Summary

“No sir.” The older policeman said. “Nothing like that.” He hesitated. “I’m afraid we’ve come with bad news.”
Chapter 1

Ned Farnby was drunk. Very drunk. He knew it, his mates had known it and the barkeep of the Drover’s Arms had known it and thrown him out, he’d dealt with a drunk Ned before now. Ned was one of the kindest, gentlest men in Darrowby; he could barely bring himself to kick a rat. Unless the drink was on him. Then Ned performed a remarkable Jekyll and Hyde transformation to become a raving, frothing madman, spoiling for a fight with anyone and everyone. His large build and muscles built up through years of heavy labour meant he rarely lost either. He always felt tremendously guilty about it afterwards of course, but at the time nothing could hold him back. And right now Ned was staggering down the streets of Darrowby looking for more drink, a woman or a fight. He clung to a fence post and peered ahead. A figure was making its way towards him, walking quickly through the cold night air. Ned felt his lips stretch into a grin. Finally, a chance to have some fun!

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Back at Skeldale house James was listening to the Farnon brother’s usual bickering with an air of resigned amusement. Helen sat beside him on the sofa, calmly repairing one of his torn shirts. Tristan was sprawled in the deep armchair across the room, scowling at Siegfried who was pacing back and forth in front of the fire.

“It’s no good Tristan! This can’t go on!”

“It was hardly my fault Siegfried!”

“It was entirely your fault Tristan. This whole mess is your fault!!”

“How? I mean, I haven’t actually done anything here!”

“You didn’t need to Tristan! Your reputation is already sufficiently well established to cause the damage!”

“I never went near Tamfern’s daughter!”

“That doesn’t matter Tristan! He thinks you have been and as a result we may be about to lose a valuable customer!”

“She’s fifteen Siegfried! I haven’t touched her!”

“I know you haven’t! Deplorable as your behaviour usually is, you do have some standards and limits.”

“Thanks.” Tristan said grumpily.

“But the fact remains, he thinks you are the guilty party, she won’t say different in order to protect the real guilty party and therefore we might lose a customer!”

“I still don’t see how this is my fault.”

“Well, perhaps if you’d exercised a little more restraint in your time, not gone chasing after anything pretty in a skirt, you wouldn’t be the first person Tamfern thinks of when he finds his daughter’s been having illicit meetings with a boy!”

“But I haven’t- “
“I know you haven’t! But we have no way of convincing Tamfern of that without the girl’s co-operation!”

“She’s been seeing Horner, you know; Bob Hilldon’s new worker.”

“How could you possibly know that?”

Tristan smirked smugly.

“The Drover’s is full of it. Now if only Tamfern would loosen up and have a drink every now and then he might find out the truth instead of leaping to erroneous conclusions.”

“Idle gossip and speculation!”

“Mmm. True though.”

Siegfried paused in his pacing and frowned thoughtfully.

“Are you certain?”

“Straight from the Horner’s mouth.”

“Well. That does open up certain possibilities. If we can get Horner to talk to Tamfern…He’s a steady lad and Tamfern’s usually a reasonable man…they should be able to work something out.”

“Without losing you a client?”

“Precisely! Or landing you with a good horsewhipping either!”

“I never went near the ruddy girl.” Tris sighed. He pushed himself up from the chair. “I’m going to the Drover’s.”

“Your liver won’t thank you.”

“My hide might. If it hadn’t been for my ‘idle gossip and speculation’ at the Drover’s you’d still have the dilemma of Tamfern to deal with wouldn’t you?”

“True. Don’t stay out too late; I shall need you tomorrow, busy day.”

“Do I ever?” Ignoring Siegfried’s snort of disbelief the younger Farnon turned to the sofa. “Coming for a pint or two James?”

“Not tonight Tris. You enjoy yourself.”

“Suit yourself. Night all!” He strode into the hallway, collected his coat and walked out.

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The night air was crisp and chilled, the stars clearly visible in the sky. Tristan’s breath fogged up at the low temperatures. He turned away from Skeldale house and began to stroll towards his favourite pub. It was cold, but the night was calm and surprisingly beautiful, walking would be fine. Besides, he didn’t fancy James’ tyres on the icy roads and he certainly didn’t dare touch the Rover. Not after last time! There was plenty of moonlight to see by and Tris stuffed his hands in his pockets as he walked.

