just lie there in the darkness, waiting for sleep, knowing Jazz had been crying. No, that was definitely not an option.

A heartbeat later, he just had to say something, anything. The silence was painful.

"Jazz?" Baxter held his breath and counted to five, then to ten, and then fifteen, but there still wasn't the slightest reaction from Jazz. It worried him.

"Jazzy? Are you all right?" Darn, Baxter knew it was a stupid thing to ask, but it was all he could think of right now. He just wanted to hear Jazz's voice and make sure he would feel better about whatever was bothering him.

"They still surprise me," Jazz whispered, and after a long pause added, "The nightmares. I'm sorry if I woke you."

Baxter shook his head as if to say *don't worry about that*, but he knew Jazz wouldn't see a thing, with his head under the doona and his back to him.

"I'm sorry you have them."

He felt Jazz wiggle out from under the doona and he probably stared into the darkness for a while, because that was all Baxter managed to do himself, and it drove him crazy.

Then there was more shuffling, and Jazz whispered, "Bax?"

"Mh?" He voiced as carefully as he could, he wanted to comfort Jazz, but didn't know how, it was frustrating. Baxter had never been in a situation that called for hugs and cuddles, or something along that line anyway.

Jazz's voice was small and quiet, barely a whisper when he asked, "Can you hold me tonight?" And Baxter felt his heart skip a beat or more, because that request most definitely caught him by surprise. Could he do it? Could he hold Jazz? Comfort him as a friend? Holding him would mean their bodies would be close, very close. Half-naked in just their boxers. *Touching*.

Baxter swallowed hard. Without waiting for an answer, which Baxter wasn't sure he could manage anyway, Jazz reached around his body for his hand and gently, carefully wrapped his fingers around Baxter's wrist.

Jazz's warm palm made his skin tingle where they touched. It felt good, comforting. And again, that simple touch, combined with the faint scent of vanilla caused his body to react in the weirdest ways. Baxter hoped he could ignore the way his stomach felt, how his skin tingled and how badly he wanted to lean forward over Jazz and kiss him. Long and hard, and—*Crap*—he had to focus on something else. But all he could feel there and then was Jazz pulling his hand around his body, towards himself until his palm rested flat against Jazz's bare stomach.

Okay, that doesn't help.

He wanted to ask what Jazz was doing, but his voice just wouldn't cooperate. When he slid Baxter's hand higher and higher, his fingers brushing along that heated skin, he was unable to think any further than that. Jazz continued to drag his hand slowly over his naked stomach, the skin there was smooth and unfamiliar, the erotic sensation made Baxter's head spin and his groin stir.

Bloody hell, I'm touching Jazz.

He didn't have time for the realisation to fully sink in, because a heartbeat passed and his fingers brushed something small, round and taut. His nipple. *Holy shit. Jazz is making me touch his nipple.* And not in the most subtle way, totally on purpose and *with* a purpose apparently.

Jazz, who was with his back now snugly pressed against Baxter's stomach, hummed encouragingly. He couldn't say who moved towards whom and what happened to the doona; hardly anything registered with Baxter. *Bloody hell.* His mind was spinning from the intensity of caressing Jazz's nipples, his stomach and the possibility of all the other places he could touch. The feeling of his warm skin underneath his fingers felt more arousing than anything he had ever experienced before.

He was faintly aware of Jazz guiding his hand to rub over his nipple in small circles, when his thumb moved on its own accord, carefully, teasingly rubbing the taut nub. He hadn't meant to, but darn that felt good in all the right places. Baxter gasped, trying to sort the thousand thoughts running through his mind.

Is this a smart idea? It probably wasn't, but he wanted to explore Jazz's body for so long, it was impossible to hold back when Jazz apparently didn't seem to mind if he did exactly that.

But then, Jazz suddenly froze, as if it just sunk in what they were doing, that they crossed a line that wouldn't be so easy to return from. *Fuck.*

"Does that... Uh, freak you out?" Jazz's voice was barely a whisper, and he sounded... ashamed?

Not wanting to stop, and with all intention of comforting Jazz, Baxter dipped his head and hesitantly nuzzled the side of his neck, hoping like hell he was allowed to. Breathing in the intoxicatingly sweet vanilla scent made his cock twitch. His lips touched the nape of Jazz's neck, carefully, just a soft brush of lips, while he caressed his chest, now without the guidance of Jazz's hand. Pressing a careful, lingering kiss against Jazz's skin he whispered, "Does that freak *you* out?"

Baxter felt Jazz shake his head softly, the careful action bringing his nose in chaste contact with the buzzed short hair at Jazz's nape. *Mmmh*, that felt good. Still, Baxter wasn't fully convinced that this was the right thing to do. They might have kissed earlier, a lot, but that was definitely something else, a big step towards new territory, and he didn't want to freak Jazz out, or worse, complicate things further between them. They had to be on the same page, and maybe, just maybe, they should have talked about it before after all.

With a gentle caress, Baxter brought his hand up to Jazz's clavicle and brushed his thumb up and around the rigid bone in an attempt to soothe and explore his body. Jazz's skin was smooth and warm and every second they were connected, skin against skin, felt like touching a piece of heaven. Baxter had had many sleepless nights where he wished he could do all those things, holding Jazz, caressing his skin, mapping his body millimetre by millimetre, and it felt better than he could have imagined.

He kissed Jazz's neck again, hard then soft and lingering, pulling him closer against his own body. Bloody hell, his chest felt like it would burst in two if he ever let go of him. Jazz's careful touch, as he wrapped his fingers around Baxter's hand, startled him. "Bax, you're hard."

No kidding.

It was definitely a statement that he couldn't deny if he wanted to. It was bloody embarrassing. Baxter felt a little ashamed now that it was out in the open. Not that he should want to hide it, and for crying out loud, they were in bed together, half-naked, touching; of course he'd be aroused. And shouldn't that be what they both wanted?

“Um...” Baxter wiggled back enough that his cock wasn't pressed flush against Jazz's arse anymore. Taking his hand tightly in his, Jazz gave it a squeeze and moved it down his warm, naked chest, over his belly button until his fingers brushed the hem of his boxers. Baxter's heart sped up, and a long heartbeat later, his fingers brushed a lot more than just a piece of fabric.

Fuck, Jazz is hard like a rock.

Should he be surprised? Probably not, but feeling his hardness was definitely a reminder that it wasn't just him who was effected by what they were doing. Jazz's cock was hard and hot, wrapped in thin fabric of black boxers. He bit his lip, trying hard to stop himself from groaning out loud. Baxter pressed his face close against Jazz's neck, nuzzling into him as deep as he could, inhaling his scent. *Mhh*. That, and the feel of Jazz's erection, encouraged his heart to lose its rhythm again and again.

“Does *that* freak you out?” Jazz whispered and slowly dragged Baxter's hand over his hard-on. Up and down and up again.

“Maybe? A little.” He swallowed a lump in his throat, wishing badly he could kiss Jazz *right fucking now*. He wasn't exactly freaked out, just a little nervous. He was touching another guy's dick, for crying out loud. Surprisingly, and very gladly, he was also turned on as hell. And he liked Jazz, *a lot*, he wanted to touch him in every way possible.

Feeling Jazz nod and loosening the hold he had on Baxter, he knew he needed to reassure him that he wanted it, too. Baxter didn't want him to feel bad about it, or anything else but turned on. Challenge accepted.

Adjusting slightly, Baxter kissed the outside of Jazz's throat softly, ghosting his lips higher up his neck until he brushed against and over his clean-shaved face. “You feel good, Jazz, so hot.” He squeezed his erection through the thin fabric of his boxers and immediately felt Jazz's cock jump under his touch. Now, *that* was hot. Baxter would have never thought another guy's erection could feel so bloody *awesome*. And he hadn't even gotten to the *good* part yet.

“You smell good, too, so addictive.” Baxter inhaled deeply and kissed the back of Jazz's neck just like he had always wanted. *Mhhh, just so good*. Jazz shuddered in his hold and pressed himself up against Baxter's chest, invitingly, teasingly. His own cock was painfully hard too, nudging against Jazz's soft arse cheeks, and it was the hottest feeling, ever.

When he found the opening of Jazz's boxers and the tip of Baxter's fingers brushed the head of his bare cock, a soft moan escaped Jazz. *Damn*. The feeling

of Jazz's warm, smooth and damp erection against his palm startled him, but then Jazz moved just slightly, enough that his cock moved in his hand and Baxter wrapped his fingers around his shaft, squeezing experimentally. A rush of heat overcame him and all worries and uncertainty fled his brain.

He couldn't think, couldn't speak.

He could only feel.

Smooth, velvety hotness underneath his fingers, moving at *his* rhythm now—gently, slowly down, up and down again, over the insanely hard, almost steel-like cock. Jazz's cock.

I'm stroking Jazz's cock.

Baxter wished he wasn't so inexperienced in giving pleasure to another guy and that he knew what he was doing, because he didn't have a clue. He simply touched Jazz the way he would touch himself, tugging and pulling, a little awkwardly maybe, given their position. Thank god, Baxter quickly found a rhythm and angle he was happy with, and jerked Jazz off effectively. At least, he hoped like hell it was good enough for Jazz, because he felt his own body go crazy, and slowly, but surely, come undone.

Jazz moaned and writhed within his hold, and it felt amazing. He clearly struggled not to make a lot of noise and maybe even hold back. Baxter wished he wouldn't, wished they could both let go and enjoy each other. Everything drove him crazy, the closeness, the feel of Jazz's arse against his throbbing erection, his sweet scent, the soft noises and low moans filling the tent.

His fingers were already slick and bloody sticky with Jazz's pre-cum. Wondering what *that* would taste like, he almost lost it. He sped up his movements, rutted against Jazz's arse, unable to hold back, a deep, gravelly moan escaped him. He had never thought he could make those kinds of noises.

Then in a heartbeat, Jazz fell apart, his own world turned dark, and time simply stopped. Never had he felt more amazing than that moment, and he was sure nothing would ever surpass *this* feeling. He squeezed Jazz's cock until the last drop of cum, a good amount of which covered his fingers. His own release already began to dry inside his boxers, which started to feel slightly disgusting.

He hated wet boxers. But right now, even that wasn't enough to encourage him to move a millimetre. Baxter caressed Jazz's slowly softening cock and dragged his hand through the pool of cum that must have rained down on his stomach, squeezing him tight against his heaving chest.

Gosh, that felt good—breathing heavily, almost in synch, holding Jazz close like nothing else mattered, like the world was theirs and nobody would give a damn if they stayed like this forever. Because if they could, he'd make sure they wouldn't move ever again. But then Jazz did, and he turned within Baxter's now loosened embrace. Even now in the dark with only the faint moonlight shining through from somewhere in the back of the tent, Jazz's intense brown eyes glowed dangerously. Baxter's chest tightened, and he wasn't ready to break their spell just yet. He so wasn't ready to face the aftermath of what they just did.

"Bax?" Jazz moved his head closer and gazed up at him with a look he couldn't read. *Please don't let him regret anything.* Baxter couldn't stand it if he did. He wanted to say something but words wouldn't leave his lips for the life of him.

"There's something, eh, a little sticky on my ass. Do you know anything about that?"

"Bloody hell, Jazz."

Embarrassed, Baxter wrapped his arm around Jazz and pulled him close enough to feel his heart beat against his. Jazz buried his face in Baxter's chest and chuckled, "I'm glad my ass is sticky, Bax."

Jazz lifted his head enough to look at Baxter again, this time worry and uncertainty were clearly visible on his face. "Did you, uh, like it too?" Jazz blushed, and Baxter thought he seemed to get cuter just when he thought he couldn't.

"Very much so? It's a little hard to deny that I *really* like you, Jazz."

"True, the stickiness on my ass speaks for itself."

Seriously? Just how sticky could it be? They were both wearing boxers, last time he checked. It didn't matter, he would go along even if Jazz were just messing with him.

"Does it turn you on thinking about my cum on your arse?" Baxter asked with a raised eyebrow. But, sometimes Jazz just had no shame. The way he could be so endearingly shy one moment, and then say something *that* bold, was what drove him so crazy about Jazz. Well, that and a lot of other things, he stopped keeping track a long time ago.

Jazz chuckled. "Maybe?" and then grinned sheepishly, his eyes sparkling with excitement and maybe happiness?

“So, uh, are we good?”

Baxter wondered about that briefly, were they good? He'd say of course they were bloody *good*, but were they also on the same page? What exactly did Jazz think, and want from and with him?

“Of course we're good, Jazz.”

Well, they had time to find out, hadn't they?

For now they were good.

Really good.

Jacob

Jacob sat on a small wooden dock by the river with his feet dangling in the water, and the bright sun shining down on him. Just like any other day it was hot as hell, and sweat trickled down Jacob's spine without moving a muscle. The clear, blue water before him appeared to be just as clear and blue and probably just as refreshing as on any other day. Gazing up, he noted how the cloudless blue sky looked the same as yesterday, and Jacob could almost say for certain it wouldn't look any different by the time tomorrow came around. Nothing out here appeared to have changed overnight, nothing major at least. For Jacob on the other hand, a lot had changed with one single night. Just what had they been thinking? Today Jacob felt *a lot* more restless than ever. He just couldn't stop his thoughts from spinning back to last night.

The morning started out almost fine. Jacob had been the first to wake and immediately made a run for the toilet and a well-needed, refreshing shower down by their campsite facilities. When he returned, Jacob literally bumped into a rather furious Bax who then scolded him for running off without any warning. Jacob promised he wouldn't do it again, he probably would have freaked out himself if Bax had disappeared in his sleep. Instead of sitting down with a mug of nice, hot and freshly brewed coffee, enjoying the morning sun and everything, they both ended up grumbling in front of a mug of cold instant coffee. Yuck, that was just the wrong kind of coffee to drink first thing in the morning. In order to get something hot and preferably far more delicious, they went on a drive to the next city.

The drinks they got at that coffee shop were *amazing*, especially compared to that cold instant soup, and exploring the neighborhood had been fun. It was

the whole being with Bax *thing* that sort of threw him. Jacob still got butterflies when he looked at him, but after last night they were all sorts of weird and wrong and kind of drove him crazy. Bax, on the other hand, seemed to be doing just fine and had been all smiles and funny jokes and his usual good-natured self, especially after that good coffee. Jacob couldn't blame Bax for that, it tasted delicious. Ever since he'd gotten to Australia, Jacob had fast developed a thing for the hot beverage, and he enjoyed having their cup together whenever they could. Before he met Bax, Jacob hadn't been all that into it, but here, coffee shops meant Bax's company, and that just totally did it for him. It was quite difficult to beat a large cup of white chocolate latte and Bax, together. *Yum.*

Maybe today just wasn't his day. Everyone deserved at least one day to feel off, right?

No, Jacob couldn't deny he quite well knew what was bothering him; he was fairly certain that last night was to blame for his nerves going into overdrive. It was frustrating. Jacob had been looking forward to this trip for a while now, and so far it had been a blast, so why did he have to make such a mess out of it. Those damned hormones. Jacob probably couldn't blame his body, it was his heart that decided not to listen. Maybe his body too, last night proved it. He was just so head over heels for Bax that it wasn't healthy anymore.

Today, he'd actually began to distance himself from Bax.

Chickenshit.

He knew he wasn't doing anyone any favors by behaving like this. It was all just so confusing.

After they returned from that weird-ass mud crab tasting thing at a nearby restaurant that Bax had talked him into, Jacob had been running up and down the entire campsite in an attempt to jog off his lunch. And avoid Bax. Jacob just couldn't face him for a long time without getting aroused, big time, and feeling embarrassed as hell. Memories of last night haunted him, teased him, drove him crazy. And the way Bax's eyes glowed and his confident smile taunted him didn't help in the slightest to stay focused on anything but what he tried not to think of.

Jacob knew they were good, at least he hoped they were. Jacob *felt* extremely good, that was for certain. And when Bax said they were good, then they had to be. But what in the world had come over him to be so bold? He had absolutely no clue. And why did he have to feel so embarrassed about it today?

The pat on his shoulder startled him. Jacob turned around and looked up into Bax's bright green eyes. He felt like melting, and it wasn't so much from the sun this time.

"You okay, Jazz?"

Jacob nodded. Bax held out his hand and helped Jacob to stand up. Once both his feet were steady on the ground, Jacob grabbed Bax by both his shoulders and pulled him into a tight hug. He needed this right now, needed reassurance that they were good. Jacob needed to know that he was making a fuss out of nothing. He wasn't sure just how he would *know*, but he hoped Bax would show him in his own way. He was ready, he hoped. Jacob needed to face Bax and find out just where they stood. Jacob cared about Bax so much it made his head spin and his heart ache. He didn't want to jeopardize their friendship with their stupid fooling around.

He wanted more though, more of Bax, all the damn time.

Jacob wanted all of Bax, and it scared the life out of him. By looking at his parents, he saw how *love gone wrong* could destroy so much, and he feared that whatever they would do or become in the future might tear them apart at some point. Jacob didn't want that. But then again, he wanted what they had last night, and a lot more. He wanted more of his friend's warm skin against his, those kisses and just everything.

Geez, why does this have to be so fucking difficult?

It doesn't have to be difficult, you just have to risk something. *Great, that's not helping at all.* Jacob wanted safe, wanted home and happy endings. He wasn't a gambler and he didn't want to risk losing Bax over this or anything else.

And as if he could read his mind Baxter whispered against his ear, his voice low and gentle and reassuring as hell, "It's going to be fine, Jazz. We'll figure this out. You and me, together." He then hugged him closer and held him just like that for a few very long and comforting moments.

"Yeah?" Jacob eventually asked, just a little breathless because these emotions he felt were so overwhelming.

"Of course, we will." Baxter nodded and broke their embrace, those beautiful, golden-green eyes gazing down at him, with something like hope and adoration, felt wonderful and sent those butterflies dancing and fluttering again.

"Okay, Bax. I trust you."

And he did. He'd promise to put his stupid fears and insecurities aside and trust Bax. They will figure this out, like he said, together. Together sounded good. They could do that. Hopefully.

"Good."

"So, what are we going to do now?"

"Now? I am going to kiss you breathless, and then I'll drag you back to our tent and have my way with you." Bax smiled at him in that dazzling, arousing, and yet, reassuring way.

Yep, he trusted Bax.

One hot and heady kiss followed another, while hands tugged at clothing and feet tried to stay steady. It proved to be quite the challenge inside their narrow tent, especially with Bax all over him like a starving hyena. With every breathless kiss, electrical heat swept down Jacob's body like liquid fire, leaving him hard and throbbing and just one step closer to insanity.

He felt Bax's wet tongue close to his ear when finally, the last piece of fabric hit the floor, and warm skin touched warm skin. Soft kisses rained down on Jacob the very moment he hit the mattress with his bare ass. *Gosh, this feels good.* Bax fast devoured every inch of his body with warm hands and wet tongue, soft lips and gentle fingers. Even teeth seemed to be everywhere. Jacob thought his head was spinning, but he couldn't tell, maybe the tent was moving?

And just when had breathing become so difficult?

