

1.  
**NEW BEGINNINGS**

“This is it, Simmo. Room 14B,” I said, throwing my bag down on the floor after forty-eight hours of travelling. I knew the journey would be a long one, but I had been led to believe that we only had one stop-off, which was supposed to be Singapore. In reality, we had twenty.

“When did that change?” I’d asked Simmo as we landed in Iceland, (the country, not a supermarket car park) after a three-hour flight which was technically in the wrong direction.<sup>1</sup>

“Oh yeah! I forgot to tell you, I got a last-minute offer on our flight. They offered us money off to take a slightly longer route.”

“Slightly longer route? *Slightly?*” I had answered. Even though we were good friends (some might say the best of friends), we knew we could speak openly and give our honest opinion’s about anything. Having said that, I made sure to give the second time I said the word ‘slightly’ an extra-long, drawn-out inflection to it, to make sure Simmo knew I was displeased

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1. It is technically the wrong direction if you believe the earth is a globe. If you believe the earth is flat, however, you could consider it a stop-off point. Call +1 (865) 277-6243 for a free discussion on the subject, and ask ‘Is Iceland the country, not the supermarket chain, a practical stop-off point for a flight to Australia?’

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with this new development without having to communicate how unhappy I was, directly. That's just how close we are.

“Yeah well you know, thinking about it now, we have pretty much doubled the amount of time it would have taken—but just think what we can do with the extra £18.50 we have saved!” Simmo's face was beaming as he said those words. £18.50, for doubling our travel time to forty-eight hours. I couldn't believe it.

“Yeah, that'll go a long way in Australia. What's that then, about *twenty dollars* roughly?” I'd asked, once again adding inflection to the word ‘twenty’ and ‘dollars,’ to communicate my true feelings. Simmo's face lit up as he nodded at me while slipping his headphones back on, clearly beaming with joy at the pittance we had saved taking the longer route. After what felt like an eternity of pinballing all over the globe, including stop-offs in *France, Germany, Egypt, Greece, Yemen, Ukraine, Estonia*, back to *Manchester, Ghana, Sudan, Kenya, Croatia, an Arctic base camp, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Ukraine, Portugal, Canada, Norway* and *Singapore*, we finally landed very late in the evening in *Brisbane, Australia*—forty-eight hours from when we had departed. Just when it seemed like we were through the worst of it, we had yet to traverse the maze that was known as Australian Immigration. (To save on confusing tenses, the following is written in the present tense despite being a flashback of sorts to events that have happened before this current point in the story.)<sup>2</sup>

“I don't understand, what is the problem?” A short gentleman, standing in front of an unimpressed customs

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2. After a minor debate with my previous editor (discussing points and counterpoints about how switching to different tenses by flat out explaining it, is uncreative, confusing and toxic to a developing story) we have decided to part ways for this manuscript. I wish her all the best and hope she can settle all her legal bills relating to my previous publication.

officer, asked.

“Sir, you have an entire suitcase filled with meat, rice, and fish produce. This is a major problem,” The officer replied, waving over his shoulder to two other officers carrying what looked like MPEG-3 sub-machine guns.<sup>3</sup> Simmo and I had arrived at Brisbane airport over four hours earlier, yet we were still queuing up to get through immigration watching situations like this play out.

“Simmo, can you see how full that guy’s suitcase is?” I asked, being as nosy as possible to get a good view.

“Yeah, I can. These people are crazy, they must know how strict immigration rules are here.” Both of us shook our heads in disbelief and continued watching, seeing as the queue we were in didn’t seem to be moving anywhere anytime soon. Simmo, having been to Australia before, was aware of their strict immigration laws. I, however, was witnessing it for the first time.

“Please sir, I am a simple man. I simply wish to provide for my family.” I overheard the short gentleman say (pointing to his wife and two daughters who were standing next to him), as several guns were pointed point-blank in his face and several more immigration officers rifled through his bags and belongings. One of his daughters stepped forward and presented her teddy bear for inspection. The officer grabbed it, ripped its head off and prodded the inside of it. It was a brutal but efficient searching method.