He was just nearing the pub when he heard a sudden commotion, shouting and swearing. Slowing
his pace, Tristan looked down a side street and saw a hulking shape pulling on a woman’s arm.

“Let go of me!”

“C’mon darhling, jush a lil’ kissss?”

“No! Get off!”

“Hey!” Tristan shouted, haring down towards the struggling couple. “Leave her alone!” Surprised at the interruption the man released his victim, who took to her heels and raced away into the night. Tristan saw her go with a sense of relief that quickly faded when the farm labourer turned to him. Tristan was suddenly acutely aware of his own relatively slim build and complete lack of fighting experience. He took a cautious step back.


“Now Ned, calm down…”

“Bloody interferin’ vet!”

“Don’t be hasty Ned…”

“What d’ye mean. Stickin yer nose into, into what don’t conshurn you!”

“I was just making sure you didn’t do anything you might regret Ned. That’s all!”

“You bloody bastard!” Ned lunged for Tristan’s neck. Tristan leapt backwards in fright, narrowly avoiding the spade like hands. He spun around to run back to the main street but Ned’s bulk slammed into him before he could take a single step. They crashed painfully to the floor, Tristan banging his chin hard against the cobbles. He frantically pulled himself loose and tried to escape again but felt Ned’s huge hands close around his upper arm. Tristan jerked a knee up sharply into Ned’s groin and the big man released him with an oath.

“Stop it Ned! Just drop it!”

“Shurrup!” Ned grabbed the shorter blond and shook him violently. Tristan cried out in surprised pain. This seemed to infuriate Ned who threw him back down onto the road and kicked him twice in the ribs. Tristan curled up protectively with a groan. He saw Ned raising a half brick he’d picked up from the ground, saw it come crashing down towards his skull and then everything went dark with a sudden terrifying abruptness.

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James was peacefully eating his breakfast when Siegfried stormed down the stairs with a face like thunder. He raised a cautious eyebrow.

“Good morning Siegfried.”

“Not for Tristan it won’t be when I find him!” The elder Farnon served himself some breakfast and grabbed the newspaper. He didn’t open it to start reading though, instead using it to gesture with as he ranted.

“Bed not slept in, hasn’t been back all night. Little idiot’s probably passed out in some pub somewhere.”
“Well, he can’t be sleeping in the car again; he’d have frozen to death in this weather!”

“He’ll come swanning in in a few hours no doubt, with a hangover and a thousand excuses. Well it’s not good enough! I’m going to have to put off my visits to look after morning surgery. Can you go up to Barney’s? I promised I’d see him first thing in the morning and now I can’t.”

“Of course Siegfried.” Siegfried grunted in acknowledgement. James finished his breakfast hurriedly and set off on his rounds, giving Helen a kiss on the cheek as he left.

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Siegfried was in the surgery. It had been quiet today, the icy roads meaning people were staying indoors rather than risk the treacherous walk to the vets office except in dire emergency. He was using the opportunity to sort out some of the bills Helen hadn’t had a chance to organise yet. He was enjoying the rare peace and quiet when there came a shuffle and a knock at the door.

“Come on through!” Siegfried called. The door opened and two police officers walked in, removing their helmets as they did so.

“Can I help you?” Siegfried asked curiously. “Found a lost dog that needs patching up?”

“Not exactly sir.” The younger one said. He glanced at the older policeman for support. “It’s about your brother.”

“Tristan? What’s he done now? Heavens, he hasn’t been arrested has he?” Siegfried asked, face darkening at the thought.

“No sir.” The older policeman said. “Nothing like that.” He hesitated. “I’m afraid we’ve come with bad news.”

Siegfried felt a sudden chill sweep over him, numbing his every thought and movement.

“Bad news?” He managed to ask, voice only shaking a little.

“Yes. Er, would you like to sit down sir?”

“No. No I’m fine.” Siegfried managed to pull in a deep breath. “Just tell me officer. Is it…?”

“I’m afraid Tristan Farnon was killed last night.”