Bax gently pressed him into the soft mattress "So hot, Jazz." His warm breath tickled his neck as Bax kissed his way up, making Jacob squirm underneath him. "Are you okay with this?"

Their eyes locked and Jacob nodded. "Uh-huh." Then their lips met in a long, sugary kiss.

The weight of Bax's body on him felt absolutely amazing. When his hands found Bax's bare ass, he instinctively enveloped a double handful of firm flesh, literally for the first time in his life, and it was beyond amazing. Pulling Bax's warm body closer, he moaned in satisfaction when his body responded to him, the same way that he was responding to Bax. He thought it couldn't get any better than *this*.

But then Bax pulled away, gently untangled himself from Jacob. *Oh no.* By the time he opened his eyes, and long before he could ask whether something was wrong, he felt a hand on his groin, fingers brush along his balls and a hot and rather wet tongue experimentally poke at his throbbing erection. *Oh wow.* Then those fingers joined the poking, then caressed and oh, something equally hot to that tongue nipped at his shaft, up the underside of his cock and sucked him in. Almost balls deep.

Oh double wow. Warm, wet heat surrounded every nerve ending he never knew existed, with firm lips pressed together tightly as Bax moved on him. Holy G, he was going to die. He knew it. There was no way to survive *this*.

The intense pleasure he got from Bax's mouth on him, sucking and licking, and then those sneaky fingers tugging and tickling his balls, was just too good. Jacob couldn't hold back the moan that escaped him when his hip moved, instinctively, bucking up a couple of times, pushing himself into slippery heat. *Oh fuck.* He hadn't meant to, but damn that felt good. Bax continued to suck, slowly, careful and experimentally, tongue swirling and all. Jacob opened his eyes in time to see Bax slow down, pull back and lick at the tip of his cock while he looked up at him.

Holy hell, he was going to lose it. He was already so close to insanity, he wondered briefly if he could actually faint from pleasure alone.

"How you feeling up there, Jazzy?" Bax purred more than anything else, and it was by far the sexiest sound he'd ever heard anyone make.

"Yeah." Jacob nodded, feeling dazed and just a little breathless. "Perfect." He quaked. Bax grinned, his green eyes sparkling with something Jacob couldn't categorize yet, but he was eager to find out just what it promised.

Baxter chuckled and slowly crawled up his body, forcing him to lie back until his head gently nestled into the soft pillow. *Mhhh*, he felt so good it was hard to believe this was real and not just a mind-killing dream. A warm hand ghosted across his chest until it found a nipple, fingers brushed it teasingly. Another hand cupped one of his balls, gently, carefully caressing and tugging at the sensitive skin there. Hot, lingering kisses traveled up the side of his throat, across his cheek and then finally, warm and wet lips settled on his. He gasped when Bax kissed him deeply, longingly and pushed his lips apart with his hot, wet tongue. Yes, he was going to lose his fucking mind if Bax kept that up. Jacob was already dizzy, his heart hammering dangerously against his ribcage, tiptoeing around the edge, if the sticky fluid that leaked onto his belly was anything to go by.

Heaven was close enough to touch; he could already taste the never-ending happiness that would welcome him there.

With a final kiss and nip on his lower lip, Baxter leaned back enough for their eyes to lock, and Jacob thought he was going to lose it that very moment, when his own met those dangerously sexy green eyes. “Bax?” He asked breathlessly, what for exactly he had no idea, as he probably couldn’t even remember his own name right now.

“Just let go, Jazz. It’s fine.”

Those words of reassurance made him feel all warm and fuzzy inside, adding to the already crazy, dizzying sensations and addicting feelings and emotions he was going through. With one hand cupping his ass cheek, Bax lifted him just slightly off the mattress, and with another, warm and gentle hand he began stroking his throbbing cock. To Jacob’s regret, it didn’t take more than mere seconds for him to literally fall right over the edge. Big drops of wet come rained down on his tingling belly and heaving chest, and with an orgasm so intense he thought he might just never come down from this high. He wondered briefly if that would be so bad.

When he eventually did, and his mind caught up with everything, he was already tucked in, a warm blanket covering him and Bax, who held him close in his arms, lazily kissing his shoulder blade. A sudden chill rushed through his body, and he snuggled closer into his friend’s embrace. He had a faint memory of Bax cleaning up the mess he’d made with one of their underwear—good thing he’d brought a couple too many.

“You okay?” It was Jacob who eventually broke the silence, just because he wanted to hear Bax’s voice. He cursed himself for not having anything better to say. Bax squeezed him hard and lovingly against his warm body. “Never better.” He nuzzled into Jacob’s neck and pressed a tingling kiss against his throat. “You?”

“Same here.” It was true, and yet seemed like the understatement of the year. Bax hummed in further agreement.

“Bax?” Jacob took a deep breath and gathered all the courage he had left to ask for what still felt somehow too embarrassing to voice, or do without being asked to. Just why did he have to be so shy at times? He hated himself for that more than anyone would ever know.

“Hm?” He felt Bax’s hot breath ghost over his shoulder, followed by a chaste kiss.

“Um... I want to touch you. Can I?”

He felt his cheek heat and his throat clog up, he might just faint from embarrassment, if not from pleasure, after all. He couldn't deny that it felt absolutely amazing to fully and completely have Bax worship him and his body the way he did, but that was only half the fun, wasn't it? Well, he was sure there were a ton of other things he felt like doing right now, and Bax must have felt the same. Bax untangled himself from Jacob and nudged him to the side a little. He made enough space for Bax to brace himself on his elbows and gaze down at him.

“Anything you want, Jazz,” he whispered with a blinding smile. Damn those butterflies in his stomach. Great. Just what he needed to feel uncertain again.

“Do you, eh, want it too?” he asked, knowing just how *dumb* he must sound. He was a guy, a man, a big and bulky, and damned strong man, why couldn't he ask for something as simple as that without sounding like the coward he felt he was? Girls could probably ask for what they wanted, even if it was touching someone's cock and having sex.

“I'd love it if you did.” Bax gave him an *I'm all yours* smile and leaned down to kiss his cheek softly. “But no pressure, whenever you're ready. And whatever *you* want, Jazz.”

Now he felt like a real chickenshit. A very dumb one. Great. He knew Bax only meant to be considerate and all that, but he could do it, it wasn't like he wasn't ready. He wanted it, badly.

He just felt a little embarrassed to do it, especially when it felt like he was expected to do *something*. Not that Bax had made him feel that way, but it wasn't like every day he touched another guy, especially not in places he wanted to. Now that he actually asked he couldn't just say, *Okay, but no thank you*.

“I *am* ready. I want to.”

Well there was nothing wrong with just a little more reassurance. Baxter smiled and closed the gap between them, kissing him fully on the lips with a light smack. What started out soft and gentle and reassuring quickly became firmer and hotter with each exchange of lips, tongue and a lot of saliva. Jacob reached for Bax, and his fingers quickly found his firm chest.

Hot damn, that body.

And with that, he couldn't hold back anymore. A wave of heat overcame him, and the need to be closer, much closer, and somehow connected was overwhelming. Jacob tangled his legs over and around Bax's lower body, and pulled him as close as he could. His hand roamed Bax's shoulder, caressed his stomach and along his ribs in exploration. His nose brushed Bax's cheek, and his fingers finally found his nipples, which by the way, felt absolutely insane. When he experimentally rubbed the small, round nub Bax chuckled, then inhaled sharply and kissed him lightly, teasingly, leaving him wanting more.

With his leg pushing against Bax's bare ass, he pulled and tugged him flush against his body, as close as he possibly could. Feeling his hot and very hard cock nudge against his made him gasp. Bax moaned and tugged at his shoulder, then their mouths crushed together in a deep and most passionate kiss.

Mhhh, with Bax's soft lips, his warm skin, those sexy noises and that almost suffocating heat, it was insane just how fast he felt hot all over again. When he pushed Bax onto his back, he also got rid of the thick blanket, which stuck to his sweaty body and was getting in his way. Somehow, he managed to roll them over and ended up on top of Bax, which was the most incredible feeling altogether. Looking down on him, with his cheeks flushed and lips parted was, by far, the hottest thing he had ever seen. That look in his eyes and those tingling sensations inside drove him crazy. Jacob dipped his head and caught that sexy mouth in a hot, messy, and needy kiss. Jacob learned fast that Bax would murmur a lot of "*Soo good*" and "*Mmhh Jazz*" in between kisses, which, he had to admit, turned him on like nothing else.

He will never know for sure what overcame him when he reached down between their bodies, teasingly brushed along Bax's stomach, before wrapping his fingers around his friend's cock. Bax was so insanely hot and hard in his hand that he actually shivered, and for one fleeting moment, he wondered if he could do it. But then Bax's tongue nudged his, those soft lips kissed him sweetly before his teeth nipped at his lower lip, tugged and pulled. Jacob inhaled sharply, dropped his head onto Bax's shoulder, kissed the skin he felt against his mouth and moved. Moved his body, his hips, his hands and everything that felt like it wanted to move.

He shuddered when Bax's lips tickled his neck, kissing him teasingly, wet and with a lot of tongue, before sucking every inch of his throat he could reach. Jacob already felt those tell-tale sensations humming through his entire body, indicating he was *fucking close*, but just how embarrassing would it be to shoot his load while pleasuring his friend? He couldn't help it, this was just too hot. Bax was too hot. He was going to lose it any time now.

Before Jacob could panic from trying to hold back his release, Bax gently nudged his shoulder and forced Jacob to look at him. With glowing, reassuring green eyes he whispered, "Move. A little." And when Bax reached for both their throbbing erections, pressed them flush against each other, Jacob thought he might just faint for real. That feeling. Wow, there was simply nothing like a hot and hard cock against your own. Bax gasped and encouraged Jacob to follow his lead, which he gladly did.

And just like that they stroked, tugged and pulled themselves to completion. Together.

It was the most intense and incredible thing he had ever done. Jacob wondered briefly just how many more times he would be able to say that.

He would do anything to find out.

Chapter 5

May 11th, 2012

Baxter

Baxter could feel the buzz of excitement humming through his body all the way to his toes. Today was going to be one more day filled to the brim with footy and Jazz. They hadn't been busier in weeks and every day felt more exhausting than the previous, but Baxter knew well what they were working towards and he had no regrets. With every match, he was one small step closer to his future dream. What excited him all the more were the rumours of more scouts coming to their next few matches. The upcoming championship, he'd heard, would be buzzing with important people.

Sometimes, the excitement was almost mind-numbing. He couldn't wait to finally make the Schoolboys and have actual chances to play for the Melbourne Storm or Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs. He bloody hoped he was good enough this season. Despite all those hours Jazz and he spent together doing a lot of things that had absolutely nothing to do with footy, he was still sure that he gave his best every single day. It wasn't like they didn't put in any extra hours anymore, of course they did, and they still worked their arses off on the field. They might have dropped a few hours of work out here and there and definitely stopped going to the beach as often as in the first weeks of the year. But all that shouldn't have any effect on their routine, they both made sure that nobody would have any reason to think any less of their performance and he was fairly certain they kicked ass, as Jazz liked to say, better than ever. He felt unstoppable. Almost unbeatable.

"Are you ready for the game?" Baxter asked, lowering his gaze until his eyes locked on Jazz's lips. Damn, he had a mouth made for kissing. He couldn't wait for the game to be over and check just how good they were at that. *Mhh*, kissing Jazz had fast become one of his most beloved activities to pass time. The feelings inside him were nearly out of control just thinking of later tonight. He beamed Jazz another cheerful smile and handed him his bottle of water. The guy still didn't drink enough, no matter how often he told him to. Jazz could be bloody *impossible*, but Baxter still loved him.

Wait what? Oh yeah, right. It still felt weird to think he could be in love, but it had been on his mind for a while now, because it was simply impossible to

ignore all those ways Jazz made him feel. All the time. It had to be love, he was fairly certain. He wondered if Jazz felt the same.

“Born ready, and you know it. Thanks.” Jazz winked, took a long swig before throwing it back at Baxter. Jazz beamed him his trademark grin, brown eyes crinkling, dimples and all. He realised he had been staring after Jazz when he called for Baxter, “Come on, slowpoke. They aren’t gonna wait for us!” already half out of the door, leaving him behind as last of the team.

Baxter smiled to himself, dropped the bottle in his backpack and sprinted after Jazz. What he wanted to do right now was to jump on Jazz, tackle him to the ground and kiss the life out of him.

Preferably without any audience.

As expected, today’s match had been anything but a piece of cake, the other guys were strong and played their absolute A-Game, nevertheless they won and *kicked ass*. The crowd loved them. Their coaches loved them. They were on a winning streak on top of that. Life couldn’t be any better. And he finally had his Jazz to himself for the rest of the day. Just. Perfect.

Sitting in his old Mustang, he admired Jazz’s profile for a long while until he eventually interrupted his texting. It was probably his mum, he often texted her updates on matches, or told her where they would be later that day.

“How about a barbie tonight?” Baxter eventually asked, and it didn’t take Jazz a second to look up from his phone and shove it into his backpack. Yeah, that sounded good to him. A lot of food, sunshine and Jazz.

“A what?” Jazz asked with a confused look. He looked almost comical, as if Baxter had just asked him something weird. Which he hadn’t.

“Barbecue?” Baxter poked him playfully. “Come on, Jazz. You’ve been here how long? And you still act like I’m speaking a totally different language at times.”

“Well, sometimes you really do.” Jazz laughed and, as always, it was the most contagious and lovely sound Baxter had heard all day. “And you always catch me off guard with those weird words of yours.”

Baxter caught himself getting lost in those brown eyes all over again. They never failed to draw him in and lose all sense of time. The way Jazz always would stare back and smile didn’t help for it to be less intoxicating.

“So, your place or mine?” Baxter said teasingly and pulled at Jazz’s arm, the warm skin underneath his fingertips still made his head spin and his breath catch. One simple touch would never feel like that with anyone else.

“Mine, I guess. Mom’s out as always, and I’m sure the others won’t mind. They’ll probably like to join our little *barbie* party.” Jazz winked at him and that was that. Baxter pulled him close enough to steal a long and lingering kiss.

And maybe another, and another.

As expected, Jazz’s aunt’s house was empty when they arrived. They bought a few steaks and things to munch on, on their way there. They would just put the rest of the unused food in the fridge. The small garden out in the back was perfect for the two of them. With a lot of trees and shrubs surrounding them, and almost no neighbours close by, it had been a pretty nice and relaxing barbie. Baxter hoped they could do that more often in the future. Someday maybe with all of Jazz’s family.

“When is your mum going to show up at one of our matches?” Baxter asked in full sincerity, there was no mocking or anything in voice. Baxter was concerned at times that Jazz didn’t seem to ever have any time with her at all. While he felt overwhelmed most of the time with the gigantic amount of babying by his own mum, he couldn’t imagine how upsetting it must be for Jazz not to have all that. Sometimes he wished they could exchange mothers, he preferred to be the one suffering a little more when it would make Jazz happy.

“I don’t know, Bax.” Jazz shrugged and finished his steak with one last bite. Baxter wondered briefly whether he would get to see Jazz’s mum again anytime soon. So far they had only met twice, and even then they only briefly exchanged greetings and quick introductions in the doorway. She seemed like a nice person and he wanted to meet her properly someday. He’d seen and talked to Jazz’s uncle and aunt a lot more often and longer in the past weeks.

“She will come to graduation though, right?” And that would be his last question, he promised. Jazz clearly didn’t enjoy talking about his family, he’d learned that pretty much right from the start.

“Yeah I think so. She’d said she’d be there, but you never know with her job. So I’m not betting my life on it.”

Baxter was glad that, at least, she would try, and that Jazz didn’t look sad, although the resigned look on his face didn’t make him feel any less concerned. Baxter knew that there was nothing he could do, which made it even worse.

“She will be there, Jazzy. I am sure she will.”

“Yeah, probably.” Jazz gave him a bright smile. “So, do you have anything planned for dessert as well? Or should I go into the kitchen and whip something up?”

“Oh, I think we might find something we could *whip up* together, what do you say?”

Jazz nodded and stood, holding out his hand in invitation. “I love the way you think, Bax.”

And Baxter loved how Jazz’s smile alone would always make his stomach feel funny and the rest of the world around him fade into the background. He was the luckiest person, being able to enjoy Jazz’s company, to drink in his smiles and be looked at with so much warmth and adoration.

Bloody hell, he was so in love with the guy.

May 20th, 2012

Jacob

Damn, how badly he wanted to wrap his arms around Bax, pull him close by his waist and kiss the life out of him. He constantly craved it, like white chocolate latte and Rocky Road ice cream. Today was proving to be a struggle too, especially with Bax looking so damn sexy. And then there were all those memories of their last actual night together. It had been a while since they’d had the chance to do more than just cuddling and kissing, but that didn’t make them any less real.

Those memories were burned into his brain, vividly so. Steamy, sensual memories. Hot, naked skin on skin. Fingers teasing. Lips sucking and teeth nipping, biting. *Oh fuck*. All Jacob could think of was kissing those soft, gentle lips again and again. If he had his way they would never be apart, but obviously, that wasn’t going to happen any time soon. Certainly not right now, out on the field, five minutes away from kick-off.

Damn, this was bad.

He could hardly concentrate on anything but Bax.

“Bax?” he began, only to be cut off by tiny, but insistent, kisses. “We. Can’t. S-stop.”

They were in the frigging toilet, the worst place to fool around. Bax, of all people, should know that. But it also made Jacob feel good, knowing that it wasn’t just him who had a difficult time keeping his hands to himself. The match went great, better than expected. Jacob managed to, at least, focus enough not to screw up.

“I know, just wanted to tell you that I had a great time yesterday, Jazz,” Bax whispered when he pulled back, a particular gleam in his eyes that told him he was going to be in trouble. The good kind of trouble. But they weren’t in the right place for *that kind* of trouble. Dammit. It was so frustrating.

“We didn’t do anything except play a round of *Mario Kart* and eat pizza.” With Jacob’s aunt and uncle for crying out loud. They had to spend yet another PG-13 kinda night in. So yeah, there hadn’t been more on their agenda than that. Again.

Bax leaned in against him, pressing Jacob against the cold tile wall. “Exactly. And I loved every second of it,” he purred, his lips tracing the curve of Jacob’s ear, sending tiny shivers down his neck. When Bax released him with a nip to his neck, he gazed at him with the greenest eyes and the warmest smile. If Jacob hadn’t already been head-over-heels, those simple words and just what they implied, combined with the passion and admiration shimmering in Bax’s eyes, would’ve done the trick.

“Jazz, do you know how much I *love* looking at you?” Bax whispered, and now, it was Jacob’s turn to lean in and press a kiss to his neck because he couldn’t resist that inviting throat had been taunting him all day.

“Not as much as I love looking at *you*,” Jacob purred into Bax’s ear, steadying himself by holding on to his firm chest. Wow, those muscles. It never failed to amaze him just how much Bax’s body turned him on. One touch and he was gone. Why couldn’t he know how to teleport? Jacob knew just the place where they could do as they pleased. Any place but here would be perfect. He also wished he could stop time and stay there with Bax forever.

