

**ONE**

The gays are fighting

HARVEY



# 1

The one night I haul my arse to sleep before ten, I'm woken at ten-thirty by my father rummaging through my wardrobe. He's getting up me for how many red shirts I own.

It hurts to open my eyes wider than a squint. 'Huh?'

'Red shirts,' he says, like any of this is making sense to me.

I blink. The orange glow of the hallway lamp is hitting him like a spotlight. He's dressed. Fresh fade, designer stubble, knitted jumper, too-tight pants, boots, duffle bag open at his feet... He's going somewhere.

He drops two red shirts onto the bag.

'Ba?'

He ignores me. He's fixated on the shirts. 'I've counted seven.' He runs his thumb down the stack. 'Eight.'

'*Ba.*'

'This one's nice.' He waves a V-neck at me before letting it fall. 'That's three.'

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‘What are you doing?’ I ask.

He smacks his lips. ‘If you had to go an indefinite period with a reduced wardrobe, how many red shirts would you need?’

‘Me?’

‘That’s what *you* means.’

He’s packing my bag. ‘What have I done?’

‘Just tell me how many.’

Kinda putting me on the spot here. ‘No idea. Five?’

‘Tough. Three’s enough.’

‘Then why did you ask?’

‘You can wear one on the plane. That’s four.’

Right. I’m wide awake now. ‘I’m getting on a plane?’

Ba’s moved on to shorts. He plucks out a striped pair and instinctively checks the crotch for holes. Bingo. Two of them. He discards that pair and checks another, cream-coloured, and to his delight, no holes. He lets the shorts fall onto the bag.

‘Hello?’ I ask. ‘You’re gonna need to give me some—’

‘I’m leaving your father.’ He says it as if it’s some big revelation, as if I haven’t clued into the fact that they low-key hate each other.

They groan and bicker, and for ages, I’ve been wishing they’d get on with it. Have the big fight. Say the

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horrible thing they can't take back. Split up. Move on. It'd be rough, sure, but they'd be better in the long run.

I figured they were too chickenshit. But they're doing it. Ba's leaving.

Wait. He's packing *my* bag. *I'm* getting on a plane.

'I'm coming with you?'

He groans. 'Yes, Harvey.'

I'm in bed. 'Now?'

'Right now.'

'Sydney?'

He nods.

'For real?'

I must light up, because he tells me not to look so happy about it.

I fix my face.

My mates and I have a pool going. Ten bucks each in the kitty; the first one to bail on school without being expelled or imprisoned gets the lot. Dropping out in Perth is tricky, unless you wanna suffer an apprenticeship or some shit. In Sydney, all you have to do is turn seventeen, and I've done that.

I've had zero luck convincing my parents to let me move east, but that's what's happening now, right? Ba's fleeing and he's taking me with him.

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*'Now, Harvey.'* And he's out the door with the duffle bag.

I stare after him.

*Now, Harvey.*

I kick off my doona. I throw on the closest shirt and shorts and follow Ba as far as the spot in the hallway where Dad's loitering. There's nothing to suggest he hasn't been there the whole time, looking like a shot of depresso between two framed family portraits. In 2014's, we're sailors on the pier. In 2019's, a choir on the vineyard.

I lean against the opposite wall. Dad shrugs. He's dressed after-dinner casual – singlet, trackpants. I'm itching to ask how a night implodes like this.

He reads my mind. 'The manure,' he explains.

Oh, they've graduated from bickering over trivial shit to bickering over literal shit. That tracks.

'The bag has been sitting in the laundry for eight days, Jeremy!' Ba calls from the master, where I assume he's packing his own luggage. 'You promised it would be sorted over the weekend and it's Wednesday.'

Dad exhales and asks me if I'm okay.

'I'm fine.' I sound too fine, so I exhale in solidarity. 'How are you? Do you want me to stay?'

He shakes his head. 'Go to Sydney with your father.'

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I tell him I don't have to.