The words had a terrible, awful finality.
James drove carefully, Siegfried had finally shelled out to get the brakes repaired properly but the tyres were practically nothing but canvas now and the desolate roads were steep, winding, icy and treacherous. He kept his speed low and prayed he didn’t meet anyone coming the other way. Of course, his first call of the day would take him to the very limits of their practice’s territory. He chewed the inside of his lip as he navigated the awkward terrain.

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“Killed.” Siegfried said blankly. He felt his knees buckle and suddenly the younger policeman was there, guiding him to sit in the old wooden chair. Siegfried sat absently, not really noticing. His mind was entirely filled with that one sentence echoing endlessly.

“Yes sir, I’m very sorry sir.”

“How? What...what happened? He was just going out for a pint, he’s always doing it! There must be some mistake!” There was an almost pleading, desperate tone to his voice Siegfried noticed, but couldn’t bring himself to care. Nothing mattered, nothing except finding out…oh God. Tris…

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As he crested the rise at the top of the latest hill James noticed a dark shape huddled on the side of the road. He braked slowly, mindful to avoid a skid and pulled up onto the grassy verge. Another dumped dog? The casual cruelty people treated their pets with was astounding. Poor creature must have frozen to death, patiently waiting for humans who’d just cast him or her aside like a toy they were tired of. Into the Yorkshire Dales on a freezing night in January! Monstrous! Certain people just should not be allowed to take on responsibility for an animal.

He opened the car door, no point putting it off. If the poor thing was dead he’d take it back to the surgery, see the body was disposed of respectfully. And there was always a chance it might still be alive if it had been dumped recently. He would never understand why people dumped unwanted pets, just because they got a little too big or had a couple of accidents. Perhaps a new baby had come along, or a new, cuter pet. Or the family had moved house or gone on holiday and couldn’t be bothered finding someone else to care for it. Monstrous. Absolutely monstrous.

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“I’m afraid there’s no mistake. Ned Farnby identified your brother. And you say he’s not come back home?”

“…No. No he hasn’t.” There was silence. Siegfried stared at his hands, willing his brain to comprehend what it was being told. He drew in a shaky breath. “Can I see him?” The two policemen glanced at each other.

“It’s not quite that simple sir, you see, we haven’t actually found the body yet.”

“What?” Not found the…his mind shied away from the last word. “But you know he was…he was…”

“Ned Farnby came into the police station this morning. Still hung-over. He confessed, told us everything that had happened.”

“Ned Farnby? He k…killed, he, he hurt Tris?!”
The shape didn’t look quite right James realised as he approached but it wasn’t until he crouched next to it that his brain managed to identify the figure into a human. He gasped in shock, a hit and run victim? Rather worse than a dumped dog, poor bloke, he’d have frozen just as easily as any other animal left here. And what if he were injured? Well, James was a vet he supposed; he’d be able to handle most injuries, at least until he’d managed to get whoever it was to the hospital. The figure was lying on his stomach, one arm stretched towards the road, the other hiding his face. His blond hair was matted with blood, some of which had clearly pooled beneath him and frozen.

James hesitated against turning him over, didn’t want to risk making a broken neck or spine worse. He felt for a pulse in the wrist. The skin was icy cold to the touch, numbing his fingertips. He couldn’t feel a pulse. Perhaps the neck then? He moved the concealing arm and felt his heart drop heavily into his boots.

“Tris…?”

“Yes sir.” The policeman nodded to his partner as the surgery door opened. He went out and Siegfried heard him discouraging the potential customer. The rumours would be flying thick and fast now he mused detachedly.

“Can you tell me what happened?” He had to know, the truth couldn’t possibly be worse than the vivid images his overactive imagination was throwing up.

“Of course. Ned Farnby, the labourer on Mr Garnly’s farm, do you know him.”

“Yes. He always seemed…”

“Quite. He came to us this morning to turn himself in for murder.” Siegfried couldn’t help the flinch at the word ‘murder’. The policeman grimaced apologetically. His partner hadn’t come back, must be standing guard at the door. Siegfried couldn’t blame him; it must be the hardest part of the job. It certainly was as a vet, telling somebody their beloved animal hadn’t made it. How much worse must it be to report a family member hadn’t…hadn’t…

“Did he definitely say Tristan?”