Baxter raised an eyebrow. “Are you trying to seduce me with your Californian charm?”

“Mhh. Maybe.” Jacob grinned. “Kiss me again?” Jacob loved the look on Bax’s face, the light flush and the visible excitement. When he leaned forward

and their lips met in a chaste kiss, Jacob was once again overwhelmed with the scent of him, fresh like an ocean breeze but barely hiding his masculine tang. It was a good thing they had just showered, because a clean Bax was far more arousing than a sweaty Bax. Well, on a second thought...

"*Anything* you want, Jazz." Bax's lips curved in a wicked smile, holding him captive with a lust-filled gaze.

"Yeah hold that thought, this isn't the place or time for what I really want."

Jacob wished they hadn't started this, because how was he going to make it through the rest of the day in his coaches, friends and Bax's company?

May 31st, 2012

Jacob

Jacob finished washing the utensils he had used for today's cheesecake. It had been his fourth try since last week and hopefully he'd gotten it right this time. It was one of the many recipes his grandma passed on to him years ago. They had cooked and baked together whenever one of them had had an idea for a new recipe, or whenever one of them felt hungry for something particular. His grandma always knew how to whip up something amazing. Jacob admired his Grandma Clara for her passion and talent.

One day he wished he could come up with a few incredible dishes himself. Until then, he had to practice a lot, if just rugby and spending time with Bax wouldn't always take up all of his free time. He loved taking over his aunt's kitchen.

"Good morning, Coby." Jacob turned at the sound of the familiar voice.

"Hey, Mom." He smiled at his mother as she crossed the kitchen. "Do you want coffee?" he asked cheerfully. Jacob couldn't help it; he was in a pretty good mood today.

"Thanks, dear," she said before dropping a kiss to his forehead. "Coffee would be lovely."

Jacob rummaged in the cupboard, and in no time had a cup of coffee ready. Those coffee pad machines were handy.

"Mmm, that smells good, honey. What are you making?" she asked when he turned to set the coffee and sugar onto the counter, where she sat in her usual chair.

“Cheesecake. Again. I know, I know.” Jacob wondered when his mom would finally tell him to stop messing about in the kitchen all the time. Just the other day, they offered a bunch of desserts to their next door neighbors, because they couldn't eat everything he'd made.

“Bax is going to come over later, we'll hang out here a while today,” he explained, while getting himself a glass of grape juice out of the fridge. “That's still fine right?” For a moment he felt a bit panicked that they might have to change their plans for today. *Please say it's fine.*

“Of course, honey. That sounds lovely.” She gave him a bright smile. “I hope you two will have a good day.”

Oh, he was sure they would have a fantastic day. It had been a while since they'd had enough time to enjoy their time together in private. Usually their days were packed with practice, games and a lot more practice. Today promised to be great.

“I'll put the cake in the fridge later, take as much as you like whenever you come home for lunch,” he said, sitting on the empty chair next to his mother. Jacob watched her sip on the coffee, while skipping through one of the many newspapers his uncle always left lying around on the counter.

“Thanks, sweetheart.” She tucked a strand of brown hair behind her ear, then placed her hand on top of Jacob's shoulder, squeezing gently. “I'm proud of you, you know that right?”

Huh. Jacob didn't think he was doing anything special that would make anyone proud. He was just a regular student, one who loved to play football. A *lot* of football.

“Why?” He chuckled. “Because I make the best cheesecake in Queensland?”

“Yes, you really do.” She smiled warmly. “I am also very proud that you are doing so great with school and everything. Your aunt always tells me how everyone at Keebra loves you.”

Jacob wasn't so sure about that. Probably not everyone loved him. There were a couple of names that came to his mind, who were far from loving him. Tom Morton, for example, had never gotten over the fact that he played his position now, even though it was neither one's fault. And then there was Patrick Taylor, who had a serious problem with him and nobody knew why. Patrick was the only guy who still told those weird, and most definitely not funny, American jokes, and made fun of his accent.

Nobody else bothered about his accent, which by the way wasn't that strong. In the beginning, some of the guys might have said they thought he talked funny, but that never bothered him because he thought they talked funny too. Once they all became good friends nobody ever mentioned it again, well except Patrick, but Jacob didn't pay any attention to him. As for the teachers and coaches, Jacob thought yeah it could be true that most of them did like him, which still made him feel very happy about going to Keebra. It was a great school.

"Why don't we invite your friend for dinner next week?" his mom suggested. "I haven't had the chance to say more than a few words to him. I'd really like to change that. You two seem to be getting along so well."

His mom's words took him by surprise.

"Sure. I'll ask Bax." He smiled at her, wishing they could really do that, have dinner with Bax and talk a lot. They never really had much time for that, and he *so* wanted Bax and his mom to meet properly. But he knew that wasn't going to happen so soon. *Don't get your hopes up yet.*

"We don't have to if you're busy and all. I understand," he added quickly. Jacob remembered all those times she canceled last minute. He kind of hated getting his hopes up with every new plan to do something together, just to have her go to work in the end.

"Of course we have to," she insisted. "I know I'm not around as much as we both want. I promise I am going to take a few more days off soon, and then we can all get together."

Jacob looked at her in surprise. "From work? Completely off?" he asked excitedly.

His mother gave him a warm, reassuring smile. "How about I will take you boys out? How does that sound?"

Jacob felt a sudden rush of happiness and excitement hum through his body. It would be wonderful to have a few dinner dates with his mom and Bax, and maybe do silly things like go shopping with her, or both of them. Just going to the mall would be great, and, perhaps, they could see a movie and do things families usually do.

Once his mom left for the hospital, Jacob took out the cheesecake and set it aside to cool. In order to clean up before Bax got there, Jacob dropped the last few pieces of cutlery that he'd used for his breakfast toast and eggs earlier, into

the sink and made quick work of washing up. Today was their two-month anniversary, which was a silly thing to remember he knew that, but there was no way he would not have marked *that* date in his calendar. It felt too important to ignore.

They didn't plan on celebrating, of course not, he wasn't sure if Bax would even remember. Jacob had only briefly mentioned it last month while they were away with the team for one of their matches. Obviously they hadn't had any private time back then, so they ended up passing out from exhaustion with a bunch of their teammates on the bus home. Yes, very romantic. At least now, they would have a lot of time to enjoy the day in each other's company.

It didn't matter one bit what day it was. He and Bax planned on taking over his aunt's house tonight, which turned out fairly easy since they would be away for a couple days, catching up on some alone time somewhere in a hotel in Sydney. And as usual, his mom would be working a double shift at the hospital. She might come by to grab some late lunch around the time he and Bax planned to be out of the house. It would be perfect.

The soft tune coming from the table behind him, indicating an incoming call from Bax, startled him slightly. He had been so engrossed in his thoughts. Jacob turned around to answer his smartphone. "Door is open. Come in, coast is clear." A smile quickly found its way onto his lips.

He was way too excited for today. Ever since their first kiss at the beach two months ago, they naturally fell into a form of dating without thoroughly discussing what it meant. Stealing kisses in the dark and sneaking away for a few intimate hours had fast become as important as their regular rugby practice, surfing and lifting weights. Of which, the last two had to suffer a bit in favor of a little more intimate moments. They were both probably quite happy with that though.

Most of the time it didn't bother Jacob that much, that they had to keep it a secret or that they weren't going to be addressing each other as boyfriends in the out and open. He knew what he felt was real enough, and he was almost certain by now that Bax felt the same about him. It was enough that they could freely express their feelings to each other, he didn't need to have the approval of everyone else. Although, he knew that, at some point, he had to come clean with his mother at least. Of course there were times when he wished he could cuddle up to Bax at the beach with everyone's eyes on them, without having to fear the sun might fall from the sky.

Hell, even being able to take his hand on a walk down the seashore while watching the sunset, like any other couple, would be nice from time to time, but they couldn't, and he knew better than to ask for it. At least not for the time being. Or ever. He still had time to decide about the future, right?

With his back to the living room, Jacob rinsed one last cup under the hot water. Baxter came up from behind and gently placed his hands on Jacob's waist, pulling him close against his chest.

The intimate touch didn't startle him and neither did those warm lips as they brushed his ear in barely a whisper, sending a chill up his spine. "Good Morning, Jazz." *Mmm*. That purr never failed to turn his knees into jelly.

"Morning, Crazy." At that, he felt Baxter's lips press hard against the side of his neck, followed shortly by his teeth grazing his skin teasingly. He loved when Bax did that.

Jacob turned around in his hold and smiled when Baxter's beautiful green eyes locked on his. Bax stepped closer yet, wrapped his arms tight around Jacob's back, and kissed him softly. The warmth of his tongue brushing along his lower lip drew a low moan from Jacob, before he took his mouth in a more demanding touch of lips and tongue. Holding back had been the most difficult for both of them, ever since their first discovery of how amazing kissing each other felt. Damn, were those kisses addicting. Soft lips touching, gently caressing, demanding and loving. Kissing Bax was something Jacob had wanted to do since he first laid eyes on him, and he was craving it now like nothing else. He just couldn't imagine a future without those kisses, without Bax.

Those lips were irresistible. Just watching him smile got Jacob's heartbeat going faster. Every damn time. They'd only known each other for rather a short time, but it sounded terrifying to wake up one morning and not have Bax in his life.

With his talented tongue, Bax coaxed a few more gasps and moans from him and Jacob shamelessly gave in to the rush of heat that overcame him every time they kissed. With a low moan of his own, Bax backed him to the counter behind them, running his hands up and down his body as they kissed some more. Jacob hoped he was as eager and desperate for more than he himself felt. He was going to go insane if he didn't get his hands on Bax's hot and very naked skin sometime soon.

“Mm, Jazzy,” Bax whispered close to his ear, something he seemed to love doing a lot. “Don’t you look gorgeous today, bunny.” *Damn, Bax.* Sometimes he was simply unbelievable. The things that came out of his mouth. Jeez. It was almost as if he found it arousing to tease him.

“Don’t call me that, Bax.” *Seriously?* Bunny must be one of the most embarrassing pet names he could have come up with. Jacob looked nothing like a cute, cuddly little rodent.

“Bunny or gorgeous?” Bax asked teasingly, nipping at Jacob’s jaw.

“Both.” Honestly, Jacob could do without the gorgeous as well, but he would be a lot more willing to let that one pass instead of *bunny*.

“I have to think about that, bunny. You are incredibly gorgeous, I can’t just ignore that.”

That familiar glint in Bax’s eyes did the craziest things to his stomach.

“Then at least stop with that damn bunny thing. That’s just weird. What’s that about?” Jacob grinned. “Do you have some sort of disgusting pet fetish I should know about? Maybe it’s the fur that turns you on?” Now there was a thought. He wiggled his eyebrows seductively. “Should I go fur shopping? Bunny ears or kitty tails?”

Once he was eye level with him, Baxter gave him a disgusted look. “Now, who’s weird?”

Jacob laughed out loud and took hold of Baxter’s shoulders, pulling him hard against his chest. Nothing in the world could honestly ruin the mood for them. And just like that, with teasing kisses and arousing touches they fell right back into their familiar pattern of making out.

“Why were you cooking? I thought we agreed that I would take you out to dinner?” Bax’s hot breath tickled along his throat, and he shivered.

“You know I love cooking,” Jacob gasped when Bax bit down on his sensitive skin. *Holy G, that felt good.* “And, anyway, I only made dessert.”

“And I thought we agreed on tonight’s dessert already?” Baxter pulled back enough to gaze down on him, those intense green eyes made him catch his breath and his knees almost give out. Bax steadied him with firm hands on his hip, his hard and muscled body flush against his own.

There was no way that Jacob would have forgotten. Bax had agreed that with the house empty and all that freedom they could try something else,

something a little more daring, and they both had been looking forward to it. He was a little nervous, but overall just way too excited. But first things first. Jacob had always wanted to try his aunt's kitchen counter for something other than cooking.

"You realize you've hit the Jackpot with me, right?" Jacob purred into Baxter's ear, tightening the grip he now had around his waist. He pulled him closer, seeking out his cock. Because rubbing against each other felt like the hottest thing, and Jacob couldn't get enough of it.

"And why is that?" He withdrew enough to see Bax raise an eyebrow, a teasing smile playing his lips. Jacob loved this, being intimate with him, being able to watch his *boyfriend* from up close and so very personal. It filled his chest with warmth, and his belly with butterflies.

"Mh... You know, I'm all jock, hard muscles on the outside, soft and cuddly geek on the inside," he whispered, his tongue leaving a wet path up Bax's neck to his jaw. Inspecting his work, he shuddered lightly. *Mhh*, that looked yum. He wanted to lick it all over again.

"And you can cook," Bax pointed out with a cheeky grin.

Jacob chuckled. "That I can." He reached for Bax's neck, gently pulled him closer again just to lick and nip and bite some more. He needed more, he wanted to feel Bax's hard body pressed against his own. Jacob's fingers traveled up Bax's neck, touching his nose to his cheek. "There are some other things I can do, care to find out?" he purred against Bax's warm skin, inhaling the scent that always drove him wild. Getting Bax naked had fast become his number one favorite pastime.

"Bloody hell, Jazz, I don't think I'll ever get enough of you."

Now was that truly so bad? Jacob pulled him closer and silenced him with more teasing kisses. He could swear his blood was boiling by now. There was nothing he enjoyed doing more than running his hands down Bax's strong arms, over *those* abs or just caressing his soft cheeks, neck and the lower portion of his back. Damn, the guy's back drove him wild. He'd give up his video games, comics, rugby and cooking if he could touch and make love with Baxter until his last breath. He had already admitted to himself that's where his heart belonged. It was hard to deny that Jacob was head-over-heels. *In love*. With Bax. Very much so. And damn if that wasn't scary.

"Bax," Jacob managed just a little too breathless, "Sit. On the counter."

Bax gasped when he pulled away from his searching lips. "The counter?" he asked confused, which made Jacob chuckle.

"Yes, the *bloody* counter. I would lift you up, all romantic and stuff, but you're a little too heavy for me," he said teasingly, poking Bax's chest.

"Are you calling me fat?" Bax asked in mock-hurt, Jacob could only grin.

"No, just too heavy to carry." Bax shook his head but made quick work of hopping onto the kitchen counter, facing Jacob. He wiggled his legs and beckoned for Jacob to come closer, smirking and wiggling his eyebrows. Jacob loved Bax dearly, but sometimes he just looked a bit too goofy. Not that it made him any less sexy, and especially right now, all Jacob could think of was to get him naked, hot and bothered.

Bax raised his legs and hooked them around Jacob's hips. *Oh wow*. That was nice. They reached for each other, hands found arms and shoulders, and Bax's legs pulled him closer. Then their mouths met in a slow and sensual kiss. No, scratch that. A *very* slow and absolutely mind numbing kiss. Jacob gasped a little when their tongues met and he tightened his grip on Bax's shoulder, just a little uncertain how to go from here. He *really* wanted to get Bax's shorts off, but *that* kiss, those legs tight around him, it drove him crazy.

Baxter

After a nice, relaxing couple of hours by the beach, swimming and surfing, and a very sumptuous dinner a while later at an Italian restaurant down by the Golden Coast, they found themselves back at Jazz's aunt's house. The drive there had been a little too quiet, and Baxter still felt slightly grouchy. Jazz wouldn't let him get dessert at the restaurant no matter what he offered in return, said his cheesecake had to be eaten instead. Not that Baxter minded, he loved Jazz's food and especially his desserts, but that chocolate fudge the little kid at the table next to them had just looked so good. He wanted something chocolaty then.

Jazz's cheesecake turned out to be extremely delicious though, especially licking it off its creator's lips, fingers and collarbone. He still wondered briefly how it had ended up there. He also looked forward to trying to get tomorrow's chocolate fudge right on the same spot. Jazz promised he would make him chocolate fudge next time. Tomorrow, he decided.

"Come with me, *big boy*."

Baxter held out his hand in invitation. Jazz glared at him as he reached for his hand, entwined their fingers, and Baxter lead them to the bedroom. Jazz pretty much hated *every* pet name Baxter came up with. It was fun. Jazz could still be quite shy and sometimes he preferred not to express what he wanted, at least not verbally. Baxter didn't mind at all, they always worked out perfectly fine. Once Jazz was into it enough, he wouldn't hold back much and show Baxter *exactly* what he wanted. Just like this morning in his kitchen. Boy, just the memories made him blush. They'd fooled around in someone's kitchen, for crying out loud. That was just so hot. And dirty. And wow, they had to do that again sometime. But tonight was going to be very special, he'd see to that personally.

After walking through the doorway, Jazz turned to face him and Baxter softly pulled him down for a chaste kiss. A light brush of lips, and a nip to his nose when he withdrew, making Jazz giggle. He bloody giggled! Just how much more could he fall in love with the guy?

Jazz combed his fingers through Baxter's short blond hair, sending hundreds of tiny shivers running through his body. Lowering his lips to meet Jazz's, he kissed him again, slowly, lovingly. He just couldn't get enough of those lips. "Missed this," Jazz whispered in between gentle kisses and teasing little bites. He wrapped his arms lazily around Baxter's neck and held on lightly. Their last kisses had been just a little while ago—before, during and after dessert—but he knew exactly what he meant. He missed the feel of Jazz's lips on his every moment they weren't connected.

With firm hands on Jazz's waist, he pulled him closer, causing him to gasp when Baxter carefully pressed himself up against him, moving slowly, teasingly to an imaginary rhythm. "Need you on that bed, what do you say?" Jazz let Baxter lead him fully into his bedroom with a chuckle and a sweet smile on his lips.

"When did you...?" Jazz asked just a little stunned when he saw the shelves and table had been decorated with a few burning candles here and there, and a few of those weird scented sticks he thought Jazz might like. The faint scent of vanilla and coconut lingered in the room, Baxter liked it a lot. It always reminded him of how Jazz smelled, warm and homey. "While you were fussing about in the kitchen with that bloody cake and all."

"Wow, Bax. This is amazing!" The excited smile he gave Baxter made his heart beat madly against his chest, and for a few long moments, he was at a loss

for words. He knew what he wanted to say, he just couldn't. It was far too soon and he didn't feel like embarrassing himself right now. This was going to be an amazing night, and no words left unspoken would change that.

"It's nothing special, Jazzy." Baxter pressed a kiss to Jazz's forehead. "I just wanted it to look a little cosy is all." A kiss to his cheek followed, then one to the corner of his mouth, and eventually he caught his lips in a searing kiss.

"Happy two months, Jazz," he whispered, lips tracing the curve of Jazz's ear, ending it with a nip to its soft flesh. When he withdrew, he caught Jazz grinning at him brighter than any sun possibly could, lighting up Baxter's world right from where he stood.

"You too, Crazy."

Holding on to his waist, he leaned in once more, and Jazz did the same, their mouths instantly meeting in a hot and passionate kiss, while Baxter tried to focus on manoeuvring them towards the bed. With a teasing bite to Jazz's neck, Baxter pushed them onto the bouncy mattress. Jazz chuckled softly, pulling him close. "Mhh, Jazz. God, I've been waiting for this all day," he whispered close to Jazz's ear, teasing the soft skin underneath with gentle kisses.