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3. EDITOR’S NOTE—you mean an ‘M3 submachine gun?’ MPEG-3 is a codec for video and audio files. Thinking about it the M3 Submachine gun was adopted by the US Army in 1942, are you sure that’s the right one? Or do you mean the modern MP5 submachine gun? Let’s try and keep the footnotes to a minimum this time, from what you’ve told me things got quite sloppy during the final stages on your last publication, you don’t want another book filled with ridiculous and irrelevant footnotes.

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“Please sir,” I heard the father continuing to protest. “I only wish to sell this food to provide for my family.” The man put an arm around his wife and children in an attempt (or what I suspected to be an attempt) at creating a picture-perfect family. This statement, however, seemed to sound alarm bells around the group of officers.

“SELL THEM?” The leading officer shouted, dropping whatever bits of possessions he’d had in his hands. The men with MPEG-3 submachine guns instantly stuck their weapons in the entire family’s face (especially the children’s faces) and screamed at them not to move. Several more officers now appeared and seemed to have mouth gags in their hands which were instantly installed on the entire family—children first. I nudged Simmo so he would see what was happening. Simmo nodded and stood on his tiptoes to get a better view. Cable ties were quickly placed around their hands and feet, and the entire family was immediately escorted away, bunnyhopping because the cable ties severely limited their movement. The father muffled to speak through his gag, probably trying to plead his case.

“That’s a bit unnecessary, isn’t it?” I said out loud without thinking. Simmo looked at me horrified, shaking his head and placing his finger lightly against his lips.

“Do we have a problem here?” An officer appeared out of nowhere next to me, getting right in my face.

“I was just saying, I thought that was . . .” Simmo drove his elbow into my side, preventing me from finishing my sentence. The officer got even closer to me whilst staring Simmo down.

“Do you have a problem, son?” he said right in Simmo’s face.

“No problem here, sir,” Simmo answered, looking straight down at his shoes, without ever looking up. I had never seen him so submissive. The officer side-eyed me and then turned

his head to follow suit.

“So, do *you* have a problem?” he asked me once more.

“No . . .” I answered, looking briefly at Simmo, who maintained his solid stare at his feet.

“I just said . . . I just said I can’t wait to get into your country, Officer. Sir. Sir? Officer?” The sir or officer continued to stare at me without any response. *This is getting awkward, I have to get out of this conversation somehow!* I thought.

“I’m never sure how to address an immigration officer, not like you’re a real police officer.” Simmo slowly looked at me in horror and disbelief, and I quickly realised my error. “Not that what you do isn’t challenging or doesn’t have challenges of its own! Sir! Officer! You run a tight ship going off what everyone just witnessed. You clearly are real police officers!” The officer continued to stare at me, still not giving me any response. *Oh God, say something, Mike!* In my nervousness, I continued blabbering.

“That was . . . that was very lean and efficient what you did there, processing those immi—those people! Yes, very lean and efficient . . . efficient . . . efficient . . .” *Say something, Mike! Finish your sentence! You’re blabbering again, say something. Say anything.*

“. . . lean and efficient . . . like the German war machine.” As I spoke, Simmo’s face seemed to turn to white. He was scared, and if I know my best friend like I think I do, I would say he was pretty damn scared. *Why in God’s name had I mentioned the war? Why is everything linked to the war?* Thoughts instantly ran around my mind as the officer still stood there, giving me nothing.

“Lean and efficient . . . but in a good way, you know, manpower, organisation, getting the job done and you know, without any of the evil and . . . and those idiots with swastikas.” The thought now occurred to me maybe I should

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have stopped blabbering a few sentences earlier. The officer took a deep breath (finally breaking his blue steel look) and looked around the growing queue, before casting his eyes back at me once more.

“I’ve got my eye on you, Irish.” He merely stated before turning and walking away. *Thank God, he thinks I’m Irish.* I wasn’t entirely sure that was a good thing (for him to think that I was Irish, not to actually being Irish) but I took it as a light warning. *This* time, I had been lucky.

“What the hell were you thinking, talking to him like that, Michael?” I found it challenging to formulate an answer as I had never heard Simmo call me by my full name before. It instantly dawned on me how serious this entire situation was, just by that one fact. No one ever calls me by my full name, unless it’s my mother or Melissa.

“These people are like Judge Dread here!” Simmo said, driving his finger into my chest, to reconfirm how much I had messed up, before adding, “they’re judge, jury and executioner! They decide who gets *in*, who gets *out*, and who *lives*.”