The answer comes from their bedroom. 'Harvey doesn't have a choice,' Ba says. 'He's coming. I've bought the ticket.'

Dad doesn't protest. 'Try east-coast life on for size.' He conjures a reassuring smile. My parents have always been a united front when it comes to Sydney, but I had an inkling Dad was open to the idea of me dropping out. 'You never were built for school.'

Vindication. 'Exactly!'

'What time's your flight?' he asks.

'How should I know?'

Dad sputters a laugh. He isn't talking to me.

'Soon,' Ba calls.

'Have you booked a taxi?'

No response. Dad raises both eyebrows. The silence perseveres.

'I'll drive you,' he says eventually.

Ba is adamant. 'You're *not* driving us.'



Dad's phone syncs the moment he starts the car. I dunno what song he'd choose to soundtrack the

breakdown of his marriage, but a Nicki Minaj banger about starships and their propensity to fly probably ain't it. I cackle before I can stop myself. Dad scrambles to kill the track.

'You didn't have to drive us,' Ba insists. His voice sounds brittle.

Dad lets the indicator do the talking. Two ticks warn any oncoming cars, then he pulls out of the park.

The air in here is thick.

I watch the constant stream of streetlights, half-expecting Ba to renege on the break-up by the time we reach the Shell on Thomas Street. The right turn onto the freeway. Swan River. He holds firm.

They're doing it. They're finally doing it.

And I get Sydney.

I post a GIF in the group chat, this brick shithouse of a man accepting a gold medal. I tell them to pay up. Owen's always tethered to his computer keyboard. He asks for details, then adjudicates my win. No school rules flaunted. No laws broken. Fifty dollars to my bank account.

It's not how I pictured it, but I'm glad I'm slinking off into the night. Makes for an easier goodbye. No build-up. No half-slurred two a.m. speeches. No pretending



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we're more than what we are. When I mute the group chat, I'm not twisted up about it. We're not friends like that. They're good fun. That's all. They'll react in the morning, then they'll carry on, share memes, bitch about the usual teachers, and me not responding will become so normal, they won't even notice when I quit the group.

At the airport, Ba can't get out of the car fast enough. Dad says goodbye and asks me to text him when we land. I feel like I have to reassure him. I tell him Ba will come to his senses somewhere over South Australia.

'That's sweet of you to say.'



I yawn. The gentle rumble of the cabin is doing its thing. Only a matter of time before I'm dreaming. I look to Ba across the narrow aisle. We were assigned either side of an emergency exit row. I try to read his expression. He can be a ridiculous man and this is him at his most ridiculous. 'Manure, huh?' I ask.

He doesn't face me. 'It was more than that.'

But he won't say.

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He massages his bare ring finger. The cabin lights dim. He becomes a dark silhouette. And I catch myself feeling...Um. My parents are splitting up and I'm actually sad for them.

I let my eyes close and the rumble lulls me to sleep.

## 2

My grandmother has two children she loves equally, Ba and the cafe on Victoria Street. It was an Italian place when she was hired to rescue it in the eighties. Her impact was immediate. People would say they were going to Gina's, and ignore the regular menu for the daily special – whatever my great-grandmother had whipped up the night before. Dolmádes. Spanakópita. All the favourites nobody can pronounce. After a while, the owner got the hint and offered Gina the joint. My family sold their old place and what they made on that was the down payment on the entire terrace. They've lived above the cafe ever since.

When our taxi pulls up at the intersection with the huge Coke signs, I know we're close.

Ba arches an eyebrow at me. 'Look alive.'

I groan. It should take longer to fly across a country, long enough for a solid eight hours.

There's a truck in the cafe's loading zone, so the taxi driver lets us out a fair way down Victoria Street,

by a vacant shopfront. The floor at its entrance is tessellated with unopened mail and Domino's coupons.

Ba grunts. He struggles with his stubborn suitcase handle. 'Bastard left us in the next suburb over.'

I help him out. The handle extends for me. 'We're not *that* far.'