"Me too." Jazz gasped and gave his body in surrender, which Baxter greedily took. Something between them had sparked the moment their lips touched in a first kiss all those weeks ago. Baxter still felt it tingling underneath the surface of his skin whenever they kissed, like a connection that came alive with every time they were skin on skin, like a bond between heart and soul.

Baxter reached for the white T-shirt Jazz wore and whispered, "Want to touch your skin." He felt Jazz shiver in his arms and nod in agreement. They tugged and pulled until Baxter had it over Jazz's head, then wiggled out of his own. Jazz chuckled when he rolled them over in a clumsy mess of arms and limbs. Baxter crawled on top of Jazz and grinned down at him. "Any complaints down there?"

Jazz shook his head lightly but otherwise just stared back up at him. His warm brown eyes glowed, and a gentle smile played on his lips. Baxter lowered himself down, kissing Jazz's shoulder blade and chest, and then nibbled at the smooth skin while Jazz cupped his arse and pulled him closer. Their cocks rubbed against each other, and wow felt that good. He reached for Jazz's arse in return, rocking Jazz against him as he slowly, teasingly ground his hips. He wanted to stay in bed like this forever with Jazz, kissing lazily, grinding against each other, losing their minds.

Looking down between their bodies he noticed Jazz wore his bright floral-printed boardies, which he changed into once they returned home. Baxter fast learned that Jazz always had to wear something comfy at home. Seeing this particular piece of clothing made Baxter feel a little fuzzy inside. They made him think of their day by the campsite and everything that happened those two nights. Everything had changed with that little trip. He loved those boardies.

He kissed Jazz's chest, stomach and cupped the obvious bulge, tugging teasingly. He pressed his lips against Jazz's soft skin below his collarbone, and eventually dragged them wetly down his chest. He stopped at his nipples and gave his full attention to each. He kissed and licked, nibbled and twirled his tongue around the small buds, leaving Jazz to wriggle and writhe beneath him. It made Baxter smile that they could be like this with each other, loving each second of one another's company, loving each other's bodies.

Baxter made quick work of removing Jazz's boardies as well as his own brown three-quarter pants. "You're so hot, Bax. I can't believe this is real," Jazz gasped, and it was easy to tell that he truly didn't trust his eyes, which had been fixated on Baxter the entire time. Just the thought that Jazz enjoyed watching him made Baxter shiver.

"Oh it's really real, Jazz. Believe me." He couldn't stop himself from grinning, the happiness and excitement was simply overwhelming.

"Are you sure? We might just wake up tomorrow and realize all of it has just been a dream." Baxter loved seeing Jazz equally happy and excited.

"Nah, impossible. Let me prove it to you how real this is," he whispered before brushing his lips over his mouth. He kissed him lightly, teasingly, savouring this sweet taste of heaven. "Okay, yeah," Jazz whispered breathlessly. "Yeah." Baxter chuckled and lowered himself down on his elbows to devour every millimetre of Jazz's strong body, just like their first time. He nibbled at every soft patch of skin, licked every hard plane of his chest, kissed every firm and bulging muscle until he sat stretched out between Jazz's thighs pressing a few more kisses around his ankle.

Baxter could spend hours doing this all over again. He admired Jazz's beautiful body from where he sat and slowly walked his fingers up his inner thighs making sure it tickled right where he knew it would.

"Are you still with me, Gorgeous?" he asked teasingly, and was instantly met with the deepest brown eyes glowing dangerously hot, making Baxter's head spin and his cock throb. He wanted Jazz so bad, to feel him on his skin, in

his mouth, tasting him. He wanted all of Jazz, and because he could, Baxter didn't hesitate any further, crawling forward between Jazz's thighs and taking his cock deep into his mouth.

During the many times they had done that before, he learned exactly what would drive his Jazz literally crazy, so he did just that. Baxter included his hand and fingers to give pleasure in the best way he'd learned how. Never would he have thought that having a mouthful of cock could be that hot and arousing, delicious even. Baxter suckled and swirled his tongue, sucked deep and hard then leisurely and slow. He fast became addicted to tasting Jazz. Jazz whimpered and writhed, bracing his heels on the bed to rock his hips and move with Baxter's movements. It was mind numbing, and he could literally get lost in *this*. Touching his own aching erection only added to the amazing experience.

When Baxter released Jazz's hot and heavy cock with one final lick, he looked up at Jazz, and the heavy gaze filled with lust he found as their eyes collided, nearly did him in. A wanton smile grew on Jazz's lips with every further stroke and touch of his balls. Jazz shivered when Bax's fingers found and kneaded his arse. He spread those soft cheeks, and ran his finger teasingly over Jazz's warm rim. Every further touch drew hesitant, but insanelly erotic, sounds from his lips.

Baxter slicked two of his fingers with the raspberry lubricant he had also previously organised and tentatively touched Jazz's opening. Just a light brush of slippery-wet fingers, carefully feeling out the area. Baxter knew there was no reason to be so damn nervous, but his heart still hammered madly against his chest. It wasn't the first time he had touched Jazz there, they had in fact done this quite a few times before, and Jazz seemed to have enjoyed it.

Holding up one of Jazz's legs, he brushed his slick thumb along the crack of his sexy arse. First teasingly, then with more and more eagerness, to get Jazz hot and ready. Boy, how he loved touching Jazz's fine arse. He relished in that first touch of his slick hole, getting high on rubbing against the tight ring of muscles and finally pushing in. Baxter watched mesmerised at the sight of his finger slow disappearing inside Jazz over and over again. Holy shit. That was hot.

Jazz gasped when Baxter squirted a good amount of lubricant on his cock, and his hands began to work their magic. Baxter felt his cheeks heat and flush at the incredibly hot sight of that pink, nearly translucent liquid quickly

dripping down Jazz's length and towards the crack of that damned sexy, firm arse. He squeezed Jazz's cock with one hand, then rubbed his fingers over Jazz's balls while massaging his opening with his other hand.

With his eyes locked on Jazz's twitching cock, he pulled out his finger slowly and pushed back inside with an additional digit, fast finding the perfect rhythm to draw those sexy moans from Jazz. Reaching for his own aching cock, he wrapped his hand around the base and began stroking himself lazily, watching Jazz's reaction to his actions closely. Jazz hissed through gritted teeth, fisting the sheets at his sides and arching his back just slightly, but enough for Baxter to feel just a little concerned.

"Is that still okay?" Jazz nodded, and he tried to believe him. He had no idea what it felt to be fingered, especially not with more than one digit. But by the look on Jazz's face it was more than fine. Maybe one day he'd let Jazz do that to him too.

"Yeah," Jazz creaked, face flushed and eyes shut close. "I might just. You know. *Fuck*. I can't—"

And with only a few more tight squeezes and rough tugs Jazz let go, and white, almost translucent, drops of come rained down on Jazz's stomach and chest. Baxter loved watching the play of emotions on Jazz's face, the look when he came was incredibly sexy. *Damn*. He couldn't resist and lightly smacked that exquisite butt lying so teasingly, invitingly before him. Jazz yelped in surprise, and Baxter almost chuckled.

He crawled towards Jazz and breathed close to his ear, "Couldn't help it. That was just so hot." Baxter then trailed his lips along Jazz's throat, kissing and nipping teasingly on his skin. When he withdrew, their eyes met, and Jazz grinned wickedly, holding him captive with that lust-filled gaze that would just drive him over the edge one day.

"Do it again?" Jazz whispered, his voice barely audible, and never breaking eye-contact. And wow. How he loved what he saw, he wished he could engrave that picture forever in his mind. And so, Baxter lifted Jazz's leg and his arse off the mattress with it, reaching down and smacked his arse again. And just a little harder a second and third time. That look on Jazz's face, flushed cheeks and lust-filled eyes, the silent yelps and moans got Baxter high like nothing else.

"Jazz," he whispered breathlessly, "you're bloody killing me."

Baxter dropped Jazz's leg, lay down onto Jazz's strong chest and kissed his neck, nibbling his way to his ear while grinding his hip up, rubbing their hot

and very much aroused cocks together. His lips caught something wet and slightly salty somewhere on Jazz's shoulder. "Mhh." Baxter hummed, hard muscles bunched beneath him, and *wow* Jazz's hardening cock felt amazing against his. His heart was hammering madly against his chest.

Jazz complained in the form of a low and deep growl when Baxter leaned back to gather their supplies. It made Baxter chuckle, and blush that he could have that effect on Jazz.

"Give me a hand here, Jazz?" Jazz raised his head, his cheeks flushed even a deeper shade of red when he considered Baxter for a long moment.

"Okay, I'll do it myself." Baxter chuckled and tore the condom wrapper, handing Jazz the bottle of raspberry lubricant. Jazz popped the lid with a muffled sound, and squeezed a big dollop of pink liquid into his palm while Baxter got himself sheathed a bit too clumsily. He was just too bloody nervous.

Those damn obscene squishy noises that bottle made didn't help one bit. When he watched Jazz smear the lube up and down his erection and around his opening, Baxter had to be a bit too careful not to lose his mind there and then.

"Easy there, that's my job." Baxter growled and gripped Jazz's cock. "Lie down and relax." He scooted closer, covered his own erection with as much lubrication as he dared, he didn't think emptying the whole thing would make it any better.

Baxter took hold of Jazz's legs and pulled his arse flush against him. He teased his hole with the tip of his slippery cock, circling the rim before slightly pressing forward until the resistance gave way. With a deep sigh, Baxter slowly and carefully entered him. When he pushed a little too deep into Jazz's arse, they both gasped. Baxter feared he might not make it much further than that, he was already so close.

"Fuck. Jazz, I'm sorry," he gasped, almost whimpered. Baxter hoped he hadn't been too rough, but hell, how could anyone control their body with that overload on... on everything?

"Are you okay, Jazz?"

"Uh-huh. Good. Real good."

Jazz lifted his head and they found each other's mouths with hungry lips. Both stilled as they devoured each other with maddening kisses, licks and nibbles. Baxter shivered when Jazz's arse tightened around him and continued

to do so. Boy oh boy, was this *good*, dangerously addictive. They both gasped when Baxter began to move again, and the following kisses were slow and sensual, less tongue and more lips, tasting, savouring and breathing each other in.

Baxter wrapped his arms around Jazz and rocked into him with slow, careful thrusts. When he leaned back to admire Jazz's features, their eyes locked as he slid in and out of Jazz's body. The moment was almost too much. Baxter slid closer and brought their bodies together again, needing to feel more of Jazz still. He rewarded Baxter with low moans and a toe-curling kiss, as if he poured everything he had into it.

Bloody hell. Jazz's mouth and tongue, and those kisses were driving him crazy and almost right over the edge. Making love with Jazz was overwhelming. Baxter could never have imagined that anything would feel like *this*, mind numbing and just absolutely maddening.

They tightened the embrace, and together they rocked, a slow, steady sway of their bodies. Muscles bulged and flexed, and Baxter slowly began to push deeper and faster, building a mind numbing rhythm that would soon send them over the edge. The sight of Jazz's smooth skin and those hard muscles bunching when he picked up the pace, bringing them both ever closer to completion, drove Baxter wild. It was absolutely maddening. Baxter moved in order to kiss Jazz lightly on the forehead, he slowed down all his movements, rocking his hips just a little, almost lazily pushing inside and out before picking up a much faster and determined pace, seeking out Jazz's lips with his own.

And wow, this was a completely new, and by far the most incredible feeling he ever felt. Their bodies melded, seeking more friction, more contact, while losing themselves in the most passionate, soul-searing kisses. When Baxter managed to let go of Jazz's lips he lowered to his neck, flicking his tongue against his damp skin, tasting and teasing him. "I'm..." he whispered unfinished when his lips reached Jazz's ear... *so bloody in love with you.* The need to let go grew too fast and became stronger with each thrust and every moan and gasp coming from Jazz's lips.

Baxter bucked his hips just a little faster and just a little deeper into Jazz's clenching arse and was instantly hit with an overwhelming rush of heat, shudders and shivers. There was no way to hold back any further than that and so Baxter gave in to his body's needs and let go.

He wasn't sure how much longer they continued to rock in each other's arms, but at one point he felt the hot, warm burst of Jazz's seed shooting

between their bodies and carefully slowed down his movements. His entire body was on fire inside and out, his head was spinning and his heart hammered in his chest as if he had been running for a million years.

Baxter didn't know how they managed to hold back so long or how something like that could have felt so incredible. When he moved enough to slide out of Jazz, his body ached all over and he wondered if he could manage to move any further without passing out.

Light, feathery kisses taunted Baxter's nose and he snuggled closer against Jazz. Arms wrapped tightly around strong shoulders and a broad chest. He hoped sleep would come slowly and last for longer than usual.

With Jazz in his arms, he didn't want to have to get up, if possible, ever again.

Chapter 6

June 22nd, 2012

Jacob

To celebrate their recent victory, Jacob had been standing in his aunt's kitchen almost all afternoon to prepare Bax's favorite dinner—homemade pizza with a lot of champignons and double cheese, crispy fries and salad on the side, and most importantly, walnut brownies for dessert.

It was the most perfect celebratory dinner, Baxter would never get to taste.

Jacob had absolutely no good feelings when Bax dropped him off at his aunt's house after today's rugby practice. The afternoon by himself, fussing about in the kitchen, had dragged on so long he even passed out for a while on the sofa while waiting for his brownies to be done. Baxter had promised to meet him at his home over an hour ago, when finally, the doorbell rang.

Baxter was never *that* late for anything. Jacob knew something was up the moment his pizza *dinged* in the oven and Bax was nowhere to be seen. And all that just when Jacob thought things couldn't get any better between Bax and him. They had been together for almost three months and everything had been just so good, despite the whole keeping it a secret thing. He had to admit that it had never been his wish to be in a secret relationship, and there had been a few moments recently where things became a bit too awkward with their friends, family and well, everyone really. Jacob hadn't known anything other than hiding his sexuality from the world, but quite frequently, he wondered what it would be like, being out to everyone and being able to express his love for Bax freely. It sounded more and more tempting. It was slowly starting to get to him that they *always* had to be careful not to accidentally touch each other too intimately, or lose themselves in a kiss.

Maybe Jacob suspected that something wasn't right, and maybe he tried to ignore it because he was afraid to find out the reasons behind Bax's strange behavior. Recently, Jacob noticed how Bax would suddenly act all strange, especially the past three days. When they were out together, he avoided Jacob almost deliberately, which was something new and caught him by surprise. Everyone knew they were *really close* and nobody had ever questioned them before, so Jacob didn't have a clue what was going on with Bax. Yesterday, he'd even gone so far as to tell him to go ahead without him, because he had something to take care of.

Something to take care of? Seriously? In the locker room without him?

Jacob offered to help take care of whatever it was he had to take care of, obviously intrigued and worried, but Baxter refused loud and clear. He told him to go home. Without him.

Not only had that been the very first time in almost five months that Jacob went home without Bax. It had also been the first time he went *anywhere* after school without Bax by his side.

Okay, so maybe they had been overly attached to each other, but that was just how it was and it felt right. What truly bothered Jacob, more than having to take a bus home by himself because *that* wasn't so bad, was simply the fact that he had been sent away without any explanation.

The impatient, annoyed look on Bax's face also did nothing to calm him down. He'd never seen Bax like that. It honestly frightened him. So yeah, Jacob wasn't the least happy about Baxter's secret job in the locker room, a part of him worried that Bax was in rather big trouble. Everything about the way he spoke to Jacob that day just didn't sit right with him at all. He knew there was something in the air; he just hoped it could be solved fast.

"Jazz, hey, I think we need to talk."

And that was the last he had heard from his boyfriend before he passed out. Or maybe not. He couldn't tell whether someone switched off the lights or he lost consciousness. Probably neither, but the next thing he remembered, they sat in the living room and his whole world shattered to pieces.

"Someone saw us, Jazz."

Bax sat down in front of him and took Jacob's hand in his, holding it in a loose grip. The simple gesture felt right and reassuring. Did he just hear Bax say what he thought he said?

"What do you mean, someone saw us? Where? When?" Jacob reached for Bax and pulled both of their hands to rest on his knee. For a moment, Jacob didn't dare to breathe or move. Baxter looked terrified. Absolutely freaked out, as if he had seen a frigging ghost.

When he spoke his voice was low, barely a whisper and underlined with mortification. "More important is what they saw."

Oh. Crap. This was bad.

“W-what, what did they see?” Jacob didn’t want to know. By the look of Baxter’s expression it was bad, really bad.

“They um, saw us, Jazz.” Baxter’s eyes suddenly unfocused and looked bleary. Jacob reached out and touched his hand to his cheek, Bax’s skin felt hot under his fingertips. “Two weeks ago, I think, maybe Sunday. Alex, Duncan and Sean. They saw us in my car.”

Oh-oh. Jacob was fairly certain he knew where this was going, and he didn’t like it. *Damn it all to hell.* This was bound to happen sooner or later, he should have known it would never work out. They couldn’t be careful enough forever. *Fuck.*

“Is it that bad? What did they see?”

Jacob gently caressed Bax’s cheek. He knew this was probably the most stupid question he had ever asked in his life, but he had no idea what else he could have said. The look on Bax’s face and his watery eyes told him it wouldn’t matter what he would say. Things couldn’t be fixed, kisses couldn’t be taken back and whatever hell they had given Bax couldn’t be undone. Baxter brought his own hand to his face and covered Jacob’s, then pressed it against his heated cheek. He let out a breath he must have been holding, and when he spoke, his voice was anything but steady.

“They saw us kiss. And touch. And be anything but discreet. Dammit, Jazz. Why didn’t we take better care? The car, really? What were we thinking? Why did we have to get caught?” Jacob gave his cheek a gentle squeeze and Bax tightened his grip on his wrist in return.

“Because it’s fucking *impossible* to hide forever, that’s why, Bax. Wasn’t it difficult already to pretend to be friends all day? Getting caught and found out was inevitable.” Jacob gave him a bittersweet smile.

“What did they say, Bax? This is going to be okay isn’t it?”

When Bax wouldn’t say a word, he thought he was going crazy. He needed him to say something, reassure him that this wasn’t going to be the end of *everything*. “Bax, come on please talk to me. You have to talk to me.” He felt his own voice break and a tear rolled down his cheek, which now started to fucking burn.

“Please.”

“It’s not going to be okay.” He wouldn’t look at Jacob, and it broke his heart. He knew what this meant without having to hear it. “I’m sorry, Jazz.”

No, he didn't want to hear it.

"What do you mean you are fucking sorry?" *Don't. Don't ask. Don't be so stupid. You know exactly what it means, you don't want to have him say it.*

"We can't do this. W-we can't stay together, Jazz."

"Why the hell not? Whatever they said, they can't blackmail you or whatever crazy ideas they have. They're our friends. Hell, they are *your* friends, Bax." He didn't scream or shout, he merely stated the obvious. Jacob knew it was wrong to attempt an argument because it wasn't Bax's fault. It didn't mean it hurt any less.