“Who lives? That can’t be true, I mean I know they take immigration seriously but—”

“—but *nothing!*” Simmo said sternly, finishing my sentence for me, before giving me a firm slap across the face.

“What country do you think has the highest missing persons cases?”

“The United States,” I answered, firmly believing I was correct. Simmo shook his head.

“Australia. Australian immigration to be more precise. Look around you. Statistically, fifteen percent of people in this queue will go missing. That’s just how ruthless they are! Being part of the Commonwealth, they’ll be more lenient to us, but we have to tread carefully. Despite the fact, you know,

the empire used to own them.”<sup>4</sup>

“Why didn’t you tell me about any of this before?” I asked, trying to manage my growing panic.

“There was no time!” Simmo answered, dismissing me with a hand gesture while rummaging through his bag. One might argue that being on forty-eight hours worth of flights would be plenty of time.

“Anyway, you’ve got your bribe ready, haven’t you?” I looked at Simmo, utterly lost by his question. *A bribe? This has to be a joke.* Since returning from Thailand, I had told myself I would no longer fall for his banter-like mind games. No more would he convince me that I had only come on this trip by the skin of my teeth, (having just about got approval from Cade and Melissa, and in an odd sense, himself) or that Y2K was making a comeback and I had to transfer all my money into one of his bank accounts before the Internet collapsed, to keep it safe.<sup>5</sup>

“A bribe? You never said anything about having a bribe!” Panic filled my mind, and sweat began pouring down my back and face like we were back at the *Angkor Wat* temples.

“Come on, Mike! Of course you need a bribe! This is Australian immigration! You can’t be that naive!” Simmo shook his head whilst counting an obscene amount of

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4. Simmo had always been proud of the ‘Great Empire,’ (which is how he referred to it during many of his heated debates with our friends) AKA the British Empire, a fact that regularly slipped my mind. He would often rant about the travesty of ‘that mucky business with the *Suez Canal* in the 1950s’ (Again, how he referred to it) and that ‘those yanks should have minded their own business’.
  5. The money was, of course, quickly transferred back to me. Simmo unreservedly apologised at the time, saying he didn’t think I would be stupid enough to do it. We had a great laugh about it afterwards, and I completely understood that a fraction of the money couldn’t be returned due to the account transfer fees he had acquired.

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Australian dollars. The queue was now moving, and we were edging closer and closer to passport control.<sup>6</sup>

“My God! Where did you get all that from? I haven’t got that much in cash!”

“Well, it’s too late now. I’m sure you’ll be fine,” Simmo said, looking around anxiously like he might have to go on, on his own. As we continued shuffling forward, I kept fighting with my suitcase to get my passport out and any other loose Australian notes I had, (that might somehow add up to the amount I would require for a decent bribe) but suddenly I stopped. My hand felt something in my case, something I had completely forgotten I’d brought with me.

“Oh my God . . .” I gasped, standing still like I was frozen in time.

“What? What is it?” Simmo asked, looking at me like he was babysitting a younger brother.

“I completely forgot . . . I completely forgot I brought this.” I pulled my hand out and showed Simmo a bag of *KP Dry Roasted Peanuts*. I’d been a damn fool for bringing them with me. Simmo’s eyes lit up, and he instantly pushed it back into my suitcase before anyone else could see it.

“Have you lost your fucking mind, Michael?!” Simmo furiously looked around the queue, but luckily no one had seen it. “Dry roasted peanuts? Nut-based products in your hand luggage without going through quarantine? They’ll put you away for life!” *He’s right, what on earth was I thinking?* My love for dry roasted peanuts had blinded me from strict Australian import laws.

“What do we do?!” I asked, as my voice slightly cracked

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6. For the sake of dramatisation and story momentum, I have decided to move the queue forward a lot faster. It actually took another three hours to reach the desks for passport control. I made the executive decision not to spend half of this book’s word count in this one chapter.



and I wiped away water that was building up around the lower part my eyes.