“Yes sir. Apparently Ned was drunk and harassing a lady, he can’t remember who. Tristan interfered.”

“That sounds like Tristan.” Tris may have acted the coward but that was all it was; an act. He was a Farnon at heart and wouldn’t stand by idly when someone needed help.

Frantically James scrabbled at Tristan’s neck, pulling the blood speckled collar down and pressing his fingers firmly into the pulse point. The seconds ticked past agonisingly slowly with no discernible trace of life. He felt the icy core in his stomach expand until it filled his chest and dug his fingers in further, desperately praying for that life giving blood to still be flowing. He wasn’t sure he could bear it if Tristan was…well…dead.

Tris was his best friend, his conspirator and the one who helped him weather Siegfried’s frequent mood changes and sudden enthusiasms. He’d known Tris longer than he’d known his wife for heaven’s sake! Yes, he was annoying, far too fond of playing practical jokes and a downright
genius at skiving off unpleasant jobs but he was cheerful, hard-working when he did actually work, witty and intelligent. He’d been the driving force behind James’s marriage, and thus the driving force behind his becoming a partner in a successful veterinary practice and finding a home here in the Dales. Life without Tristan Farnon was…unthinkable!

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“Yes sir. He then said that after your brother interposed himself the woman ran away. Ned got angry and turned on the nearest person.”

“Tris.”

“Yes. Drink makes a man do terrible things sir. Terrible.”

“But you said you hadn’t found a body? How…”

“Well it seems sir,” The policeman looked uncomfortable, shifting his grip on his helmet. “That after the ah, incident Ned realised what he’d done and panicked. He hauled the body into that old truck of his and hid it somewhere up on the hills. And, er, he can’t remember where. We’ve got men searching of course but it’s a large area.”

“Oh. Yes. But…couldn’t he be mistaken? You said he was drunk, perhaps…”

“We checked the area the incident had occurred. There was definitely evidence of a struggle, including the murder weapon.”

“Murder weapon?”

“A brick I’m afraid, sir. Ned struck young Mr Farnon with it in the head. Said it killed him instantly.”

“Oh.” Siegfried felt the blood drain from his face. He’d been mistaken, not knowing had been far preferable to this cold, stark description of his brother’s death. He didn’t say anything else and the policeman shifted uncomfortably.

“If you have any other questions, you know where to find us.” The policeman nodded briskly and left, collecting his colleague as he did. Siegfried sat in the empty surgery and stared into blankness.

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Oh thank God! James almost felt like crying in relief as his fingers finally registered a faint thudding pulse. He sat back on his haunches and exhaled. Thank God! But Tristan wasn’t out of danger yet. Now he knew he was alive James began cataloguing his injuries more critically, a bad cut on the chin and one arm was at an odd angle, probably dislocated. Impossible to tell if any bones had been broken but no other visible injuries. He ran his hands across Tris’s torso and felt a slight give. Broken ribs then, or possibly just cracked. But the two most serious worries were the head wound, which had streaked Tris’s face with dried blood and the cold. He must have been out here for hours, waiting for someone to come by. No doubt about it, hypothermia. James needed to get him somewhere warm, fast!

He lifted Tristan awkwardly; he was taller than James and hardly a lightweight. Managing to get one hand looped under the injured man’s knees and the other around his back he carried him swiftly towards the waiting car, ensuring Tris’s head was resting against his shoulder and not hanging. The cold was a greater danger than the risk of a broken neck and necessitated moving him, but no harm in minimising the risk as much as possible.
The car door was thankfully still open and James eased Tristan into the passenger seat before jumping into his own seat and driving off. No time to be careful now, he had to get Tris somewhere warm!
Siegfried sat on the wooden chair in the empty room with his heart and mind completely numbed. He could sense some great tide of emotion building but it had yet to crash down on him. For the moment he felt, and thought, nothing. His mind shied away from any thought even remotely connected to his brother. Helen would need to be told. And James and Mrs Hall. God, the family too. Well, Richard might be happy. Spiteful old bastard, he’d never liked Tris anyway. Siegfried drew in a quiet breath and realised his hands were shaking. He buried his face in them. Telling people could wait. The world could wait. Siegfried needed a few moments to break down and put himself back together. With an enormous, little brother sized hole in his heart and life.