"They are *our* friends, and they'll have our backs. Well, some of them might."

"But?" *Oh. No. No.* He couldn't do this.

"Nobody else knows, Jazz, and they can't find out. Coach won't accept it."

"How do you know? You are his best player—he won't kick you off the team just because we fucking like each other."

Jacob knew he'd already lost him; he might as well retreat right now before they would end their relationship with an argument, or a fight. That was the last thing he wanted. Growing up with his parents arguing about anything from the weather, over dinner, to clothes, friends, his mother's work and whatever else they couldn't agree on. Jacob didn't want this for Bax and him. He didn't want to argue with the person he cared for, the person he loved. Ever.

"We shouldn't want to find out, Jazz. It won't have a happy ending. Especially not now, with all the championships and stuff. It's your career too, Jazz. I don't want to jeopardize it. You know how the sports world is, they're not very accepting."

You damn idiot, I don't care about rugby that much, and you know it. But he wasn't going to comment on that, it would only end in an argument, because really, he didn't give a damn about any sport when he had to choose between Bax and playing ball. There was no doubt about what his answer would be. Nevertheless, Jacob knew what he meant; he knew just how much Bax wanted to be accepted by everyone, especially the coaches and his team. He didn't play the way he played for nothing. It was his life. And Jacob wouldn't stand a chance.

"So, this is it?" *You're choosing rugby? Without putting up a fight?*

Fuck. The truth hurt more than he had thought it could. He'd lost him. Lost his Bax, his *love*. He would be lying if he said he had never thought about what could happen if they were found out. Many sleepless nights Jacob ran the possibilities through his mind and every single time he promised he would never stand in Baxter's way. He'd accept his decisions, give him up if he had to and most definitely stay away, in the background, if that was what he truly wanted.

It hurt, but if it would save Bax's career, so be it.

There had been a time when Jacob wondered if their love, he was fairly certain that they were in love, had a future. And hadn't it been obvious all along?

Jacob had always known that if it came down to it, Baxter wouldn't give up on rugby and Jacob would never ask him to reconsider his decision for the sake of him. He couldn't blame Bax.

He only wished it didn't have to be this way.

July 22nd, 2012

Baxter

He couldn't do this.

They were supposed to be a team. Jazz and him. They were supposed to be strong together, for the team. They were meant to be together, be strong for the damn team. Together. And this was just wrong. So wrong. They'd lost their *magic*, lost their bond, their friendship, their love.

Everything was just gone. Hell, the sun could fall from the sky and he wouldn't fucking care. Jazz had become his light, he almost dared to say, his everything. Without that light, he didn't need the sun, he was already living in darkness. And no sun could light up that kind of darkness. Without their bond, Baxter realised fast just how broken he was, inside and out. He was even too bloody broken to play. Baxter hadn't been at his best in *days*. In fact, he had been by far his worst, there was no doubt about it.

He couldn't just stand there and pretend there had never been anything between them. It hurt.

"You know how much this means to me, Jazz."

"Yeah, I know."

With those three words Jazz had totally shut him out, and he didn't blame him. It hurt like a bitch, he couldn't deny that. It didn't take Jazz one day to do just what he asked of him, not to see each other again. In a heartbeat, he basically took off and never looked back.

Does he have any idea how I'm hurting?

Does he feel like dying inside as well?

Did he ever think about him? Baxter did. Every bloody hour. He just couldn't get him out of his mind. It drove him crazy to be apart. Not being able to talk to Jazz, not having his smile directed at him instead of their friends, not being able to touch, kiss and hold him. Hell, simply not being able to tease him and mess around as close friends killed him. They hadn't exchanged more than a few greetings the entire time. Days passed without a proper hello, weeks passed without as much as a spared look. How could Baxter not feel bloody broken? If this was how it was going to be from now, he didn't want it. He didn't want a future without Jazz.

They had been so good together. When Jazz came along, he'd swept him off his feet, and never had losing control felt more empowering. Being with Jazz, having *his* Jazz admire him, care about him and take care of him, had fast become more important than playing footy had ever been. With all that gone now Baxter felt lost, hopeless and just a little pissed off at the world.

He knew he should feel proud of his team, his mates, their victories and most of all he should be thrilled beyond words, because he'd finally made the bloody Schoolboys.

Another cup, another semi-final, and as expected they made it into the finals with an outstanding score. He'd *kicked ass* too, like Jazz would say. Baxter had been "*man of the match*" for many of their matches, despite his lack of enthusiasm. They even made him captain of the Schoolboys. It was just like he'd always dreamt, the admiration, the endless scores, the importance of his new position and being captain. He lived for the high of every game, the moment when they kicked the other team's bloody arses, except somehow none of that mattered anymore.

Being on the field to the point of exhaustion, playing footy for the Schoolboys didn't matter. Nothing could cheer him up. He missed his Jazz, on the field, in his car, next to him on the street, by the beach and at the table at some random restaurant over dinner or coffee at their favourite shop. Baxter

missed their banter, their kissing, their cuddling and fooling around. He missed his Jazz's cooking, his bubbly laughter, his beautiful brown eyes, and well, he simply missed his Jazz.

Nothing was the same without him, and he wondered just how long it would take to get over this hole in his life. This pain was incurable and nothing could or would ever replace Jazz.

"Bates and Knight make Australian Schoolboys."

And a lot more headlines similar to that flooded the internet these days. Some newspapers and TV stations had interviewed them a handful of times. Not only was all of this damn surreal, it was also too much to handle at the moment. It was difficult to have Jazz on the same team, and now they would play for the Schoolboys together as well? It was like a dream come true and hell on earth at the same time.

Baxter wasn't sure he could do this. There were a couple of camps coming up and so much responsibility, he couldn't let anything or anyone distract him any further. At one point, he might just screw up for real and not only disappoint himself, his family and coaches, but also ruin his entire future over a bloody broken heart.

Just how had it come to all this?

Baxter considered quitting the team a few times too often. Not seriously, though, he just wanted to run away and hide, because seeing Jazz every day without being able to touch him, and watch him play with that hurt expression was getting to him more and more. He didn't want to go on like this, but neither could he just quit. Footy was what he did best. What else could he do? Nothing and he knew it, and hadn't it been his dream to make the Schoolboys?

There was no doubt about it, of course it had been his dream for years, but then Jazz came along and turned his entire world upside down. And Baxter sent him away because he couldn't deal with the idea that he might not be accepted by everyone and lose his dream of playing footy.

He wondered if all that would be worth losing Jazz over.

It bloody had to be, because he wouldn't survive this pain otherwise.

Jacob

Today had been one of the hardest days he'd had to go through in the history of his life. After witnessing what appeared to be the worst day of

Baxter's rugby career, which by the way, hurt Jacob probably more than anyone else, they were interviewed by a TV station. That alone hadn't been that bad, but then they made him and Bax pose for photos, together, smiling. They were made to stand side by side and smile their hearts out for what felt like the longest forty minutes of his life. Not only did Jacob not have any damn reason to smile, but forcing it for the camera in such close proximity to Bax had been nearly impossible. Eventually he managed, somehow, and after seeing the result, he thought he deserved an award for his performance. Maybe not an Oscar, because even to his own eyes he didn't look happy.

Jacob had been staring at the whole thing on his computer; their newspaper's online edition had it up in no time. Video and all. He always thought if anything like that would ever happen he wanted to be on good terms with Bax, he wanted to be friends and happy. Jacob wanted to be able to enjoy this experience, celebrate with Bax. Instead, he was going to mope around and read that damn article over and over. Or maybe just one more time and then never go online again. Ever. Also avoid newspapers and TVs, just in case. Maybe he would just never leave his room again.

Baxter Bates is fiercely making an impression on the Australian Schoolboy selectors. Bates, who will play centre position for this year's Schoolboys team, said he had never been more nervous as when they were announcing the team.

"I was truthfully a little surprised that I actually made it, I mean I played well, but I know I could have done better. I am truly delighted to have made the team despite my obvious bad day," he said. "I am also thrilled to have Knight on the team with me, going to the same school. I have known him for a while, and we make a good team on the field."

He didn't need to read the rest again, he could probably recite it in his sleep by now. The selectors were apparently truly impressed with how Jacob *"fought his way onto the Australian Schoolboys Rugby League team as one of just two Queenslanders selected"*.

Of course it was an incredible opportunity and Jacob *did* feel a little proud to have made the Schoolboys. Playing alongside Bax had always been so much fun. Except recently, when it became nothing but painful. Geez, he had to get a fucking grip and stop moping.

“Honestly, I didn’t expect to get picked,” he said. “I haven’t worked to be part of the Schoolboys team, but I love playing rugby, and I am looking forward to this new, awesome and surreal experience.”

Those were Jacob’s words to the reporter, and they were true. Jacob was looking forward. A little. Next was the Australian Schoolboys Rugby League Championships in Port Maquarie, and he had to get his game face on and show them how it’s done. Jacob shuddered. This was just so bad. He didn’t know what to think or feel anymore, he *was* truly excited, but then, he wasn’t. It was a constant up and down. The past weeks had been pure torture and he didn’t think he could honestly go through more hours together with Bax. Not with the terrible mood they both were in, and most definitely not pretending nothing ever happened. Pretending they weren’t even friends was simply the worst. But what could they do? For the life of him, Jacob couldn’t put everything behind him and just move on. Not yet, anyway.

Most of their friends had given them hell already, wanting to know why the heck they were both acting weird. Of course neither had any answers, so they just shrugged it off. *Stress*. Or something. He hoped they would buy it, eventually. *Why did everyone even care?*

It was frustrating. Only those who saw them that day apparently knew that they had been involved in more than just a budding friendship, and to Jacob’s surprise Matt wasn’t one of them. And right now Matt appeared to be the one most concerned, especially about Bax. Jacob didn’t know why Bax hadn’t talked to *him* of all people. Out of all the guys, he was sure that Matt would be the most understanding and maybe even supportive. He didn’t want to think that Bax might be *that* ashamed of who he was, that even his best friend would never find out. Okay, well maybe Jacob could understand it a little, it was scary to tell anyone, especially people you care about. He hadn’t told his own mother yet.

Jacob just wished that Bax would be happy, at least, even if he wasn’t. He didn’t want to see him ruin his career because of him. He couldn’t watch him play this bad for much longer.

Jacob had to do something, but what?

He truly didn’t have the slightest idea.

Baxter

Just as he was leaving, Matt came bouncing into the locker room, smelling dirty, sweaty and just bloody disgusting. "Get away from me, mate. You stink like you fell into a bloody toilet."

"Not any more than you. Wait, what's up with the clean clothes?" Matt sniffed at him like he was a bloody dog.

"Nothing? I'm just going out." He replied casually.

Therefore, he'd showered straight off the field and got dressed. Nothing weird with that. And now that he was all nice and clean, he could get away first and fast. He might even get a drink somewhere. Maybe not, since he wasn't fond of anything alcoholic, yeah he might just skip the whole *get wasted thing* and be lonely and miserable without it. He didn't need beer to get happy, or depressed. He could be either without it just fine.

Matt gave him a disapproving look. "Are you going on a date? Somewhere fancy?" he asked as if he hadn't ever seen him in nice, clean clothes before.

"Just because I'm wearing something other than my lousy shorts? Seriously, Matt. Just get out of here and into the shower, you bloody stink." Baxter shoved Matt towards the door and encouraged him to *leave* already. He didn't want to deal with his friend right now, or anyone else for that matter. He just wanted to be alone and preferably far, far away from anything that reminded him of footy. And Jazz.

"No, no wait. Geez, mate. Chill. I wanted to show you this." Matt held up his hands in protest, waving a small device before Baxter's eyes. "There's a ton of articles about you and Knight on the net."—"BATES AND KNIGHT GAIN AUSSIE SELECTION." Matt read aloud, almost yelling the words in his face actually, before he handed Baxter his smartphone. "Go on, read it already." He added with a broad grin, obviously determined that Baxter looked at the report.

Baxter growled. He knew about those stupid articles. Nevertheless, he scrolled down to read what had Matt so excited, despite his wish to throw the phone against the wall and watch it shatter into a million pieces. Why did he have to feel so bloody angry?

He honestly didn't give a damn what any of these articles said, Baxter already lived it, right here, right now, it wasn't anything glorious, at all. So what? They made the eighteen and under selection of the Australian Schoolboys. The ASSRL loved them. They were "*standouts in the South coast*

side that won the recent Queensland titles” and apparently deserved their selection a great deal. And just how did that make his life any better?

He was miserable more than ever.

Baxter tried to enjoy it, really, he tried to bask in the spotlight just like he always dreamt he would, but it just wasn't satisfying. It wasn't that much fun to be in the spotlight and it didn't make him feel any better about his damn breakup. Three months. They almost made three months.

And now that? He was forced to be with Jazz, pretending to be best mates for the media while they weren't saying more than “hello” and “good-bye” on a daily basis, despite being in each other's faces all day. It was bloody terrible. And it still hurt. In fact, it was more painful than any footy injury could ever be. With their recent tournament over, and the start of the South QLD semi-finals set for Wednesday night, he was anything but excited.

Screw the GIO Cup.

He was going out now, and wherever was fine. He tried calling Jazz's phone endless times over the past few days but nothing. He didn't pick up. He didn't call back. He even ignored him this morning when Baxter tried to talk to him. Jazz actually ignored him. *Ignored*. Can you believe it? He couldn't. Baxter had been so shocked when Jazz just walked past him outside on the car park like he was bloody invisible. Like Baxter wasn't real and hadn't just shouted his name ten times or more. Baxter could only stare after him and be late for *everything else*, which earned him a good ear full from Coach Anderson.

It hadn't been a thrilling experience to be given a speech, but what hurt worse was Jazz's behaviour and the fact that he bloody ignored him. He wasn't furious. Baxter would never be violent or anything, he was just crushed and broken and wanted to die.

Just when he had gotten the nerves up to confront him and hopefully talk, all he got from Jazz was a dismissive look and the cold shoulder.

What in the world was he going to do about this bloody mess?

Chapter 7

August 26th, 2012

Jacob

Another month gone and not much had changed. Not that he had expected anything to look brighter in just a few weeks. Well, that wasn't quite true, some things were going great, extraordinary great. They'd made the QLD semi-finals and kicked ass like nobody else. They'd even *won* the GIO Schoolboys state final. He should be thrilled beyond words, but reading all those headlines and comments in the online communities still felt as surreal as the first time.

He was anything but excited. Jacob probably wouldn't get used to seeing his name and interviews online and on TV. And honestly, he preferred not to. He couldn't fully wrap his brain around the fact that this was happening. Being on the field, playing a match, just being at practice alone, rugby still made him feel awesome beyond words, but then he would see Bax, and that sadness in his eyes and Jacob's heart shattered all over again.

He was absolutely thrilled for Bax. It was so good to see *his* Bax finally picking up his game, even if just a little, and truly becoming a star. Jacob knew he was on the fast track to becoming one of those big names. Everyone seemed to notice him, and Jacob had probably seen more of him on random rugby sites than in real life. Maybe not literally. It felt like there were worlds between them now, and it was a terrible feeling. Despite the excitement for Bax's recognition, the small fact that on the field, somehow, they'd both managed to play well together again. They sent those England Academy boys to a 2-0 series defeat in their last tournament, and it honestly felt good again to play to his heart's content. Kicking those English Academy boys' asses had been a blast. They were all nice guys too, and hanging out afterward had been fun, but on the field only victory counted. And it was a *bloody good* victory, if he might say so himself.

"When he finishes school, Bax will play in the under twenties side for the Gold Coast Titans."

He'd heard one of the reporters say that after they had finished interviewing Bax the other day. Yeah scratch that. Jacob didn't think it was what he truly wanted, because he knew for a fact Bax dreamt of getting out of Queensland and playing for one of the teams in Sydney, Melbourne or Auckland. Jacob had

to find a way to talk him out of this; he knew Bax had gotten a lot of offers from all across Australia. Maybe not every single team wanted him, but there were a few of the big ones that just had to be still interested, no matter what he might have announced. Even if they weren't together anymore, they could still be friends, eventually. And friends were there for each other right?

Jacob wanted to be friends again. After everything, Jacob knew he just had to get over himself and kick Bax's ass. He had no idea what the guy was thinking, choosing an offer to stay in Queensland when he could go to so much more exciting places. Not that Jacob had any problem with Queensland, really. He liked Queensland, but they both thought Sydney just sounded a lot more exciting, especially for Bax who'd grown up in Queensland. Now that he was finally on his way toward his dream, Bax simply could not miss taking that opportunity.

He had to show him just what a big mistake he was going to make by staying in Queensland.

If it just didn't still hurt so much to be around that idiot.

September 1st, 2012

Jacob

Long moments went by; songs passed one after the other. Jacob watched couples dance, reporters chase after the players, cameras here and there and everyone having a blast. Well, everyone except him. Jacob hated this—the party, including the food and the music, hated his friends having fun, and Bax surrounded by all those pretty, interesting people. *Fuck it.* He couldn't do it. Jacob couldn't just be friends, the guy still meant the fucking world to him, and he couldn't handle seeing him be all smiles and laugh with everyone but him.

And what is that girl doing so close? Touching him? How dare she drool all over what's mine?

Was.

Well, maybe never was his, but felt like it had been. He was still *his* Bax somehow. He would always be. Jacob hated himself for being such a coward, it took him *forever* to get up the nerve and show up here. Of course, he had been invited, but he would have skipped it if he didn't have to talk to Bax. And now he was going to run away again, wasn't he?

And, by the way, wasn't today the official beginning of spring in Australia?

Right, that wasn't helping his confidence one bit. He should have known that trying to talk to Bax today, of all days, just could not be a good omen. He tried to get a hold of him before, but every time he called, Jacob had chickened out and hung up before Bax could answer. Of course, he didn't pick up those countless times Bax returned his calls. *Coward.*

Jacob would probably never get over his *spring issues*, despite the somewhat incredible turn of events this year. It had been a wonderful spring, meeting Bax and everything that had followed. He had been fooled. His theory was that since today it was only *officially* spring here, he had actually been tricked by whoever plotted this. Didn't he leave America before spring kicked in? Yes, so what he initially thought as *spring gone good* had been nothing but a regular season. Fall. In Australia. Yep, it had been fall in Australia when he'd arrived.

Okay, so maybe he *was* making all this shit up and trying to find someone to blame, which obviously didn't work. Neither did it help much feeling more confident about talking to Bax.

Jacob still wanted to make up, be friends again, and tell him to leave Queensland for the sake of his career and all that. Without breaking down preferably, because he still loved Bax, and a future without him just sucked. If he could manage to talk him into leaving, it would also mean they couldn't be friends in the future. What a mess. It would be for the best though, wouldn't it?

It had been *months* since their last kiss, since the last time Bax had looked at him with eyes that held nothing but love and adoration for him. Now they were only filled with sadness and appeared empty when he saw him. Bax was disappointed. It hurt, but he couldn't blame him. Bax did what he thought was best, and when they both realized that it wasn't working, it was Jacob who did everything possible to stay away.