“Just settle down for Christ’s sake and let me think!” Simmo snapped whilst giving me another firm slap across the face. Simmo had always been a firm believer in the one slap strategy, which is if anyone becomes hysterical, one firm slap should put them right. It was a strategy first devised by the retired actor *Sir Sean Connery*—most well known for his plucky performance as Indiana Jones’ disgruntled father—who first published the technique in a *Playboy* interview in the early 1960s. He stated ‘An open-handed slap is justified, although I don’t recommend doing it in the same way that you’d hit a man.’<sup>7</sup> Having regained some of my dignity, I picked the peanuts up and prepared to take my chances by throwing it as far away as possible in a random direction like it was an active grenade.

“What are you doing?!” Simmo said, whilst grabbing it from me and holding it by his side. With a quick flick of the wrist, Simmo opened his pocket knife and cut a hole in the suitcase of the person in front. With a sharp cough, Simmo rammed the bag of peanuts straight inside it without batting an eyelid.

“Done,” he said, turning to me, flicking his knife shut and returning it to his pocket.<sup>8</sup> I nodded, let out a loud sigh and patted him on the shoulder. It was a narrow escape. We could now see the passport controls desks in front of us—we were getting close to the end. As I looked down to check I was still holding my passport (and my bribe), an officer and a sniffer dog walked past and stopped at the person in front. I nervously

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7. EDITOR’S NOTE—this is dangerously close to being libellous. At no point has the retired actor *Sir Sean Connery* been most well-known for his plucky performance as Indiana Jones’ disgruntled father.

8. Despite how strict Australian laws about food imports were, they were surprisingly lapsed with metal objects, including pocket knives.

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looked at Simmo, who merely held up his hand—mimicking a slapping gesture—to make sure I didn't do anything else stupid to compromise us. The sniffer dog briefly examined the suitcase before going completely ballistic attacking it.

“We have a code 211. I repeat we have a code 211!” The officer screamed, straining his biceps to control the animal. As more officers arrived carrying MPEG-3's, the family was dragged out of the queue. Simmo told me to keep moving as this chaos unfolded around us. In the corner of my eye, I could see the dog tearing the bag of peanuts to pieces as the family pleaded they had no idea where it came from. The last I saw of them was the gags and cable ties being installed on them. I looked down in shame realising what we had just done—we had condemned a family to death. Before I could hand myself in and confess though, the metal gate slid open in front of me, and two officers told me to keep moving. *This is it, Mike, you got to keep going. You have a new life now.* Simmo was directed to the desk to my right, and I went to one straight ahead.

“Hello,” I said to the woman, as I handed over my passport, shaking like a dog. I wasn't sure of the protocol for the ‘extra paperwork’ (the bribe) so I discretely placed it on my passport's photo page—making sure to align it neatly with the centre seam—so that the edge of the notes on my side of the passport was concealed and the notes overlapped and protruded on the edge she handled. The passport was snatched off me, she quickly grabbed the money and stuck it to one side. Her desk was unbelievably high, being six foot tall myself, I've never really had trouble looking over things, but now I was on my tiptoes so I could rest my chin on it. She looked at my photo page and began typing into her computer. As she did, I had a quick glance back at the arrivals terminal, even though the terminal was more like a warehouse than

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an airport building. It was a stark contrast to what we had experienced in Bangkok Airport. The metal fence that had packed us in zigzagged from start to finish, with various access points along the way so officials could drag people out for random beatings searches. Big spotlights spanned the room, slowly rotating keeping various people constantly lit up. As one light over my shoulder spun round (temporarily blinding me), I noticed a group of people huddled around an oil drum with a roaring fire in it—I assumed they were trying to keep warm. Along the fence next to me were people calling out to anyone that would listen. They seemed to be stuck in ‘the void’ as it was known—they were not allowed in Australia, but not allowed out. Amongst the calling was one woman who managed to get my attention, I suspected she was in her mid-twenties and with an infant. She held the infant proudly above her head and signalled for me to come and take it, whilst she



*(Above) The entrance to the Arrivals Terminal, Brisbane Airport. The quality of the building and the appearance of armed guards came as a rather unsettling surprise compared to what we had experienced at Bangkok Airport. Never the less, we complied with the staff and proceeded in.*

clearly held back her emotions.<sup>9</sup>

“Paperwork. There is paperwork missing.” Her stern voice caught my attention as I spun back round to see the officer holding her hand out. *Paperwork? What paperwork?* Then it dawned on me. *The bribe! It’s not enough.* I knew I had to act quickly, knowing full well I had no more Australian notes on me. I searched my pockets only to find a few loose coins. Realising I had nothing left to lose, I placed them on the counter in front of her and slowly slid them over.