“Siegfried! SIEGFRIED!” Only it seemed he wasn’t going to get it. Siegfried looked up wearily at the sound of James’s shouting. Usually he would have raced out to see what had got his partner so upset and excited but right now he couldn’t bring himself to care. James continued shouting though; Siegfried heard him struggling with the door and heaved himself up with a sigh. Any distraction would be good right now he supposed. He opened the surgery door and peered out to see what all the fuss was about.

James stood in the hallway, struggling to hold the front door open with his foot and carrying the limp body of Tristan Farnon. Siegfried felt all the blood drain from his face.

“James? What? But…?”

“Siegfried! Help me here!” Numbly, Siegfried moved forward to take his brother from James. As he lifted the younger Farnon into his arms he felt Tristan’s heartbeat thudding through the muddied jacket he was wearing. He almost dropped him in shock.

“Tristan?”

“I found him up by Brydon’s place, Siegfried; he’s cold, dangerously cold.” Siegfried snapped into action. Pushing aside his turbulent confused emotions, he turned and hurried into the living room, barking for Mrs Hall as he did so. He laid Tris down gently on the sofa and knelt down next to his head, James right beside him. Mrs Hall came hurrying from the kitchen.

“Mr Farnon? What is it? Oh Lord! Tristan? What on earth?”

“Mrs Hall, could you run across next door and fetch Doctor Allinson? Tell him we’ve got a hypothermia case with a possible concussion and…any other injuries James?”

“Damaged ribs and what looks like a dislocated arm. Could be more, he hasn’t woken since I found him. Siegfried what happened?”

“I don’t know James, I really don’t know.” Well he did he supposed. A fight, a concussion and then thrown out of a moving vehicle. But there was no need to distract James by telling him that, for now they needed to focus on getting Tristan back to full health so Siegfried could murder him for scaring him like that!

Mrs Hall hurried out. James pulled off Tristan’s shoes and Siegfried began to ease him out of the battered jacket he was wearing, wincing at the cold temperature of his skin.

“What the fire going James.”

“Right, Siegfried.”
As the flames flickered into life Mrs Hall returned with the doctor following.

“Right then,” Doctor Allinson said, “What’s going on?” Siefried mutely gestured to Tristan. “I see. Can someone get me a bowl of warm, not hot, warm water and some clean towels?”

“Right you are.” Mrs Hall said and returned to the kitchen, reappearing moments later with the desired items.

“Let’s have a look at you old chap.” Allinson said quietly. He motioned for Siefried to continue taking Tristan’s jacket off. “Can someone see about getting some blankets, three or four and a couple of hot water bottles?”

“Of course.” Mrs Hall hurried off again. Allinson took the bowl of water and glanced at the hovering vets. “Any other injuries besides the head and the arm?”

“The ribs.”

“Right. I’m going to have to put that shoulder back in place. I need one of you to hold him down.” Siefried nodded sharply. He leant over Tristan, careful to avoid putting pressure on the damaged ribs. Allinson held the upper arm firmly and pulled steadily. Tristan cried out and his eyes snapped open.

“Aahh! Nooo! Ah!”

“Sorry Tris, hang on! Just a little more, easy, easy…” The joint suddenly slipped back into place and the doctor and Siefried relaxed. Tris screwed his eyes shut and panted painfully.

“Tristan? Tris? Can you hear me?” Siefried asked anxiously. There was no reply. The Doctor turned to James.

“Pass me that roll of bandages. I’ll strap it up for now, but he’ll need to keep it in a proper sling for a couple of days.” He suited words to action, deftly bandaging the arm and strapping it to Tristan’s chest. In the meantime Mrs Hall came in with the blankets and hot water bottle. Siefried unbuttoned Tristan’s shirt and the doctor gently felt along the ribs.

“Broken?” James asked quietly.

“Just cracked. Nothing I can do for them, just make sure he avoids any lifting, twisting or strenuous exercise for a week or so.”

“That shouldn’t be any problem for Tris, avoiding those.” Siefried muttered as he helped wrap the blankets around Tristan’s far too still form. James gave a flicker of a smile in response. The doctor had turned his attention to Tris’s head, cleaning away the dried blood gently and wrapping a soft bandage around it.