Why did he have to be so stubborn and freaking stupid?

He knew it was cowardly of him to ruin their extraordinary friendship just because they couldn't be *together* anymore. He just couldn't deal with that disappointed look and Bax's sadness.

Maybe it would be for the best if he left Queensland. It would definitely be the best option for his career. Was that a selfish thought? He had been empty and miserable, but being constantly confronted with Bax's pained appearance

was unbearable. He had hoped with him staying away, they could be happy again. Someday, maybe. Hopefully. So far it hadn't worked.

When Jacob tried to weave his way through the people and make his safe escape, before Bax had any time to notice he had been lurking around in the background, someone bumped into him and with all the frustration bubbling up inside of him he cursed. Aloud. Loud enough to be heard over the music apparently, because when someone touched his shoulder and he turned around, Jacob was eye to eye with Bax.

The walls felt like they were closing in on him, and he couldn't breathe.

“Jazz?”

No, don't. Just don't talk to me. Please. Jacob wished he could have screamed the words, told him to never talk to him again because it hurt so incredibly just hearing his voice up close. It hurt to hear him say his name most of all. A name no one else called him and never would. He didn't want to hear it ever again, because it already haunted his dreams. And he had enough nightmares already. Jacob backed off and searched for an opening. *Found it.*

He was going to run out of here and not look back. Taking the coward's way out, yep. With big strides, because he *was* a coward.

“Jazz, wait. I'd like to talk to you.”

No, no, no. Stay away. Please. Squeezing the green Sprite bottle he had been carrying around all night, he unlocked his eyes from Bax, turned around and ran off as fast as he could manage with all those people still enjoying their party and totally oblivious to the pain in Jacob's heart.

He had to get out of the room and nothing would stop him.

Baxter

“Jazz!”

Baxter shouted as loud as he could and hoped like hell Jazz would just stop running and bloody talk to him. He'd tried to get a hold of him for days, and the guy just wouldn't pick up his phone. What was all that about? He had been the one calling in the first place, a few times actually. Baxter was confused and way ready to finally have a proper talk with Jazz. They needed to make up, or it was going to kill him.

Just when he thought Jazz would finally stop, someone pushed him. The next moment, Jazz fell face forward onto the floor. Baxter ran fast and caught up, but when he got a good look at the scene, his heart almost stopped. *Bloody hell*. He didn't know where to set his eyes, there was blood everywhere.

Fucking blood.

Everywhere.

Baxter pushed a couple bystanders aside and instantly dropped to his knees, undressed himself from the black, button-up shirt he wore and wrapped it tightly around Jazz's blood covered hand. He didn't know how hard he could press to stop the bleeding, a very large piece of green glass stuck deep in his palm. It was the most horrifying thing he had ever seen, and that it was Jazz who was in pain didn't help his nerves one bit. He was going crazy.

"I've got you Jazz, stay calm." If he could just stay bloody calm himself. He had to.

With his eyes locked on Jazz's, he pressed the shirt against his wound as hard as he dared. When Jazz tried to say something, he told him not to talk and just focus on him. "I've got you." And with both hands holding onto Jazz, he hoped like hell he could keep his cool and not give in to those tears that threatened to fall.

"It's going to be just fine, Jazz. It's just a cut." Baxter tried to smile reassuringly, but he knew he must have failed. Despite the trust in Jazz's eyes, Baxter knew he was close to freaking out.

If the glass had cut just a bit lower and a bit deeper...

He knew Matt was just trying to be a friend, but the guy was honestly getting on his nerves right now. Couldn't he see that there was no way he would leave Jazz alone? Would Baxter have to spell it out for him?

"Relax, mate, he just cut his hand. It's not like he's unconscious or anything."

Yeah, thank god for that. It *only* looks like he totally fucked up his hand. That damn bottle, the glass cut through quite a big part right in the centre of his palm and at least three fingers.

"But he is still fucking bleeding! Why don't they stop the fucking bleeding already?"

He knew he probably sounded like a psychopath but *fuck*, he'd never be able to erase that terrifying image of Jazz's blood-dripping hand from his mind. And then his face, all tears and swollen eyes, his cheeks covered in big red splotches. It was the worst to see Jazz cry. It must hurt like a bitch to almost cut off your fingers.

"B, listen, you've got to calm down, mate. Let's get the hell out of here."

"No bloody way, I'm staying." And he was, no matter what.

"Jacob's fine. They'll take him to the hospital. We all should go back to the hotel and get some sleep. Tomorrow is a big day, mate."

Baxter tore his eyes from Matt, the guy was exhausted from arguing with him, he could tell. He had a point too, the match tomorrow was important and it was late. Coach wouldn't accept it if they lost an important away game, not right now. But then Baxter saw Jazz shivering on his knees, clutching his hurting hand as if it would fall off any moment. Yeah, just one look at Jazz, and he knew he couldn't leave.

"He's right, Bax. You should get some sleep. I'm fine." Jazz gave him a weak smile, with a face all red and ruined, and it broke Baxter's heart.

Yeah well, tell that to someone else.

"No you're not bloody fine. Your whole hand is still bleeding like a bloody fountain!" Damn those nerves.

"And they'll fix it, it's fine really."

Baxter was exhausted, he couldn't deny that, but he wouldn't leave Jazz's side until he saw with his own eyes just how they would *fix* it. And then he would make sure that Jazz got enough rest and quiet and everything he needed. The look of hurt and defeat on Jazz's face killed him. He had to do something, he *needed* to do something. At this point, he would do whatever possible to take away the pain in Jazz's eyes, even if it would destroy him.

He didn't care anymore.

And besides, screw the world, he needed to be with Jazz and nothing would stop him.

"Nothing is bloody fine. My boyfriend is hurt, and I want to be here, is that too much to bloody ask?" There, he'd said it, one step closer to the truth and possible destruction.

“Boyfriend?” Matt gave him that challenging look that probably meant to say “*Why the hell don’t I know about this?*” or something along those lines. *Sorry, mate.* For the first time, he realised just how cowardly their whole secrecy had been.

He’d do anything to get a second chance, and he’d do it completely different now.

“Well, ex-boyfriend. I guess.”

Baxter tried to avoid everyone’s judging eyes, because he knew they were all bloody judging him right now. He didn’t want to see their disgust. What he couldn’t avoid was the intense stare he got from Jazz, so he gathered all his nerves and gave him what he hoped was a reassuring smile. He felt like bloody crying instead.

Ah, fuck it. He might as well make a fool of himself right now.

“It doesn’t matter though, because I love you, Jazz, and I want to be with you right now.” Okay, so maybe he was forgetting something. “Well, if you want me to stay. I guess it’s up to you. If you want me to leave, then I will.”

“I don’t want you to leave.”

With just a few simple words, the tears of relief in his eyes just fell. Baxter dropped to his knees again and took Jazz’s bandaged hand in his, squeezing lightly. “Bloody hell, you could have killed yourself, Jazz.”

“Good thing I only fucked up my hand.” Jazz tried for another smile but failed, tears fell instead. Baxter brought his hands to his lips and kissed Jazz’s bandaged and blood covered knuckles. “I’m sorry about all the drama, Jazz, but I think I’ve been going insane since, you know, *that* day.”

“Yeah, I’d say so, considering you just came out to everyone including the reporters.”

“I don’t care. I’d do whatever, so you just know that I care about you so much it hurts.”

“And make you do crazy stuff.”

“Yes, and that.”

He still had to think of all the consequences his outing had just started. No way would his dad approve of him being *queer*. His mum probably wouldn’t mind that much; she might even be cool with it. As far as Baxter could

remember, she did have a gay friend or two. It was all too late now anyway, and for the first time, he honestly didn't give the slightest damn about what everyone else thought. It was his life for crying out loud. And he didn't want everyone else to have a say in it any longer. They either liked him the way he was, or just didn't. Their loss. Baxter didn't want to lose any more than he already had for the sake of everyone else.

Baxter looked at Jazz, properly looked at him. He could tell Jazz was exhausted and maybe close to passing out. How badly he wanted to take him to bed right now, hold him close and fall asleep. He wanted to wake up to a morning where all of this would be forgotten, and they could pick up where they'd left off. When their eyes met and that deep brown he loved so much was filled with more pain than anything, something tugged at his heart.

"It wouldn't be fair to ask for forgiveness I know that, so I won't. But Jazz, I love you. I really do. Always have and always will. Just don't forget that, okay? I'll never stop loving you. Not in a million years."

Jazz then pulled him by his T-shirt with his good hand and kissed him, softly, lovingly as if to say *thank you for everything*, and it tasted a lot like good-bye.

Chapter 8

November 1st, 2012

Baxter

Baxter couldn't believe it was already November and graduation was just around the corner. This spring had been tough and absolutely crazy. He'd actually made the Schoolboys, something he hadn't thought possible after playing so terrible for a good while. It hadn't been easy to ignore the hole in his heart and constant ache but he had to focus on what mattered. Not that Jazz didn't matter, he mattered more to his heart than anything else, but he knew he had to play his best because that was what mattered to his career. It worked out too, eventually, for the biggest part at least.

Then, September and October came around and went by in a blur. There had been all those matches, camps, more victories, celebrations, interviews, and of course, Jazz's terrible accident, and everything that followed. After his dramatic outing, it seemed like the entire world went crazy for a long while. Okay so Baxter hadn't truly become *that* important, and of course, not the entire world cared about what happened. Nevertheless, everything felt just a little too overwhelming, and for a long enough time, it was anything but fun. Despite everyone's initial shock and disgust, all of his coaches, the Schoolboys included, stood behind him. They honestly accepted him the way he is, and it felt bloody good.

When everything died down, most people involved came to their senses and realised that it didn't have to be such a big deal after all. He was gay, so what? He liked guys, or at least one in particular, there was no bloody reason to think he would suddenly forget how to play footy. He was neither a serial killer nor terrorist, and he never gave anyone reason enough to hate him. He hoped that eventually everyone would understand those important differences. Being gay didn't mean shit. Not everyone stood behind him, of course, but the majority seemed to slowly understand that he had always been *that* person, and always would be.

It was hard, and it sucked at times, but he would get through it no matter what. Baxter would fight for what he wanted this time around, and he was just about to figure out what that really was. Until now, footy had always been on his mind, the one thing he could count on to be there in his life. Baxter had his

family who loved him, and he was thankful for that. His mum was very encouraging and accepting, and his dad, well he hadn't disowned him. He still wasn't sure what his dad thought of this entire *gay thing*, except that he told him often enough that Baxter should have kept it to himself. For his career's sake. But that was that. He gave him a hard time, just like always when he thought Baxter screwed up, but he would manage.

Career wise he had no other options. School had never been his thing, he hated it to be honest, and so university was definitely out of the picture. Of course, he could go find a day job, something, somewhere, and eventually he might have to do that but not now. He was still young, and he had dreams. Baxter had wanted to become a rugby player all his life, besides footy there was nothing he wanted to fill his days with.

Rugby, he thought, would always be his second home. But then he almost lost that security blanket, right after he gave up the person who he truly loved. For rugby.

Was it really worth it now?

What did he learn from all that?

He didn't know. After losing the one thing that had become more important than footy, he now wasn't so sure what his heart wanted. Did he want to devote his life to strangers who would constantly judge him, not only for how good he played, and worse, for who he loved?

Could he live without footy if he had love? If he had Jazz?

With footy in his life, he wasn't sure whether there would be enough time to fall in love again or maintain a relationship with anyone. Despite everyone apparently being so accepting now, playing in the rugby league would be time consuming, and he saw first-hand just how difficult it would be to be in a relationship and play professionally. Before Jazz, that hadn't even been on his mind, but now with everything he'd gained and lost and experienced over just one summer, Baxter wasn't so sure anymore what he truly wanted, and what he needed to be happy. Jazz had filled his life with so much laughter and fun and love that playing footy now just didn't seem that fulfilling anymore.

What the hell is wrong with me?

And then there was the fact that he and Jazz had been together almost twenty-four seven. It made maintaining their relationship a lot easier even if they couldn't openly show it. But now? Baxter just couldn't imagine what it

would be like when they would both be going their separate ways after the school year came to an end. With Jazz not being able to play anymore, there was no hope left that they could continue their incredible rugby career together.

As it turned out Jazz hurt his hand quite bad with that damn bottle, and he hadn't been allowed to play since. Which of course made sense, because his hand had to be bandaged and protected and all that shit. Apparently, it was healing well and they had hope that he would be able to use his hand again like before, maybe not do heavy work and definitely not play rugby. The only good thing until now had been that they could still see each other regularly, just like before. Jazz obviously came to class and he was made to join the team whenever and wherever even if it was just to sit around, which Baxter had been quite pleased with. Seeing Jazz wherever they went was enough to make his day.

The thought of not seeing him there on the field, the bench, the bus or wherever was terrible, it made his stomach feel funny, and not in a very good way.

Baxter hoped like hell that they could find a way to repair things between them, because not all the footy in the world could fix that hole Jazz left behind.

Jazz and he hadn't exactly made up after his declaration of undying love, and he didn't know whether they would. It had been almost impossible to read Jazz since then. It was frustrating. He wouldn't take it back though, even if Jazz would never forgive him. His love for him wouldn't just go away. It never will just go away. There was just so much about Jazz that he *truly* loved, and so many things he didn't want to live without. Just his friendship had meant the world to Bax and it had always given him so much energy and encouragement when he hadn't known he needed it. The guy made him feel like he could take on the world, if he just had Jazz by his side.

Jazz was a strong guy too, nothing could intimidate him, despite his rather chronic shyness. It had been funny at times just how shy he could get. And he would always make a fuss over the weirdest things. Gosh, he missed their banter. Jazz was simply extraordinary, with his incorrigibly good heart he would literally help the sun shine brighter. His capacity to love was immeasurable. Jazz would always try to do something special for the ones he cared about, he had a big heart and never seemed to realise just how much love he already gave with just being who he was.

Baxter had been the luckiest person to be on his receiving end for some time, and he would give anything now to reclaim that special position. And it

might just not be completely hopeless after all, because Jazz appeared a bit more affected by all this than Baxter initially thought.

The other day, they met at Jazz's house after school and hung out in his room, studying for one of their finals and played a bit on Jazz's old Nintendo console. Just like old times. It hadn't been the first time they'd spent time together again; Jazz had invited him over a couple of times before that. Despite their efforts to be friends and all that, it still felt slightly weird to be in each other's company. There would always be those moments when neither of them had anything to say, and they would just stare at each other for a bit too long. Often they would sit a little too close and bump into each other while playing Mario Kart.

A few times, they nudged and teased each other and almost fell into their usual banter, which would always end in wrestling and with a lot of kisses. *Before* it did, recently of course, it hadn't. It was those moments when they would realise that something was a just little off, and it always felt somehow embarrassing and, most of all, frustrating.

But then something else would happen, like that day when Jazz brought him a small plate from downstairs with a piece of square, brown, chocolaty cake sitting in the centre. A cute pink heart on top the smooth dark brown surface.

"What's that?" he asked because, well it looked a lot like chocolate cake but it didn't mean it had to be chocolate cake, right? And it wasn't anyone's birthday, and they didn't have anything to celebrate. And he just hadn't expected Jazz to bring him dessert, not when they wouldn't be going to enjoy it the way they used to.

"Flourless espresso chocolate cake. With a bit of raspberry sauce."

Well, there you go. It *was* chocolate cake, but with espresso and a raspberry sauce heart and no flour. "Is it any good?" Baxter asked teasingly, he knew from experience that everything Jazz made was delicious. Jazz rolled his eyes, "Why don't you just shut up and taste it?"

And Baxter just sat there a minute, staring at Jazz who took a spoonful of cake and then unexpectedly leaned in, gave him a chaste kiss, and wiggled his eyebrows.

"*I* like it," Jazz whispered and beamed him a shy smile that melted his insides. And that kiss, so quick but so *sweet*, literally, because there was a hint of chocolate.

He needed more.

“Deal.” He then ate the rest of the cake by himself, without any further kisses, and it was the most difficult task he’d had to accomplish in a very long time. Because after that kiss, all he could think of were Jazz’s lips and tasting more of him.

Jazz might not have forgiven him for being a coward, and he might not have said the words that they were going to give it another try, but whenever they were together more privately, away from prying eyes and ears it, it was always Jazz who would be brave enough to just kiss him and initiate anything intimate. It wasn’t like he didn’t want to, in fact not being able to kiss Jazz drove him crazy. But Baxter promised himself he wouldn’t do anything stupid to jeopardise their new found friendship. He’d give Jazz all the time in the world. And apparently he needed time, because it always stopped with just one kiss or touch. It drove him crazy, he couldn’t deny that.

Baxter would not let him go again this time, he truly loved Jazz and didn’t want a life without him by his side. Even if it wouldn’t be on the field, he would find a way for them to be reunited.

December 2nd, 2012

Jacob

The last three months had to be the longest Jacob had ever experienced. His horrifying accident at that party put him through a new kind of hell. He hadn’t been allowed to pick up a ball in months, and it was driving him insane, not more than being apart from Bax, but it added to all the unfortunate events that just seemed to pile up. He was frustrated beyond words. As expected, Coach Connor and Anderson had him benched for the rest of the season. They assigned him random chores and made him join practice, doing a lot of running around in circles when they thought just watching wasn’t good enough, as if to punish him for fucking up his hand. It wasn’t like he enjoyed not being able to use his hand, for crying out loud.

It was annoying at times, especially having to watch Bax play and not be able to join. And seeing him fuck up his game again every now and then was all the more frustrating. He had to admit though, Bax did a lot better now than he had two months ago, but he was still on an up and down streak. Maybe not everyone noticed the difference, but Jacob could tell. To him it was like the

difference between day and night if he compared today to the beginning of the year. Bax was still incredible on the field, no doubt about that, especially over the last month when he improved a lot. It might have a little to do with them being a lot friendlier with each other again. Jacob didn't want to be in over his head and think he was the reason for Bax's good mood lately, but he couldn't deny that he knew just how much they still meant to each other.

Jacob also couldn't deny that the whole incident at that party three months ago brought a lot of good with it, and seemed to have put things into place again, despite the terrible effects it had on his hand. He might not be able to play rugby anymore, and probably would have to make a few adjustments here and there in case it didn't heal well enough. But on the bright side he and Bax got talking again, and even managed to pick up their friendship. It was still shattered and extremely awful being with Bax and not *really* being with him, but he thought they were on their way to fixing even that part. They had to, because that hole in his chest had to be sewed together before he would bleed completely dry.

While Jacob was afraid that it might not work out a second time and the thought of losing Bax all over again was unbearable, he also knew that he couldn't do it this way. Being friends and nothing more was definitely not an option in the long run. He just couldn't do it, his heart ached every time he saw Bax and had to refrain from anything that would cross the line. Jacob could tell just how much it hurt Bax as well, despite his constant encouragement *to be friends* like nothing happened. But *things* happened, and it still hurt.