“Thank you for your time,” I said for some reason, figuring I was supposed to say something. The coins were instantly taken, but the officer still held out her hand.

“Paperwork, immigration,” she said. *Ah, she wants my visa!* I realised. I had done it. I was nearly there, all I had to do was—*oh shit.* I pulled the piece of A4 paper out of my pocket (that I had folded up into a tiny little square) and realised that I had been sweating profusely by keeping my hand on it. My hand was now jet black with ink. I carefully began unpeeling the piece of paper, trying to preserve any of the writing that was left on my visa. After some time, I finally had it flat and carefully placed it down on the desk as it began to tear itself apart from being soaked. The officer looked unimpressed as she used her pen to lift up the only section of it that was readable. After some more typing on her computer, she looked back at me.

“You speak English, right?”

“English? Reasonably well,” I answered, as she looked at me slightly confused. I had always been taught from an early age not to showboat about anything, even if you know you’re

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9. EDITOR’S NOTE—keeping warm around a drum? In Brisbane, Australia in July? Are you sure you are not misremembering these events? Brisbane Airport is not a refugee centre. Did your previous editor not question stuff like this?

good at it. ‘Nobody likes a show-off son’, my father would always say to me first thing in the morning as I finished my corn-flakes before he would. ‘What did I just say, son?’ he would always add afterwards.

“Where are you staying in Brisbane?” She then asked.

“A hostel,” I answered, sounding strangely confident.

“What address?” was the follow-up question. I had no idea.

“I . . . I . . . I . . . I . . .” Despite my perfect answer mere moments ago, I was now stuttering on the word ‘I,’ attempting to say ‘I don’t know.’ As I continued stuttering, she stamped my passport and handed it back to me.

“Okay, you’re clear to go, but your paperwork was a bit light. I’ve written an address in your passport. I want you to make your way there tonight.”

“To pay the outstanding balance?” I asked. The officer paused from typing to answer me.

“In a *way*, yeah.” As I touched my passport, I noticed her hands were massive, almost like a trucker and there appeared to be a tattoo of a snake running up her arm from her side.

“Well, okay then, I’ll be there. I guess that seems fair.” The officer started chuckling behind her desk. For what reason, I do not know.<sup>10</sup>

“Thank you for your time,” I said once more, happy that I was about to make it through immigration. *What a lovely woman, letting me pay the money back tonight because I don’t have it now; are all Australians this friendly?* I thought as I picked up my luggage, holding my head up high as I proceeded to the final metal gate. The guard on the left nodded to me with a cold as

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10. MIKE’S TRAVEL ADVICE #1—even though I barely escaped with my life, not declaring food produce when arriving at any airport in Australia is a big no-no. Always plan ahead and be prepared, so you don’t have any last-minute surprises. One bag of nuts could cost you your own nuts, *metaphorically*, and perhaps *physically*, in rare cases.

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ice gaze. I nodded back and waved, whilst the gate slowly slid open to reveal a burning light.

“Keep moving!” A muffled voice growled at me. As my eyes slowly adjusted to my new surroundings, I found myself standing in what I would class as a normal-looking terminal building with shiny marble floors and various people shouting to provide taxi services and minibus hire for new arrivals.

“Mike! Over here!” Simmo shouted.

“Thought they were going to take you away for a minute there!” Simmo said laughing, clearly watching me recovering from being terrified about my bribe not being sufficient.<sup>11</sup>

“Felt like a close call, mate,” I said.

“Come on, let’s go get a taxi,” Simmo said, as I reorganised my bags and followed him towards one of the exits. We had only been in the real arrivals terminal for just over ten minutes, yet the only song I heard over the terminal’s PA system was the Australian classic, ‘Down under’ by *Men at Work*.<sup>12</sup> As we made our way out, I noticed a news flash on one of the TVs.

“Oh look,” I said, pointing in its direction, “they’re announcing a new Australian prime minister.”