Seventy metres, tops. Ba exhales like we're facing Everest.

'You okay?'

He just starts walking, the loose wheels of his battered suitcase rattling behind him. I catch up.

'What's the strategy?' I ask.

'Be honest. Tell your grandmother you're dropping out of school and moving here.'

'I meant about you leaving Dad.'

His silence says everything.

'You can't not tell her. She'll know what's up.'

'Not necessarily.'

'Yes, necessarily. We fled in the night.'

'We didn't *flee*.'

Gina's wiping down a wonky table on the footpath. She's got her white shirt tucked into black pants, hair pulled back severely. Nature's facelift. When she clocks us from a distance, she shrieks. She startles

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the customer beside her, but she couldn't give less of a shit.

'Ah, fuck,' Ba mutters. 'Is it too late to get a hotel?'

'Yep.'

She ditches the rag and barrels towards us.

'I didn't leave your father, okay? Distract her. Not that your head won't distract her plenty.'

'My head? Oh.' He means my *hair*. People above a certain age can't handle the skullet. Buzz cut up front, mullet in the back; it breaks their brains. But even then, I doubt it'll keep Gina from noticing her son has left his husband.

She throws her arms around me. The hug is... a lot. She has all the energy of an overwhelming Greek grandmother, but to a casual observer, she could pass for my mum, or my sister if the casual observer was hitting on her and laying it on a bit thick.

She doesn't reckon she's old enough to have a teenage grandson. Watch this.

'Hi, Yiayia.'

'Oi! Gina,' she corrects. She pulls back and gives me the once over. 'You're tall. Perfect height. Don't grow more.'

'I'll see what I can do.'

‘And we’re shaving your head.’

I laugh. ‘Sure.’

She turns her attention to Ba and arches the same eyebrow he does. ‘What are you doing here?’

I give him a few seconds, and when it’s obvious he’s incapable of answering, I rescue him. ‘I’m dropping out of school.’

‘And you wanted to see me react in person? Brave.’

‘It’s easier in Sydney.’ I gesture at Ba. ‘He’s here for moral support.’

‘When were you going to tell me?’ she asks, finally moving to embrace her son. ‘Hi, darling.’ She pecks his cheek and then scans the surrounds, as if expecting Dad to pop out from behind a parked car. ‘Where’s my son-in-law?’

Another chance to spill the beans. This time, Ba swats it away confidently. ‘He has to work.’

‘He needs to be his own boss,’ Gina says, peeling off her apron and leading us back the way she came. ‘Éla.’

We haven’t visited for a while, but we were here so much when I was a kid, the red door sandwiched between the cafe and the real-estate agency is seared into my mind. It’s an effort to open. Gina blames the rain, expanding timber. ‘Ah! There we go.’



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She leads us up the stairs and the house aggressively reminds me that half my family is Greek. Sure, I live with someone I call Ba who has his Mediterranean moments, but he hasn't been around his family much, so it's like his stores are depleted. He's Greek-Australian fusion, and the balance is off. He's a drizzle of olive oil on a kangaroo steak. This place is...I've already counted two commemorative Parthenon plates on the walls, ANT1 is blaring from a distant room, a torrent of words I don't understand, and there's the choking smell of liváni. It might be painfully early, but my great-grandmother's already smoked the place.

We abandon our bags in the formal dining room. Nobody's ever had a meal in here. It's where they keep the antique table and cabinets. One's filled with china and treasured ornaments, and the other's stuffed with old photos and funeral pamphlets. The last time I cracked a joke about the mausoleum, Gina threatened to make room in it for me. It's stacked with pics of her brother when he was around my age. He didn't get to be much older.

I round the bend and I'm in the kitchen. There's a moment when my great-grandmother doesn't know anyone else is here. She's watching the TV in the

adjoining room. But something makes her turn. She lights up. A sharp intake of breath. 'To paidí mou!' She claps her hands together.

