

## Campfires - Stella, Year 7, VIC

*Meet Me At Our Spot - THE ANXIETY, WILLOW, Tyler Cole*

*("Man, this must be the life!")*

*A lazy slice of life.*

Polluted air thronged to Manon's nose as he punched open the door of the rusty crimson truck, the one that his parents had bought him after he aced his drivers' test in 2018.

He let out a string of curses, coughing hysterically as a plume of grey smoke erupted from the trunk, the motor sputtered noisily, vibrating the ground beneath.

Manon leapt onto his feet, feeling his bulky black leather boots pressed against the mix of rubble and sand. A jolt of electricity shot up his legs, rubbing the soles of his shoes onto the earth.

"Yeah. We're not making it much farther."

"That bad, huh?" a husky voice rang out from the passenger seat; the ashy blonde's head whipped around nervously.

The engine cried desperately, almost begging for its life to come to an end.

"Worse," Manon responded, scratching the back of his head, his bony fingers tangled into his tousled black mullet. His wobbly hand grazed over a raised tattoo underneath his ear; a small red spider.

Jason gnawed on a stale pop-tart.

"Nice weather, 'innit?"

*He can't be serious.*

"Jason," Manon retorted bitterly, his eyes softening as his friend's gaze weakened. He let out a lengthy vinegary sigh.

There was an awkward pause.

The sounds of nature soon took over the peaceful silence. A family of wolves howled, the sun set naturally, though it felt almost as if the day had just started a second ago. Manon's eyes flicked to the eerie darkness that seemed to have surrounded them in an instant.

"Boys' camping trip?" Jason asked hopefully, flashing a coy grin.

Manon narrowed his eyes, throwing his head back. He snatched his bag from the boot of the trunk, and nodded for him to do the same, and within a minute or so they had packed up their luggage and set off into the woods. *God knows why...*

A military helicopter soared over their heads, chopping dangerously low to the ground.

“Jesus...!” Jason shrieked, instinctively covering his head with his hands. He jogged to catch up to Manon.

“Never liked planes, helicopters, those sort of things. They just always seemed unnecessary.”

The tattooed man raised an eyebrow.

“How so?”

The blonde paused, contemplating his next sentence. He sniffed a bit, staring directly at the sun,

“I dunno. But, instead of taking a plane, you could take a car. Or a boat.”

Manon glanced over at him, his lips curving into a wry smile.

“I read on the internet once that driving in a car is more dangerous than flying in a plane. I’m not sure if that’s true though, because surely a lot of planes have to crash everyday.”

Jason raised an eyebrow back, chuckling dryly.

“I don’t get the hype. Everyone should just walk everywhere, it’s better for your health, and the planet!”

Manon burst into hearty laughter, pinching his friend’s cheek, beaming with something that Jason hadn’t seen in Manon for a few days now. *Joy? No, that couldn’t be it...*

The blonde chap couldn’t help but smile at him; he loved seeing him happy, he loved seeing everyone happy, really, but... especially him. There was just something about him that made him all proud of himself.

And suddenly, *there he was.*

Him and Manon, barely 15, watching the Rocky Horror Picture Show late at night.

He remembered everything, the way his eyes hurt staring at the bright white screen in the dark room, the rain pittering and patterning onto the brick roof. He still recalled the way they would lay against each other the whole way through, not exchanging a single word.

And with a sharp smack to the head he was brought back to the real world.

“Jason?” Manon asked, repeatedly striking the back of his head. He smirked when he realised that Jason had been fantasising for almost the entirety of their conversation. It wasn’t out of the ordinary.

The earth crunched underneath their footing, a chilly breeze followed them through the forest. He exhaled a cloud of icy white dragon’s breath, rubbing his naked palms together: gloves were a superstition.

“Ah-! My bad, spaced out a bit.” Jason giggled warmly, hugging his shoulders.

“You’re always doing that.”

“Doing what?”

“Spacing out. Sometimes I wonder if it’s something I should be concerned about,” Manon bantered, gently nudging his shoulder.

“Day-dreaming is a gift, our imagination is something that we take for granted,” Jason gleamed, clapping his hands over his mouth in a desperate attempt to warm up his face, because he didn’t believe in gloves.

Manon let out a simple hum in response.

Within an hour they had found themselves kneeling in front of a crackling red campfire. Jason hazardously waved his frozen fingers above the flames, warranting a pleased murmur as he felt the heat return to his face.

Manon rummaged through his baggage, nibbling on a slice of expired plastic cheese. He pressed the small rectangular button on the side of his phone; *7:14 pm*. He slid his cell-phone into his back pocket, exhaling.

“I’m glad we decided to do this, y’know, instead of calling a mechanic.”

Manon grinned, his shoulders shaking with silent laughter.

“You know that we can’t call mechanics. They’d recognise us and call the cops.”

Jason covered the end of his cigarette with his palms, blowing on the flame. There was frost creating on the ends of his hair.

“No, I mean, getting out. Just us.”

The man dipped in tattoos responded impassively.

“Like, a date?”

“What?”

“If you wanted to go out, just us, you could've just said. I don't know why you'd want to, though. We see each other, just us, every day. Isn't that how it's been for the last 20 years?”

“I-“

The fire fizzled out unnoticeably.

Another helicopter soared above them.

“I don't know what you want me to say here,” Manon admitted. Feeling a calloused hand embrace his own, he pulled away and twiddled his fingers anxiously.

“Oh, uh, we don't gotta talk about anything. Unless you want to, I don't care.”

Jason grinned like an idiot, he cared more than he let on.

“No, no. I wanna talk. I just...”

“I don't know what to say.”

*8:09 pm.*

Manon laid his head on the blonde's chest, nuzzling into his scent. It had started to drizzle down, the sound of rain hitting the trees and sinking into the dirt drowned out every other noise.

The silence was... comfortable.

“You wanna like.... Steal the biggest diamond ring in the world and get married?” Jason asked, mumbling sleepily.

Manon was taken aback, stroking his fingers through the man's ashy blonde hair. For a moment, he was awe-struck, and everything was hilarious.

“Yeah. Sure. Why not?”