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It only took fifteen minutes to arrive at the hostel in

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11. MIKE’S TRAVEL ADVICE #2—be prepared with your bribe. Australian immigration officials will not be lenient if you plead ignorance. You must have your method of inducement neatly presented for ‘inspection’. Small denominations are accepted, but are still commonly frowned upon. Larger denominations work best. Especially one hundred dollar notes, fresh from your local bureau de change. Tread carefully and good luck!

12. I would later find out that this is the only song legally allowed to be played over Australian airport music channels. Instead, live musical performances are fairly common place in airports all over the country.

Brisbane where we quickly checked in and were given a key to our four share room where we would catch up with Cade and Melissa, who had stayed in Asia when we returned to the UK for the wedding. I swung the door of Room 14B open and found Cade and Melissa inside. (For anyone who hasn't realised, the previous segment set in the past—even though it was written in the present tense—has now joined up to the original part of the story creating a seamless flow.)<sup>13</sup>

“Guys, you're back!” Melissa shouted as she dropped her book, jumped from her bed and came running towards us. In the heat of the moment, I didn't even notice Cade, who was using the curtain rail as a bar to do reverse chin-ups. Although it had only been a week since we had last spoken to or seen either of them, Cade looked unbelievably more buffed than when we had left. His lean torso and bulging biceps shined through the natural light of the window. It was an extraordinary sight. *Wonder what routine she's got him doing now to get him that fit in just a week?* I thought as I picked myself up from being knocked out of the way by Melissa so she could hug Simmo.

“Took your time getting here, dickhead!” Melissa said whilst giving Simmo another hug, clearly beaming with joy that both of us had finally arrived.

“Alright, guys. How was the flight?” Cade asked after jumping down from the curtain rail, performing a small tuck and roll as he did, to pop up in front of all three of us.

“*Flights* you mean. Unbelievable, and immigration! Don't even get me started on that! I just want to lie down.” I threw my bag on to a bottom bunk and walked over to throw myself into bed. As I did though, Cade stepped forward and seemed to reach out to grab my bag, looking unbelievably worried. He

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13. EDITOR'S NOTE—it's not quite seamless by the fact you've had to explain it twice, perhaps reconsider editing the chapter for better flow?

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shifted his gaze from me to my bag, to Melissa, to Simmo and finally back to my bag. I couldn't help but feel confused by the flicker of subtle looks and movements.

"Is everything okay? Is this your bunk?" I asked, not realising they might have had their stuff on it. Cade stared at me like a deer in the headlights. But not just any headlights, the headlights of a commuter train, the sort of train you get in the States that does cross country travel. The type that if it were to hit you, would leave nothing behind for the local wildlife to feast on. That's just how lost his stare appeared to me.

"Should I move?" My follow-up question was greeted by even more silence. I couldn't help but notice that Cade had a tiny ball of sweat running down his temple. All four of us stood in silence for several minutes, as no one dared to move. Finally, Cade looked once more at Melissa, slowly placing his hand down further on my bag, almost like he was going to grab the handle. Melissa looked at the bag, briefly looked at me, looked at Simmo and returned to look at her boyfriend. She smiled and gave Cade two gentle nods of her head, and instantly returned to talking to Simmo. Cade let a loud sigh (wiping the sweat off his forehead) and gently patted the top of my bag.

"No no! Of course not!" Cade said laughing hysterically (a very forced hysterical laugh might I add) to answer my question he hadn't answered several minutes earlier.

"Yeah, you guys take these bunks, we've got these two over here," he added. Cade turned around and took a little run-up, before springing off the corner of my bed to launch himself to the height of the curtain rail. *How does he do that?* I wondered as I began unzipping my bag. Just as I was getting organised, one of Simmo's bags landed on my hand with a thud.

"Hey, think your bag has just landed on my hand," I said as



I whipped my hand out from underneath.

“Oh sorry, mate!” Simmo said as he threw the rest of his bags onto what I thought was going to be my bed. “Listen, you reckon it’ll be alright if I take the bottom bunk? My sides have been playing up again, don’t think I can make it up there.” I believed the ‘up there’ he was referring to was the top of this five-foot bunk bed.