I don't feel like I've done anything to earn the reaction. I'm just the guy from the fortnightly video calls who laughs when she bends over to kiss the screen.

'Hi.'

She's at the plastic-covered table in the centre of the kitchen, halfway through her boiled eggs and toast. She's in her robe. Her hair is thinner and whiter than it was the last time I saw her in person. Short wisps of it are combed back roughly and her face is specked with more sunspots than I remember. When I'm close enough to hug her, I notice the butterfly stitch across her left eyebrow. I realise that the most prominent sunspot is a bruise.

In Greek, a grandmother is a yiayia. A great-grandmother is a proyiayia. They're like regular grandmothers, only they've been around long enough to go pro.

Yesterday, my proyiayia lost a fight with a rubbish bin. She was in the courtyard, cleaning out the bin with the hose. She lost her grip and the lid hit her head.



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‘The lid did that?’ Ba asks, casually inspecting the injury. ‘Nasty.’

Gina’s tone is severe. ‘She admitted she fainted.’

My great-grandmother is defiant. ‘I no faint.’

‘Did your vision go black?’ Gina asks.

My great-grandmother nods.

‘And did you wake up on the ground?’

Another nod.

‘Then you fainted.’

‘Bah!’

Gina’s concern doesn’t rub off on my father. He squeezes Proyiayia’s shoulders and says she’s sturdy. He does a quick lap of the kitchen. Something’s different. The cupboard doors are a different colour. Gina insists she sent him pictures when she had them done.

While they debate whether that’s true, I slide into the chair beside Proyiayia. She whispers, ‘I no faint,’ and waggles a finger at me. I wink and she grins, a little bit of egg escaping her mouth. She doesn’t notice and I don’t tell her. ‘I come inside. I bandage. I ring Panagiotis.’

Gina breaks off her riveting conversation about the kitchen remodel to clarify, ‘Her GP.’

‘GP,’ Proyiayia repeats. ‘He say he no help on the phone. I have to come in. I drive.’

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The terrace is built into a hill. Even though we're upstairs, the courtyard to my right backs onto a narrow street.

'You drove yourself?' I ask.

'Independent.' She stresses every syllable. Then she asks me something in Greek.

I look to Ba. I got *kefáli*, but the rest...

'She wants to know what died on your head,' Ba translates. He answers on my behalf. 'A skullet.'

Disdain flashes across her face. 'Ti éinai aftó?' She tries repeating it. 'Sku...Skunk?'

'Skullet.' I dunno why I bother.

'That I say. Skunk.'

I give up. 'Yes. Skunk.'

She smiles. 'Heavy.'

Proyiayia has always had difficulty with my name. My parents didn't do what their parents did and name me after a relo. They wanted a name with a story, but the story changes every time they tell it. According to the bits they repeat most, the day my dads decided to have me, they made an appointment with a mortgage broker. They briefly flirted with the idea of guilting a friend into being their baby oven, but decided it was best to engage one of those fancy overseas surrogacy

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agencies. That meant they needed money. Sitting opposite their broker, they told the truth. They were two men, both in their early twenties, one with an unencumbered house, who wanted money to secure a womb. This did not impress the broker. A child was apparently not a sound financial investment. But they pleaded with him – Ba says he charmed him, but Ba's always had tickets on himself – and eventually, the broker relented. He amended their application. They weren't seeking a mortgage to pay for a surrogate, they were after cash for a *Home Addition (Non-Structural)*. They thought that would make a good name for a boy, Hans.

They started telling people about the pregnancy and they said Hans aloud enough times that they fell out of love with the name. So, they went back to the drawing board. I know they briefly considered honouring their broker. Gina was the one who vetoed Stewart. Coming up to my due date, they had no name, and then one afternoon, Ba was served by a guy called Harvey at the local chicken shop.

I probably butchered it, but the story really comes alive when they tell it – Dad and Ba, bouncing off each other. They haven't told it recently, and they haven't been like *that* around each other for I dunno how long.