It almost seemed like Bax would do just about anything for them to be friends again. It was sweet though, Jacob had to admit. Until now, Bax had never asked for forgiveness and took all the blame for their broken relationship on himself. It wasn't like Jacob wanted to punish him for his decisions back then, he could have fought for their love too. He was ashamed that he hadn't, and it made him a little queasy just thinking about how easily he gave up.

Back then, it sounded like the right thing to do, and when he looked at how well Bax did with the Schoolboys and everything, despite his moping, he knew it had been the right decision. Jacob couldn't have lived with being responsible for ruining Bax's rugby career, if it had come to that all those months ago. There was no proof that it would have gone down like it did after the guy's stupid coming out drama during that party.

Jacob was thankful that it hadn't done that much harm to his career after all. His theory was that everyone had already seen how well Baxter played during all those tournaments, the Schoolboy championship, against the English

Academy and so on. They had the chance to fall in love with him during the winter and before that, and it would take a lot more than coming out as gay to fully destroy that love.

Bax was one of the most loveable guys when he didn't play rugby, and all the more so when he did. To Jacob, Bax was something close to a rugby god, his rugby hero, and he would always be. Therefore, he was especially thrilled just how many people stood behind Bax in the end.

Bax was meant to be on the field, and Jacob wanted to do everything now to encourage him to aim for the best, just like he always wanted.

Shortly after his accident, Jacob managed to talk to Bax about leaving Queensland, and somehow it went a lot like he expected. Bax said he *didn't feel like leaving his hometown just for footy anymore*.

Great. Of course he didn't tell him what made him change his mind or what exactly he wanted to do then; his only answer was that he had to figure out what he wanted. And that was that. They hadn't talked about it anymore simply because Bax refused. It frustrated Jacob. He knew now that he wanted to be with Bax, no matter how and where, therefore Jacob promised himself that he would try anything possible to make that happen.

He hadn't told Bax that much yet because he didn't want him to think they could just pick up the pieces and continue from wherever they left off that easily, even though he wanted to. It had nothing to do with punishment, really. Maybe. Jacob wasn't sure exactly what made him want to take it slow, but it felt like the right thing to do. He wanted them to find their way back together on safe ground, once everything else was figured out, and right now, everything still seemed to be too messy for that.

He remembered one night, many months ago, when they laid in bed together, cuddling and happier than ever, and Bax tried to talk him into playing professional rugby. Together. Bax always wanted them to play together on one of the big teams, preferably in Sydney or Melbourne. When he told him then that it wasn't what he wanted to do, Bax wouldn't listen for a long time. Eventually, he understood and accepted it, or so Jacob thought. Every now and then, he still hinted about just how great it would be to play together, away from Queensland and all that. Bax said it would be like an adventure, and maybe, even if they couldn't play together now, they could still have their adventure away from home.

Jacob never gave up on going through all of the possibilities, and he might just be a few phone calls away from having the perfect solution.

If he could just convince Bax to trust him.

“I’m going to quit the team.”

What the fuck? Jacob pinched himself. *Ouch.*

“What team?”

He looked up at Bax who was sitting on his bed, looking extremely comfortable, while Jacob lay on the floor on a bunch of pillows and blankets. It wasn’t uncomfortable but he would prefer to cuddle up with Bax on the bed. Yeah, screw that thought. They had been watching a couple of random cartoons and munching on veggie tarts he’d made yesterday. It was a wonderful day as it was.

“Whatever damn team. No more footy for me,” Baxter said matter-of-factly and just continued to zap through Jacob’s TV like he hadn’t just told him he would quit rugby.

He couldn’t be hearing right. Was it April Fools’? No, it most definitely wasn’t anywhere close to that. Bax must have hit his head or something.

“Are you fucking insane? Rugby is your life, your love, your everything. You don’t just quit because you’re having a shitty day, you big, fat idiot.”

Jacob hadn’t realized he raised his voice and was now sitting next to Bax on the bed. Bax stared at him with big green eyes and slightly flushed cheeks. Holy G, he was gorgeous.

“Why do you love calling me fat, Jazz?” Bax beamed him a playful smile.

Wait, what? “Don’t try changing the subject. We are so not through with this, Bax.”

“Well, I am. And you’re wrong, Jazz.” He smiled at Jacob with the same love and adoration he used to. “You’re my love and my everything. I don’t need any bloody footy.”

The ache inside of him swelled, and it was almost too painful to not respond with a deep and never-ending kiss right now.

“Yes, you do, Bax.” He instead forced out of himself, “And you know it.” Because it was true, he couldn’t let Bax give up his dreams for whatever stupid reason he thought would justify his temporary insanity.

“No, I don't, and I will prove it to you.” The determined look on Bax's face made his insides churn.

Damn you, Bax.

“Don't you even think about it, Bax,” Jacob growled. *Damn you.* And the next thing he knew he'd suddenly straddled Bax's lap, pressed his broad shoulders into the headboard of his bed and his lips were against Bax's in a fierce and demanding kiss. He felt Bax's hands on his hip, then up and down his back, all the while he kissed him back equally desperately.

Fuck, this was such a bad idea.

Jacob tried to stop and unlock their lips, but he couldn't. He had missed *this* for so long, missed Bax's lips and those mind-numbing kisses. He missed the emotions that came with those eyes, the comfort of his arms, the lust he felt from just one look or touch, and the love that came with everything that was simply Bax.

Jacob didn't know what overcame him, but maybe he'd finally reached his limit? He couldn't resist that guy any longer. And with Bax being so sweet and telling him that he loved him, more than rugby, Jacob simply hadn't been able to hold back. He'd wanted him to know just how much he loved him too, even if he hadn't put it into words yet. Which, by the way, seemed more and more stupid. He wanted Bax to know. If it just weren't so scary, somehow.

When Jacob forced himself to withdraw, everything ended too fast, leaving Jacob's head spinning and his body wanting more. He missed gazing into Bax's bright green eyes like this, with his head spinning and heart pounding in his chest. He wanted *this*. Every day.

“Kiss me again? Please?”

Bax's request surprised him, and he lifted his head, taking the kiss before Jacob had even had a chance to respond. He didn't mind one bit. Bax pulled him closer still, and Jacob sank into his arms, welcoming the gentle embrace. This kiss was slow and tender, and Jacob poured all of his love into it, savoring the slow thrust of Bax's tongue.

Damn, how he missed that taste.

Chapter 9

December 8th, 2012

Baxter

Three days without footy. Three incredibly long days without touching any ball whatsoever or working out at the gym. Three fucking long days doing *nothing* at all. Baxter wanted to shoot himself. The first day had been manageable and somehow not too bad; he slept in, had a late lunch, watched TV, listened to music, went for a walk, took out a book and read. By the time night came around, he fell asleep fast and felt relaxed and refreshed.

The next day, Sunday, Baxter was already bored to death. He thought about repeating all those things he did the day before but except sleeping in and eating while listening to music or watch TV, there hadn't been many things he could repeat. Baxter decided to go into town, grab pizza for lunch, a coffee later and then maybe go surfing. Baxter felt like shooting himself all over again when he realised he didn't have anyone to meet and hang out with, because all of his mates would be too engrossed in many hours of practice. At least he wouldn't miss an important match.

Doing nothing by yourself for two days was insane, how anyone could truly enjoy an overload of free time, with nothing to do, was beyond him. If he'd spent an entire week like this, Baxter was sure he would either go mad or drop dead from boredom. Probably both.

Late in the afternoon, Baxter managed to get a hold of his mum and offered to pick her up from work a little early and drive her home. She owned a florist shop and would always spend extra hours on the weekend to prepare their online deliveries if nobody expected her home. Today, Baxter wanted her home. He was close anyway, since her shop wasn't far from Surfer's Paradise where he had been hanging out for far too long already. Another long day all by himself, *ugh*, and it had been anything but enjoyable. It was a little weird maybe, he had to admit, because Baxter could be quite lazy and honestly enjoyed doing nothing for a while, but when he knew he wasn't allowed to do anything besides being lazy, especially not play footy, it somehow made him all irritable and restless. It was going to bloody kill him if he didn't get to play ball as soon as possible.

Together they made quick work of grocery shopping, and Baxter even helped his mum prepare dinner. How Jazz could enjoy something so boring like

cooking was beyond him. He couldn't see the appeal in mixing sauces, spicing meat and chopping veggies. Slicing carrots and potatoes would definitely not become his favourite pastime. Once dinner was in the oven and his mum offered that they could bake cookies together, because she had been thrilled that Baxter joined her with such enthusiasm, he fled.

That enthusiasm had disappeared with the fifth carrot he had to chop and nothing, absolutely nothing, would have made him want to bake cookies. It was just too much.

He had to get back to his old life.

He just had to.

“What the fuck, B, you missed practice. Three fucking times in a row.”

“So? I'm here now.”

Because there was no way he would quit. He knew that giving up after three bloody days was pretty weak, but wasn't it better that way? At least he wouldn't have to suffer any longer, and hopefully, Coach would accept his excuse. Baxter didn't enjoy lying to his coaches or anyone else for that matter, but he knew if he told everyone he had planned on quitting the team he'd never hear the end of it.

“Don't let coach hear you talk like that, mate.” Matt glared at him. “What the hell is going on with you anyway?” Now it was his turn to glare.

“Nothing, I just didn't feel like it, okay?”

“Okay? You just didn't feel like it? Have you lost your mind completely? It's not because of the whole gay thing is it? You know we are all bloody *okay* with it.”

Yeah. To his surprise almost everyone he knew seemed to be dealing by now, and more and more people were honestly backing him up, reassuring him, and telling him just how good everything would be. Not like anyone gave a damn though, he knew that. Many were just all talk, and there was nothing behind those words. Baxter didn't mind as long as he had the approval and love from those who mattered. Like his family, best mates and Jazz.

“No, of course not. Why does everything have to do with my bloody sexuality?”

Baxter was getting a little annoyed though with everyone assuming his bad

mood had to be a *gay thing*, or whatever their weird minds came up with. Even his mother had been asking him the weirdest questions lately. Like him being moody or wanting to help her make dinner had something to do with him being gay. It didn't suddenly give him period cramps or shit. Seriously, sometimes he just felt out of place these days. Maybe it was a *gay thing* after all.

“Anyway, I was ill, if anyone asks, got it?”

Matt rolled his eyes at him and shoved him playfully into the nearby locker.

“Sure thing. Because it's you. But don't ever skip again just because you have your bloody period, mate.”

“Oh, shut up.”

So, yeah maybe it *was* a gay thing.

But more importantly, in the end he failed his attempt to quit rugby, royally at that. Baxter had to admit he couldn't do the whole *no footy* thing for the life of him. He had been sure that if he just set his mind to it he could do it, that he could do anything he wanted. Apparently not. If he was being completely honest, he didn't want to stop playing footy. It just seemed like if he did he could have more time to spend with Jazz, focus on other things, build a new life.

A different life. Which apparently he couldn't do. It would be embarrassing now to face Jazz, but he simply needed to play. Jazz had been right, he couldn't quit. *You won, Jazz.*

Baxter just had to find another way to fix things. There had to be another way. There just had to. Jazz tried to talk him into reconsidering one of his former offers with Melbourne Storm or the South Sydney Rabbitohs, but not only would they probably not want him now, Baxter also couldn't leave Queensland. Oh, how he would love to play for the Bulldog's in Sydney...

Baxter just couldn't. He wouldn't leave Jazz behind, especially not when they were so close to finally finding their way back to each other.

He wouldn't give up, not now.

December 9th, 2012

Jacob

Today was the day. Jacob would play his very last game. It would also be his best, he fast decided, because wearing his favorite maroon jersey, playing

alongside Bax, who he had sort of made up with, in the very same stadium one of his favorite teams had played just had to be the best game he could ever play.

After a few attempts of playing with his bum hand he quickly realized that it just wouldn't work out playing more than a couple of minutes. Not only did it hurt like a bitch to move it, the doctor told him over and over again that if he used it too much too soon, he would risk a high chance that he'd fuck it up for good. Well, those weren't exactly the doctor's words, but pretty much what he meant to say. Jacob could probably live without playing rugby on a daily basis but he needed to do at least some light work with his hand eventually. Even though he never wanted to play in the rugby league, the thought of not playing properly ever again wasn't that easy to digest. The weeks he had been benched and just watched the others play had been tough, but he knew it was too late now anyway and he just had to accept his fate and make the best out of it. He was still alive and otherwise healthy.

After a little immature begging and negotiation with the doctor, Jacob was allowed back to play at least partly for their season's final, which now meant the end of his rugby career. Jacob wanted to play one last time, even if it wasn't the entire match. He just wanted to be there to support his team and play one last time with his *mates*. There was no way he could play professionally with a bum hand, he just hoped it would heal enough for him to get back at cooking, because even chopping veggies for a certain amount of time hurt like a bitch.

On their way toward the stadium, with just a few hours to go until his final match, Jacob almost lost his nerve and began second-guessing the whole thing. His mother would be there too. Geez, he hadn't felt that nervous in forever. He was also excited that he could play one last time for his mom, she had only seen him play a handful of times, and she promised she wouldn't miss his last game for anything in the world. Since keeping her promise to be home a little more often and being there for him at his graduation, Jacob had no reason to doubt she wouldn't come today. Just recently, he finally managed to tell her all about Bax and him, that they were officially dating now and what he was planning for his future. Oh, and that the whole gay thing, obviously. Which to his surprise hadn't been all that surprising to her. Jacob loved her dearly, and now they could be more open about everything with each other. He felt like an adult.

Jacob promised he wouldn't be a chickenshit anymore, so... *no more second guessing, man!*

Yeah, he could do today. But, what if he wasn't good enough? What if he hurt his hand again, and it didn't heal this time?

Baxter nudged his side. "Are you nervous, Jazzy?"

How the hell did he know? Damn, was he that transparent?

"Uh, maybe a little?" He decided to go with the truth, since there was no reason to pretend to be all rough and tough with Bax.

"Come here." Bax beamed him a warm smile and pulled him close by his shoulder. Jacob wrapped his arm around his waist and held on to Bax just because he could. The closeness soothed his nerves a little. "What if we lose this game because of me?"

"Nah, that won't happen. I will make sure of it." The gentle press of Bax's soft lips on his forehead did the trick. He trusted Bax to do his best today, and so would Jacob. They could do this, together.

One last time.

They are so going to kick those guys' asses.

Bax and Jacob were just heading toward the parking lot outside the stadium. Their match, his last match, had ended almost an hour ago, and they were now going out to celebrate their victory. It hadn't been an easy win and playing with his bum hand proved to be a little more painful than he had anticipated, but it didn't look like it took any further damage. It wasn't like he had ever been one to catch and throw the ball all the time like others. Jacob had had a great time today and would always look back on that day with a bittersweet smile. He'd miss this; his friends, rugby and the excitement of a great victory like today's. Jacob might even miss those disappointed moments and regrets of a missed chance that were inevitable playing sports.

Once they reached Bax's car, Bax jumped right into the backseat while he told Jacob to wait outside, saying he would want to be in the sunlight for this. *Huh? Just what had gotten into him again?*

"Sorry, Jazz. I forgot to give you this before the match." Baxter handed him a small black, rectangle box, complete with neatly tied, pure white bow on top.

"What's that?" An electrical zap ran through his body when their fingers brushed. Baxter smiled, placed a hand on his shoulder and guided him to the side. "Open it," he whispered with that shy smile that made Jacob weak in the knees.

And so Jacob did. When he saw what lay inside on top of purple velvet, his heart almost stopped. It was beautiful. "Bax," he gasped and reached for the

small, golden charm in the shape of Australia. It was light in his fingers, thin like a few layers of paper maybe, and close to the size of a poker chip.

There was a heart shaped hole where Queensland was supposed to be. Jacob was speechless. Baxter reached for his hands and untangled the charm further, and only then, he realized that it was complete with a chain, making it a necklace.

“Turn it around.”

Jacob turned it over. “Oh wow, Bax. I don’t know what to say.” He could only stare and try everything possible to hold back those tears. On the back of the golden plate were their initials engraved, a clean and beautiful **JB**.

Underneath it said, in tiny letters, “*I lost my heart Down Under*”.

Jacob wanted to cry. It was the sweetest and mushiest thing he’d ever seen. He loved it.

“You don’t need to say anything, Jazz.” Baxter smiled at him hopeful. “I just hope you like it a little.”

“A little?” *Was he insane?* “I absolutely love it.”

Jacob sighed and looked at it again. “It’s gorgeous, Bax. Thank you.”

“It was supposed to give you good luck today,” Baxter whispered, “but as expected, you didn’t need any good luck charm.” Jacob tore his eyes away from his brand new necklace and when his eyes locked on those familiar green orbs, he couldn’t do anything but smile until his cheeks hurt.

“Oh, Bax.” Jacob sighed. “Come here, Crazy,” he somehow managed, holding out his free hand in invitation, which Bax took with a smile on those lips he longed to kiss.

“Jazz, I really missed you. I don’t want us to be apart. Ever,” Baxter whispered, as he pulled him close.

“I know.” Jacob almost lost his fight against those persistent tears that were still threatening to break free.

“I just don’t know what to do. I want us to be together. Always,” Baxter whispered, so close to tears himself that it almost killed Jacob. This mess they had gotten themselves into was just insane, and stupid. They wanted each other, they loved each other, and there was no good reason for them to be apart.

“I know.” Jacob took a handful of Baxter’s soft maroon-colored jersey shirt and just held on because he couldn’t move, those green eyes held him captive, and his body appeared to be frozen in time.

Matt chose that moment to pop up from wherever he and the others had hid and snapped a picture of them. What else he might have gotten on film was lost to Jacob after drowning in those bright green and gold eyes and those beautiful, long and deep kisses that followed.

It was a moment he certainly wouldn’t ever forget, when Bax then gently grasped his face between his palms, raising it until their eyes were locked on each other, and told him that he loved him. Right in the middle of the crowded street, for the whole world to see.

Jacob couldn’t keep it inside any longer and told him that he loved him too.

Always had and always would.

Baxter

Their last match of the season had been a blast, they’d killed those suckers. It had also been the best send-off they could have given Jazz. Gosh, how he would miss playing the field with him. Footy without Jazz somehow just wouldn’t be the same. They had gotten so good in the beginning of the year and always had that special connection, and *kicked ass* wherever they went. It was going to be lonely not seeing his face on the field anymore, not that he ever had a lot of time to look at his mates during a match, but simply knowing Jazz was there had been the best motivation possible.

Not seeing him at practice and after matches in the locker room, even after school and all that, would be terrible. They probably wouldn’t ever be able to lift weights together as well. Baxter had a good taste of that during Jazz’s absence due to his injury, but at least then Jazz had still been around all the time. Jazz never had been completely out of sight for a long amount of time. He couldn’t imagine what it would be like not seeing him for days, weeks and maybe months in a row.

Besides not being able to play footy with Jazz, Baxter was beyond thrilled, because they’d made up, honestly made up and were back together again. For bloody real this time. *Out and proud*, as everyone liked to say. Jazz accepted his apologies, accepted his regret and most of all, accepted his love. He hadn’t planned on buying Jazz back with that necklace or anything, it was supposed to be just a good luck charm for his last match.