“Oh right,” I said, slightly taken aback by his statement that his side had been playing up, “you seemed okay on all those flights here? Even during that two-hour transfer stop-off with the inuits at that arctic basecamp. That was a crazy two hours, wasn’t it?” The fresh memories instantly filled my mind and distracted me from the present conversation we were currently having.<sup>14</sup>

“It really was,” Simmo said, having a look on his face similar to mine. Simmo’s ‘side issues’ were from a drunken night out years ago, the first time he and Cade had gone travelling around Asia. Both of them had got blind drunk and were playing a classic game of who could fall off the highest balcony. In classic style, Simmo won—but some might argue that the win might have come at a high price. Fourteen kidney stress tests, ten X-rays and four psychological evaluations later, we were in our current situation sorting out our sleeping arrangements.<sup>15</sup>

“Well, I was thinking, there’s not much room between the top bunk and the ceiling,” (as I spoke, I placed my hand down on the top bunk and quickly raised it about a foot until my hand touched the ceiling) “maybe you could take it seeing as you’re smaller?” Simmo instantly looked down, appearing defeated, and nodded. He then appeared to inflict a limp as he slowly dragged his bags off my bed like they were a

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14. It really was a crazy two hours at the arctic basecamp.

15. SIMMO’S NOTE—despite the physical burden it has left me with, I maintain I still hold the record for the highest balcony.

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massive burden on him. All of a sudden, he seemed to have the persona of an eighty-year-old man.

“Come on, Mike . . . just let him have the bottom one,” Cade added before and after a rep.

“Yeah, he’s really struggling there!” Melissa also added, before leaping up from Cade’s bed to load herself up with Simmo’s bags like he was leaving us.

“It’s alright, guys, it’s alright. I’ll be fine, it’s only a minor twinge.” Simmo said, before dropping a bag and holding his side like someone had just shot him.

“Look . . . you have the bottom bunk, mate, we’ll take it in turns if there’s bunk beds at the next hostel,” I said realising he was in a severe amount of discomfort. I couldn’t be one hundred percent sure he was putting it on, but I decided to be kind and considerate to him anyway. I knew Simmo would do that for me, that is, he would do it for me when his side pains weren’t flaring up. I also noticed Cade and Melissa gave each other a concerned look from this comment.

“Yeah . . . you guys can switch. At the *next* hostel,” Cade said, still performing chin-ups at an unbelievably fast pace.

“Cheers, mate, really appreciate it!” Simmo said whilst grabbing one of my bags and launching it across the room.

“Did that not hurt your side?” I asked as I started picking up my belongings that had been thrown clear of my bag as it collided with the far wall. I turned around to see Simmo lying on his new bunk with his headphones on.

“What?” he said like none of the previous conversations had taken place. After organising my belongings, I climbed up to my bunk and slithered in, only knocking my head three times on the ceiling. There appeared to be a strange groove in the ceiling plaster, right in front of my face. Clearly, I wasn’t the first person to struggle with this bed to ceiling ratio. I could also hear the steady thud, thud, thud, from somewhere

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above us. It almost sounded like a PA system.

“Is that music?” I asked as tiny chunks of ceiling plaster started to come loose and fall directly towards my face.

“Is it that time already?” Melissa asked, appearing from behind her book.

“Time for what?” I said, swotting the air in front of me to stop more bits landing on my face.

“It’s just gone midnight. They’ll be starting up at the bar. It’s directly above us,” Cade said now performing his reps at a slightly slower pace.

“Oh, I see.” The thuds were now getting louder as Calvin Harris was clearly audible, blasting out through the PA system. “What time do they normally go on to?” I asked, looking across the room.

“Probably easier to tell you when they go off, they stop at 10:00 p.m. for two hours, then it’s party time for the rest of the day,” Cade answered. I noticed Melissa giving her boyfriend a very knowing look, which resulted in Cade speeding up the rate of his exercises.

“Don’t be getting any ideas you two!” Melissa ordered Simmo and me.

“I wouldn’t worry about tonight! I doubt either of us is in the mood to get ‘on it’, I’m certainly not! What about you Simmo?” Simmo didn’t respond. *Those bloody headphones again.*

“I said, what about you, Simmo?” I slithered off the side of my bunk and hung my head over the side, “Simmo?” his bunk was empty. In a split second of turning my head, I noticed our door was closing, almost as if someone had just run out. Within seconds, someone who sounded a lot similar to Simmo was directly above me, shouting something like ‘help me get on the bar!’ *Classic Simmo.* Considering what was happening above us and the fact that we’d had an incredibly (and needlessly excessive) long journey, I wasn’t feeling that

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tired anymore.