‘So...Sydney.’ Gina leans against the counter and homes in on me. ‘Where are you going to live?’

‘Here,’ I say. Her eyebrow twitches, so I add, ‘Hopefully. Till I get a job.’

‘And we’re committed to this no-school thing?’

Ba reminds Gina that I’m his son, which is likely as close to telling her to back off as he’s comfortable getting.

‘Yes, he’s your kid, but that doesn’t mean you can’t be wrong.’ She’s smirking, but her focus returns to me. ‘I don’t tolerate bludgers. Piss me off and you will quickly learn there are worse places to be than school.’

‘Understood.’

‘You can look after your great-grandmother today.’

‘I was gonna explore the city, actually.’

‘Let me rephrase it. You’re looking after your great-grandmother today.’ She’s firm, like Ba in a bad mood.

Proyiayia asks me what I want for lunch.

‘Ma, you’re not going to baby him.’

My great-grandmother chops the air. ‘Áse me!’

‘No, he’s seventeen.’ Gina looks to me for confirmation. I nod. I am indeed seventeen. She adds, ‘You’re going to look after her, not the other

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way around.’ She approaches and plants a kiss on my forehead. ‘I need to get back downstairs.’

She pecks Ba, and when she’s gone, he relaxes. I dunno why. He’s only delayed the inevitable.

‘She’s gonna find out,’ I warn him.

‘Áse me!’ he huffs.

I can’t recall the last time he was exasperated at me in Greek. The house is changing him, adding a little more olive oil to the steak.

### 3

Ba lays claim to the spare bedroom, so I get the home office where an old single bed has been sent to die. I test the mattress. Its insides have turned to dust. Not great, but I'm in Sydney. My room might only be wide enough to fit a desk and a bed, no chair, and it might smell like water damage, but I never have to set foot in a school again.

The desk's coated with old photos, some in better nick than others. There are probably hundreds more in the yolk-coloured Kodak envelopes stacked on the floor. These must be the favourites. I snatch one up. Gina and Proyiayia sitting on a grassy incline. Gina's face is fuller. She's a teenager. Proyiayia's hair is in a dark bun. They're both beaming. I put the pic down, but not exactly where I found it, because it had been covering *OVERDUE* printed in fat red letters, and now I'm curious. I shift the layer of photos to reveal several threatening notices. Utilities. Rates. Invoices.

'Gina, you rebel,' I mutter.



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Through the wall, I hear Ba's phone ring and then the curt way he answers it.

'If I wanted to talk to you, Jeremy, I'd still be in Perth.'

The gays are fighting. I climb onto the bed. I press my head against the wall and wait for what comes next. Takes longer than I expect.

'Why would I tell him not to text you?' he asks.

I recoil.

Shit. I forgot to text Dad. I scramble to fish my charger out of the duffle bag. I plug my phone in but it's too late. Ba's standing in the doorway looking aggrieved.

'Your father tells you to message him, you message him,' he says.

I sigh. 'Battery died on the plane.'

'Not my problem.'

'Well, you did yank me out of bed while it was charging.'

'Don't start me.' His voice is gravel. 'And since you need reminding of things, your great-grandmother's downstairs, where you should be.'

I love her to bits in the way you love eighty-something-year-old amateur bin wrestlers, but I dunno why she's become my responsibility. 'Why aren't you the one looking after her?'

‘Because you’re the one who wanted to leave school,’ he says. ‘I’m heading out.’



When my phone has enough charge to switch on, three messages from Dad come through. Different ways of asking if everything’s all right, but ramping up the anxiety each time. I shoot him a quick apology for not texting sooner. He responds, *Okay*. I ask how his morning’s been. *Okay*.

Awesome. Heaps to work with.

I redownload Grindr. It’s my top suggestion in the app store. Recently searched. Recently downloaded. Recently deleted.