Baxter wasn't so sure why exactly he'd got a necklace made, the idea just hit him one day, and it felt like the right moment for it. He thought it was romantic and all, plus he wanted Jazz to have something that would make him remember him, think of him wherever they might be. They'd both lost their hearts to each other, so why not? It seemed perfect, and Baxter was thrilled with just how much Jazz loved it.

He was all the more thrilled that Jazz seemed to truly love him too. Hopefully, more than the necklace. Things were looking great and he knew everything would work out. He would get his happy ending with Jazz, he just knew. They still had to figure out some things, and he was sure that not everyone would be that accepting of their love and relationship, but together they would get through everything.

He had never felt surer of it.

Chapter 10

December 22nd, 2012

Jacob

"I don't want us to be apart. Ever."

Bax's words repeated in Jacob's mind the entire drive back from rugby practice. How he wanted those words to be true, that they could be together every day for a very, very long time. The wish to spend his future with Bax had been on Jacob's mind for a while now; the thoughts a lot more frequent those past weeks. Jacob believed that it might not be impossible to wish for things like that, they just had to make it become reality. Their reality. He felt a little queasy thinking about the things they still had to discuss.

Practice had been a bit weird those last few times he joined. Jacob felt a lot like *the girlfriend*, which he sort of was, watching her crush play ball with the tough boys. Now that he wasn't part of the team any longer, he felt more like a damn cheerleader than anything else really. He couldn't deny that he loved being the cheerleader, but it was just a little strange to sit around in his normal clothes cheering on his boyfriend, knowing that he wouldn't be on that other side ever again.

Jacob hoped that the bitter tang of sadness would go away soon. Not playing was still a little hard on him, most of the time he didn't know what to do with all that excess energy. Recently, he picked up running and tried a few different kinds of sports that wouldn't involve using his hands as much. So far, he hadn't found a lot that he enjoyed doing.

Once they were home, Jacob made quick work of unpacking the small bag of groceries they had gotten on the way. He turned at the familiar touch to his shoulder, and the very instant he was met by those green eyes the butterflies were dancing again. It was ridiculous.

"Jazzy." Baxter reached around him, picked up the bottle of chocolate sauce they'd bought and slowly backed away, grinning mischievously at Jacob. "I think we have the house all to ourselves today."

Damn you, Bax. Jacob wanted to jump at him and kiss that sexy smirk off his lips. He followed that come-hither look step-by-step, quickly giving up on the idea of preparing that casserole he wanted to make tonight.

"And as you know we both are very free this very moment and for long

enough to empty that bottle here.” Baxter wiggled his eyebrows and held out his hand invitingly. God only knew how Jacob could have thought about making dinner in the first place. Jacob took Bax’s hand, entwined their fingers and let Bax pull him flush against his strong body. When they were only a breath apart Baxter let go of his hand, gripped his chin instead and kissed Jacob deeply, longingly, while he slowly maneuvered them both out of the kitchen and into the living room.

Bax lowered him down on the large black sofa in the center of the room, planting feathery kisses on Jacob’s nose and cheeks. When something heavy dropped onto his stomach and rolled onto the sofa he remembered the bottle of chocolate sauce that Bax sneaked out of the kitchen.

“That sauce isn’t for playing, Bax. I need it for tomorrow’s cake.” Bax raised his head and gave him his teasing “so what?” look.

“We’ll buy a new one tomorrow then?”

Jacob groaned. “No way we’re getting chocolate on my aunt’s sofa. She’ll kill me.” Baxter lowered down again to kiss him sweetly.

“Who said we will? We are going to be careful, and if not tell her it was my fault.” Bax offered with a smile, “I’m craving something chocolaty. Come on, Jazz, live a little.”

Jacob laughed, gripping Bax’s shoulders. “Didn’t you hear me say *no*? Grow up a little, Bax. Chocolate sauce isn’t for playing.” Okay he had to admit that it sounded rather hot to share some liquid choco with Bax, especially if they were naked. But they couldn’t just do *that* on his aunt’s sofa, could they?

“Just one tiny drop, Jazz. I’ll squeeze it right into your mouth, okay?” Baxter whispered seductively close to his ear, kissing the soft flesh below once, twice, and then sucking down a bit more forcefully.

“Geez, Bax.” Jacob felt his cock throb at the thought of Bax squeezing whatever part of him, and chocolate dripping into his mouth. No, not his. Bax’s. Oh boy, that was the hottest image, ever. He shivered when Bax trailed teasing kisses down his throat. He gripped at Bax’s shoulder when he sucked at one spot in particular, long and hard until it made his head spin.

Well, maybe one tiny drop wouldn’t hurt anyone.

Jacob sort of craved something chocolaty too, and what better *thing* to combine it with than Bax?

“I think I have it all sorted out, Bax.”

And he had. Jacob was beyond excited about the news he could finally give Bax. He knew it might not go down so well considering he acted without asking for Bax's permission, but it all happened so fast and turned out so perfect that he could only thank fate or whatever helped him along the way. He hoped Bax would be just as thrilled.

“Oh have you now?”

Bax pulled him closer, by his waist, until their knees slightly bumped against each other. His hands slid back and a little lower until they rested comfortably on Jacob's ass. He smiled up at Bax, admiring his green eyes and that light flush on his cheeks for a moment too long. Jacob stepped closer yet and backed him up against the kitchen counter behind them. Damn, their little chocolate make out earlier did absolutely nothing to satisfy his craving for more of Bax, and so Jacob caught his mouth in a chaste kiss, his lips moved against Baxter's when he murmured, “The Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs want you to play for them.”

Baxter pulled back so quickly that Jacob's face almost collided with his chest. “What? Did you just say the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs want me to play for them?” he asked, sounding rather shocked, like Jacob had just told him he saw aliens in their backyard.

“I think I did.” Jacob chuckled and reached for Bax's shoulder, gently wrapping his arms around his neck. Bax's hands snaked around his lower back and held on lightly. “I've got it all in a letter, black on white with every contract detail you might need.”

“Why would they want me after I refused to take their offer a few months ago? And why would *you* have such information, and I don't?”

“Just trust me, Bax.”

It sounded a little strange to Jacob's ears hearing himself say that. He had never wanted anyone to trust him in his life, but right now it was the only wish he had. He hoped Bax would trust him more than anything. “Read the letter, take the offer and... and I'll fix the rest.”

“The rest?” Bax's lips quirked up, and he didn't take his eyes off Jacob when he leaned back, his hands now resting on his waist.

“Yeah, the rest. You and me. And our future.” Jacob could tell Baxter wasn't buying any of it by the way his eyes gleamed with mischief, and his

smile bore down on him. It made him just a little weak in the knees, and his nerves faltered.

“That’s a huge responsibility you are taking on there, Jazzy.” Bax grinned and pulled him closer again, playfully nipping at Jacob’s nose. A quick kiss to his cheek followed.

“Do you doubt my awesomeness?”

Jacob tried to sound as confident as he could. He hoped it was good enough for Bax to trust and take a chance on him. Jacob knew there still was the possibility of him not wanting to accept the offer. It scared the shit out of him now. He wouldn’t survive if Bax didn’t want the same future he wanted.

“Not at all, Jazz.” Baxter smiled a bit more genuinely now and leaned in to kiss him sweetly on the mouth. Jacob sighed into their lip lock. Would he ever get enough of those kisses?

“Not at all,” Baxter repeatedly whispered close to his tingling lips, before catching them in another lingering kiss that honestly took his breath.

Jacob’s knees wobbled and almost gave in. “So, are you going to do as I tell you?” He felt breathless from that kiss and dizzy from how scared he was that Bax’s answer might be no.

“Do I have any choice?” Baxter smiled down at him, his lips slowly quirking up in a playful grin. Jacob felt his stomach flip-flop. “I don’t think you do,” he whispered. Jacob had planned on sounding more confident but failed royally when those eyes collided with his. He just couldn’t do big and butch when Baxter looked at him like that, teasing him with so much adoration and love. It was the weirdest mix only Bax could manage.

“Honestly though, Jazz, why would they want me now?”

“They want you, Bax. Trust me they do.” He knew that Bax would probably feel unhappy that Jacob had his hands in all of this, but he couldn’t just stand there and do nothing; he couldn’t let that opportunity slip away.

“Just *what* did you do?”

“I swear I only talked to some of the guys there, while making sure I’d get my future figured out. I was lucky I met Mr. Hasler when I did.”

“Des Hasler? The Des Hasler? The head coach? You talked to him?” Bax gaped at him, pulling him closer by the waist.

“Yeah Bax, I did.” Jacob chuckled. “He’s only human too you know.”

He knew people made mistakes and deserved a second chance at their dreams. Especially when it wasn’t their fault that they had slipped away.

“And as it turned out he is a big personal fan of yours. When I explained our situation, you know the whole gay thing, and me moving to Sydney next year, and how I possibly couldn’t be apart from you, he seemed to be willing to talk to the CEO and whoever about maybe offering you a position for their next season.”

“Wait what? Sydney? Why on earth are you moving to Sydney, and why haven’t you told me any of this?”

“I am telling you now, Bax. You know I was down there to look into places, and as it appears, I could fix both of our futures. You just have to play for the Bulldogs and move to Sydney with me.”

Jacob sounded a lot more confident now—god knew how he managed that. He was getting his hopes up again with the growing excitement from remembering his trip to Sydney a few weeks ago. Jacob had been thrilled when his mom and aunt decided to go with him to check out some universities and places to live.

“Are you serious? You want me to move to Sydney with you?”

“That’s what I just said. If you won’t accept that damned offer, I will be moving by myself, and that’s so not how I planned this, Bax.”

“You are insane, Jazz.” Baxter cupped his cheek, his fingers playing with the tip of his ear.

“I know.” Jacob couldn’t help but grin, the sudden burst of happiness he felt inside was overwhelming. Baxter looked genuinely surprised but also very pleased about the idea of moving to Sydney together.

“Come to Sydney with me, be my rugby hero,” Jacob whispered and fought back those tears the best he could. Bax didn’t let him say more than that because he pressed their lips together and kissed him for all he was worth. Jacob was thankful for that; kissing Bax was so much easier than talking right now.

He held on to his strong shoulders and let go, giving Bax as much as he wanted to take. With every brush of lips and slide of tongue, he felt put back

together and invigorated. Jacob thanked god, and whoever else might listen, that he wouldn't have to give up on Bax.

"I am sorry that I went behind your back and did all this. I hope you won't be mad and think it makes you less of a man because you let your boyfriend sort out your life, or something like that. I only helped a little anyway." Jacob batted his eyelashes and smiled his brightest smile. How he loved calling Bax his boyfriend. It got his heart beating faster every time.

"Oh, Jazz," Bax sighed and kissed Jacob's lips, slowly, gently, and a smile spread across his face. "I could never be mad at you, especially not for something like that." Bax then kissed him fully on the lips, firm but lovingly, with one hand cupping Jacob's cheek and the other slowly running down his chest and side. Jacob felt himself quickly getting lost in that sweet and demanding kiss. Bax withdrew too fast, the action drawing a whimper from Jacob's lips.

"I'll let you make me breakfast every morning, drive me to work and make me packed lunches. You can also pick me up from work, make me dinner and tuck me into bed," Bax whispered, his sparkling green eyes locked on Jacob's. "I let you do anything you want with me, Jazz."

Jacob laughed out loud, "No way in hell will I treat you like a twelve-year-old, Bax." Baxter grinned.

"No, definitely not after tucking me in."

"No definitely not." Jacob felt his heartbeat quicken with anticipation. "I won't give in that easily this time, I promise. I'll fight for what I want now." Baxter raised his eyebrow. "And when are you going to tell me what *exactly* that is?"

Jacob felt his cheeks heat up. He dropped his head onto Bax's strong chest and nuzzled his neck. "For one thing, I want you," Jacob whispered against his throat, lips tracing the curve of his clavicle.

"The rest you'll find out very soon," he said before pressing a lingering kiss on Bax's skin. Jacob knew he wanted a life with Bax, he wanted a future with him and to experience all those things couples did. Jacob wanted to live his life with Bax by his side. He wanted it all with Bax and nobody else.

"I love you, Crazy," Jacob murmured and pressed his lips to Bax's, wrapping around him in a tight, passionate embrace, and kissing him for all he was worth.

Baxter's arms tightened around him. "Love you, too, Jazzy," he whispered against his lips, his fingers gripping Jacob's shoulders as if he would slip away if he didn't.

Epilogue

March 31st, 2022

Jacob

When Jacob had gotten into Keebra, he'd honestly had no idea what he was getting himself into. The decision to graduate from that very school hadn't been his; Jacob had to thank his mother and Aunt Betty for their planning and plotting. Apparently, his love for rugby and very good reputation from the San Diego Aztec Rugby Club had helped with that. The coaches at Keebra Park had been impressed with him before he'd even met them. At least that's what his aunt had told him after graduation.

Jacob felt grateful that he'd had the chance to go to Keebra, even if it hadn't made him the next Darren Lockyer. That last school year had showed him what was truly important in life. Their rugby team had fast become his second home. Those days he'd spent with his friends from school, playing rugby and going surfing with Bax and the others were some of the happiest days in his life. Jacob would always remember them with a smile. He was also very thankful for all the lessons he'd learned from his coaches and teachers. Not only did he become a better person, Jacob had learned a lot about loyalty, respect and discipline.

His senior year encouraged him to be true to himself and be brave enough to live the life he'd wanted. It taught him to never give up, never give half-hearted or you will get half-hearted result. Through Keebra he'd found Bax, who then showed him the way to love. He'd learned that it was something very beautiful and worth fighting for, no matter how scary it can be or how difficult it may seem.

After he and Bax made their way to Sydney the following year, Jacob joined the culinary arts program at the LeCordon Bleu, which was one of the best culinary schools in Australia, and eventually made executive chef. Jacob had struggled for a few years on and off due to his hand injury that, every now and then, brought back those pains and aches. It hadn't hindered him from graduating as one of the best chefs or from finding an amazing position at one of the finest restaurants in their neighborhood.

Baxter started his career as center position with the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs where he had played an amazing game since his first day and fast

became their most essential player. He was currently plotting plans for a coaching position in the near future. Jacob admired him for his passion and love for the game more than ever. From personal experience, Jacob knew how much Bax enjoyed teaching his tricks, and he was sure it would make him a wonderful coach. His chest ached as he was now browsing through one of many photo albums. This particular one held a bunch of snapshots Matt took of them together in front of the stadium on his last day, before and after their final game. They hadn't noticed some of those pictures being taken at the time. Jacob was now glad they existed, those were a wonderful memory he'd treasure forever.

Jacob looked forward to *forever* with Bax; he loved *his man* more than he thought was possible. For nothing in this world would he ever give up on him again. Jacob wondered quite frequently just how much more he could honestly love the guy.

Could they still be so in love, even after ten years of being constantly in each other's faces?

Jacob would have never thought it were possible, not after his terrible experience with his parents, who grew angrier with each other by the day. On the other hand, Jacob never dared to question Bax's love for him, especially not after they had gotten back together. After the point of no return, he simply dived into it with a hopeful heart and constant prayers that they would make it. And they did. Ten years later, they were still madly in love, head-over-heels and absolutely happy.

"Jazz, are you home?" The familiar, gravelly voice broke through his thoughts and interrupted the silence. Jacob felt his lips curve into a smile at the sound of Bax's heavy footsteps on their wooden floor inside the house.

"Outside. Bring me a drink please, would you?"

A few long moments later, Bax stepped outside and joined him. He smiled and handed Jacob a glass filled with iced tea. Jacob felt himself return the gentle smile and a whispered, "Thanks."

Their eyes collided, and his pulse sped up. Ten years since they'd met, and he still got butterflies whenever he looked at Bax. The feeling was mutual, he was fairly certain, and for him it felt all the more intense on a day like this. He knew it was silly and all in his head, but today was their anniversary, one of them at least. It had been Bax's idea to do something a bit more special today, their actual anniversary, and the day Jacob had told him he loved him, thinking of it as their reunion anniversary or something like that. It was sweet, a bit

mushy, but sweet and totally Bax. He loved how his wonderful rugby hero could be so adorably sentimental.

Of course, Jacob wouldn't say no to another day he could celebrate their love, and mark it onto the calendar. Although he could mark every single day in his calendar if he wanted. Every day was worth celebrating their love.

Bax sat down next to him on the grass and scooted close enough for him to kiss his neck and inhale his scent. The guy still constantly *sniffed* at Jacob and scolded him when he wanted to switch body washes, which Jacob did every now and then just to annoy Bax a little.

"Missed you today," Bax whispered sweetly and pressed another kiss to his throat and then his cheek. "What are you doing, Jazzy?" he asked curiously, but Jacob knew his thoughts were far from wanting to find out what he had been doing. They would talk later over dinner, and Jacob was fine with that. There were a hundred and seventy nine other things they could do right now on *his* mind as well.

Jacob held up the old photo album he had been browsing, reminiscing their past together. "Looking at old photos of you and wondering just where all that beauty went." Jacob grinned and waited for that pinch to his side that eventually came. With every moment he spent thinking about Bax, replaying all of their wonderful moments, memory after memory, he felt more and more thankful for that odd not-so-spring-like spring and the even better actual spring that followed that year they'd met. Everything that happened, happened for a reason, and Jacob was thankful for where it had brought them. He couldn't imagine how his life would have turned out, if he hadn't moved to Australia, or if he hadn't met Des Hasler when he did.

"Are you saying I'm not sexy enough anymore?" Bax glared at him with that teasing glow in his eyes, and the inviting smile on his lips, that made Jacob catch his breath. He sighed when Bax reached for the photo album, taking it out of his hand just to put it aside. Jacob's heart beat faster with every inch Bax came closer and forced him to lie back onto the ground. The green grass tickled his neck and bare arms, making Jacob shiver as goose bumps rose.

"I would never dare to think that, Bax." He gasped just because Bax's closeness sometimes did that to him. "You are still the sexiest thing that's ever happened to me."

And, of course, that was the truth and they both knew it, which probably was the reason for the wide and wicked grin Bax flashed him before closing the distance with a deep and consuming kiss. Jacob gripped Bax's shoulders and

pulled him hard against the length of his body, enjoying the intimacy and delight of having Bax in his arms, his weight pressing him so beautifully into the ground below.

Jacob loved that man more than his own life.

He was more than ready for another ten years with Bax, and another, and another.

The End

Author Bio

Riina Y.T. currently resides in Germany. She spent countless exciting days in the UK, US and lost her heart in Tokyo.

With Spring, Bax & Butterflies Riina wanted to give everyone a sweet little something, and hoped it made you smile. She is looking forward to share many more stories with the world.

She would be thrilled if one day her stories could brighten someone's day in the way those beautiful romances always lighten up her dull everyday life.

When she doesn't daydream about boys in love and isn't glued to her Kindle, Riina loves to travel the world and explore the unknown.

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