“So, what’s the deal with this hostel anyway? *City Slickers Backpackers*, it sounds like that film starring Billy Crystal,” I asked Cade and Melissa attempting to distract myself from the noises above.

“That’s exactly what it is,” Cade answered whilst releasing his grip from the curtain rail and performing a similar tuck and roll like before, “did you not see all the branding and stuff in the reception area?” I stared at him perplexed for a moment, before returning my view back to the ceiling in front of me. *The name of the hostel was stylised in the same font as the movie, and the cocktail menu had themed drinks like Curly’s Golden Margarita . . . plus they do have a life-size cut-out of Billy Crystal in character as Mitch Robbins.* My thoughts sent me in circles as I tried to work out what the link could be between that film series and a random hostel in Australia.

“Maybe Australians just like ancient movies,” Melissa added from behind her book. I shot up in my bed, smacking my head full-on into the ceiling, before turning to look at Cade. Both of us started laughing.

“Bae, films from the nineties are not ancient movies!” Cade said whilst we both laughed.

“Next, you’ll be telling us Jurassic Park is an old movie!” I added as both Cade and I started laughing more. Melissa looked at us both from the top of her book.

“Well . . . it is! With those terrible computer effects of dragons and stupid characters.” Cade instantly reacted to Melissa’s statement, holding his hands in the air.

“Woah, woah, woahhhh! First of all, there are no dragons in Jurassic Park; they’re dinosaurs, but not *real* dinosaurs. They’re genetically enhanced creatures spliced with frog DNA that can reproduce asexually, but that’s neither here nor there. *Second* of all, the characters are all classics. The

world-renowned palaeontologist, Dr Alan Grant. His feisty and adventurous wife, Dr Ellen Sattler. The mathematician with an unbelievable amount of swagger, D. Ian Malcolm . . .” Cade appeared to be entering some sort of psychotic rant as he rambled on explaining the main characters and his love for Jurassic Park.<sup>16</sup>

“SHOOT HER! SHOOT HER!” Cade shouted as he re-enacted classic scenes from the movie across our room. At one point, pulling out a pair of sunglasses from nowhere and throwing on a shirt (keeping it unbuttoned, so his chest was exposed), then slowly turning around walking across the room and staring at our pile of luggage in the centre, simply saying—‘that is one big pile of shit’, in a flawless Jeff Goldblum impression. I have to admit I was absolutely blown away and speechless, it was a masterpiece performance. Seventeen minutes later, Cade looked up to see Melissa was laughing.

“Bae . . . are you mocking me?” Cade asked mid-pose as (what I suspected to be) Samuel L. Jackson’s character ‘John Arnold’,<sup>17</sup> with a rolled-up piece of paper in his mouth like a cigarette, and a pair of glasses he had fashioned out of pipe cleaners.<sup>18</sup>

“Of course I am!” Melissa said, laughing whilst throwing her book to one side.

“Ah, Bae,” Cade said, dropping all his props, throwing his makeshift glasses to one side without a care in the world.

“Bae.” Both of them embraced each other on Melissa’s

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16. For more information on Cade’s dangerous obsession with Jurassic Park, please consult my previous publication—*Tales from a Traveller . . . Adventures in Thailand*.

17. EDITOR’S NOTE—correction, Lawrence Fishburne.

18. EDITOR’S NOTE—correction to the previous correction, apologies I was thinking of a different film. It is Samuel L. Jackson.

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lower bunk.

“Jesus . . .” I said under my breath as I rolled over to face the wall.

“What was that, MICHAEL?” Melissa shouted from their bunk.

“Nothing, Melissa!” I answered, looking over my shoulder, noticing their bunk bed was now beginning to shake violently.

“Listen, not to be rude but . . . could you guys wait until I’m asleep?” I added.

“No. Now go to sleep, Michael,” Melissa answered from under their cover, as their bunk seemed to leap forwards and backwards until it violently slammed into mine and then traversed its way towards our door. It was strange, all of a sudden, I felt exhausted again, despite all the noise from above and the activity happening around me.