Having gay dads comes with a lot of pressure. You’re aware of how much they paid to have you, so you’re hypervigilant when crossing streets. And there’s an unstated expectation that you ought to be queer. Don’t get me wrong, my folks went to great pains to make sure I was comfortable identifying however I wanted, but...imagine growing up in a rainbow family and being like, ‘I’m an ally.’ Fucking cringe. Not a problem for me, I was in primary school when the same-sex



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attraction kicked in. Emmett: school vice-captain, tween heartthrob. But thanks to the great pains and a co-ed high school, I experimented with heterosexuality. Meg: debating juggernaut, radiant queen. In Year Nine, I landed on pan as my identifier of choice.

Grindr isn't meant for anyone younger than eighteen. I've had it, on and off, since I turned sixteen. Dacey, I know, but I'm not the only one who's on the app when they shouldn't be. We tend to find each other, and we migrate to Insta pretty quickly to ward off the fakes and freaks. I could start there, follow the certified snacks who haunt friends' snaps, like a few posts, and launch myself into their DMs, but that's too much work. Plus, it's nice to meet someone with zero mutuals and be the most exciting thing about each other's lives. Briefly.

It's Darlington, so the grid is busy, and I'm a fresh face, so the messages come thick and fast. I don't read most of them. There's no point. The guys are three times my age.

After ten minutes, an eighteen-year-old with a pictureless profile says *hey*. Big I'm-on-the-app-when-I-shouldn't-be energy. I ask if he's seventeen.

*Shit, is it that obvious?* he asks.

I laugh. I tell him I'm seventeen too, and I toss him a photo. He sends one back. He has a middle part and a mole on his neck shaped like Tasmania. He's cute. His name is Brad. He's skipped school because his major work is due tomorrow.

*And you're on Grindr?* I ask.

*Yup.*

That's another ding against keeping the app permanently installed. The fucker's a time suck. One minute, you're messaging a guy, next thing you know, it's June. But Brad insists he's not avoiding his work. He's set aside an hour for recreation. He wants to know if I'm keen.

I've broken my app chastity, obviously, but it does take more than seven messages to get me into somebody's bedroom. Eight, at least.

*Can we chat more?*

He doesn't immediately block me. That's a good sign.

*Sure.*

I ask for his Insta. He knows why, because he replies with a short video. 'Harvey, this is Brad. I am not a catfish.'



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I think I hear somebody say my name, and then I definitely hear somebody say my name. ‘Heavy.’

I unplug my phone and drag myself to the balustrade. I peer over.

Proyiayia’s standing at the foot of the stairs. She smiles. ‘Shopping?’

I suspect the trip to Coles hasn’t been sanctioned by Gina because Proyiayia insists we leave the back way. I don’t rat her out. I can handle a simple escort mission and I like having an excuse to leave the house. Coles isn’t far; it’s in the basement of the building with the giant Coke signs, but we make our way at Proyiayia’s pace.

More than once, my gaze drifts to the butterfly stitch and the whopper bruise on her forehead. The third time, I ask if it hurts. ‘Se . . . ponáei?’

She clicks her tongue against the roof of her mouth and continues walking, more weight on one foot than the other. I know if I ask about *that*, she’ll dismiss it with a tongue click.

I man the trolley. She leads me to the fruit and veg section, but she’s less interested in the fruit and veg than she is in stockpiling the free plastic bags. She pulls on the roll with surprising force and wraps the connected

bags around her forearm. She only stops when I tell her somebody with a name badge is watching us. She tears herself free, half the roll now padding her arm. She waves it at the bloke. He knows her name.

He's not the only one.

Apparently she's something of a celebrity at Coles Central Kings Cross. Shelf-stockers go out of their way to greet her, and when they do, she points to me. 'My *great*-grandson,' she bellows. Every time. And because I'm on my phone, on Grindr, I hide the screen. Every time. Not that I'm ashamed of it or anything. I just don't wanna look like the guy who's on a casual hook-up app while escorting his great-grandmother to the shops. Even though that's exactly who I am.

Proyiayia introduces me to Grace by the fresh meats. I hide the screen. She tells Proyiayia there are so many specials today, a note of pride in her voice. As far as I can tell, every cut has a discount sticker on it. Proyiayia isn't impressed. 'When everything special, nothing special,' she says.

Genuinely hilarious line delivery, made even better by how crestfallen Grace looks. Ten out of ten. No notes.

Unaware that she's a comedic icon, Proyiayia shuffles towards the lamb cutlets. She adds two packets to the trolley and we continue our tour. I farewell Grace and check my phone. Another three messages from Brad. He's keeping the conversation going. Which is good, because I need something to do every time Proyiayia pauses in front of the trolley without giving me notice and stares intensely at a shelf. She labours over every choice, be it meat cut, table salt or serviette. I'd hate to care that much about groceries.

We snake down the aisles one after the other, Proyiayia pausing abruptly, me pausing before I ram into her, her staring, me messaging. We're in the freezer section, Proyiayia being super deliberate about her selection of frozen peas, when Brad asks what I'm doing right now. I almost tell him the truth. Almost.

*Nothing much.*

'Heavy.'

I pocket my phone in an instant, as if my great-grandmother can not only read English, but identify a gay hook-up app on sight. She's prodding the freezer door. She wants me to retrieve a particular bag of peas. I do. Then it's off to the check-out. At least, that's where she says we're headed, but we end up zipping randomly



around the store to collect final items that occur to her in the most inconvenient order possible. *Then* it's off to the check-out.

The total is a little shy of two hundred. She blinks down at the note sleeve in her wallet. The guy at the check-out waits patiently for all of five seconds and then starts huffing. Proyiayia's brow furrows. I intervene and tell her I've got it. I hold my phone over the EFTPOS terminal till it vibrates.

Today's shop is courtesy of Dad.



Almost two hundred dollars' worth of groceries is heavy. There's a pulling on the inside of my right elbow and I'm really regretting not talking Proyiayia out of the four-litre tin of extra virgin olive oil.

'You want help?' she asks.

I wince. 'Nah, I'm good.'

When we arrive at the back gate, I can't lower the bags fast enough. I exhale, extend my right arm. The bags have left purple imprints. I wiggle feeling back into my fingers. And Proyiayia hasn't budged. I speak up and she points to the lock.

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'I don't have a key,' I tell her.

'Oh.' She's forgotten hers.

I size up the fence. I'm not a particularly adept climber, but I can hop onto a wheelie bin, and that's most of the way there. I feel an octogenarian gently nudge my foot as I climb over.

I unlock the gate from the inside. Proyiayia grabs the lightest bag and shuffles across the courtyard. I follow her, squeezing the groceries between the brick wall and the car. She leaves me to do the unpacking. She plants herself on the recliner, turns the heater on, unmutes the TV and puts her feet up.

I lug the bags onto the plastic-covered table and begin the process of laying out their contents. I'm not familiar with the kitchen and I'm already dreading figuring out what goes where. I start with the cold items. They go in the fridge or freezer, depending. And it's helpful Proyiayia's bought some things without fully running out, so I can keep the new cheese with the...four other packets of cheese and the milk with the...two other cartons. It's a trend. There's an unopened four-litre tin of extra virgin olive oil in the pantry. In fact, the whole pantry is very well stocked.

Half of this stuff must end up in the cafe.

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I put everything in its place and toss the reusable bags in the cupboard under the sink. My stomach grumbles. I could do with lunch. 'Proyiayia?' I ask.

No response. I round the table. My great-grandmother's head is tilted back, cradled by her neck pillow. She snores softly.

I can't help but smile. I whip out my phone with the intention of taking a picture, but Grindr's still open and Brad's sent a new video.

'We spoken long enough yet?' he asks.

I glance back at Proyiayia. Brad isn't far. I'll only be an hour. She'll be asleep the whole time.

I swipe the keys from the fruit bowl and duck out. I must know I probably shouldn't, because I leave the back way.