“Now, this head wound. I can’t tell how bad the damage is, not properly; not until he wakes up but he’ll undoubtedly have a concussion. Keep the lights dimmed, stop him from moving around and try and keep him calm and awake. He may be nauseous or dizzy, that’s perfectly normal.”

“Right.”

“As to the hypothermia, keep him as warm as possible. Bathe his hands in lukewarm water if you can, to guard against frostbite. Keep moving the hot water bottle around; don’t let it rest in a single place too long. The rewarming may cause him pain at first, don’t be discouraged, keep at it and the pain will fade. Once he’s awake try to get him to drink something warm, not hot; that would just burn him, but warm. Not alcohol, milk or cocoa would be best.”
“I understand doctor.”

“Right, well I have other patients waiting. Don’t leave him on his own and come and fetch me the moment he wakes up. If he hasn’t woken in four hours, take him up to the hospital.”

“Right.”

“I’ll see myself out.” The doctor gathered up his paraphernalia and left quietly. Siegfried barely noticed him leave, unable to take his eyes off his brother. James sank into a chair nearby.

“What happened Siegfried? He went out for a drink, how did he come to be abandoned on a road in the middle of the hills?”

“The police came by earlier.” Siegfried started quietly, still staring at Tris. “They had Ned Farnby turn himself in this morning.”

“What?”

“He said he’d got into a drunken fight with Tris, after Tris stopped him harassing some poor woman. The police told me Tris had been killed in the struggle and the body dumped somewhere.”

“Oh. Oh, Siegfried…”

“When you came through that door with him…that was a bloody miracle James.” Siegfried turned and looked at his partner. James was astonished at the depth of sincerity in his eyes. “I didn’t think I’d ever see him again. You brought him back, alive, and I can’t thank you enough.”

“Thank providence. If I hadn’t been on that particular road, at that time…I shudder to think.”

“Yes.”

There was silence while they both watched the steady rise and fall of Tristan’s chest.
Chapter 4

The ringing of the telephone in the hall made Siegfried jump about a foot in the air. His first look was to Tristan, but he slept on, oblivious to the noise. James hurried to answer it. Siegfried sighed deeply and scrubbed a hand across his face. He should really telephone the police, explain what had happened, but he was still fighting the irrational fear that the moment he left the room, the moment he couldn’t see Tristan, his brother would vanish and would have been dead all along, a corpse hidden out in the hills somewhere. Morbid, irrational, unjustified the fear may be, but it was very very real.

James came back in, grimacing apologetically.

“That was Metcalfe. I’ve got to head out there, sounds like an emergency. Will you be alright?”

“Yes, yes. I’ll be fine James. And so will Tris if he knows what’s good for him.”

“Alright then.” James left quietly, leaving Siegfried alone with the far too still and cold body on the sofa. He sighed again and shifted the hot water bottle to a new position. Tristan’s hands were stiff and cold, but Siegfried’s examination showed no definite sign of frostbite. He dipped the cloth in the warm water and ran it over Tris’s knuckles anyway. Anything to make the rewarming easier. He just wished Tris would wake up, speak to him, let him know that he was really and truly alright.

“Oh, little brother. How do you get yourself into these messes?”

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Tristan was cold. Very cold. Why was he so cold? And dark, why dark? Dark and Cold. Was he dead? Oh, ah, pain. No, probably not dead. You didn’t hurt when you were dead, didn’t you? He couldn’t remember, it was too cold and painful.

Should he try moving? No, probably not. If hangovers had taught him anything it was to always remain perfectly still and silent or your body would punish you. Why was it so cold? He couldn’t remember…had he gone out somewhere? Cold. Dark. Pain.

Someone was speaking. That wasn’t usual was it? Tris dragged up previous memories of waking up to pain. Well, Siegfried shouting at hung-over him, yes, that was normal but somebody speaking? A nice voice too, soft and soothing. It was almost making the pain go away.

“Easy Tris, come on. Wake up please. It’s been nearly four hours now. Please wake up. Come on Tris. I’m sorry I blamed you for Tamfern, I’m sorry I told you off for the drinking. Just please please wake up. I need to know you’re going to be alright…”

Odd conversation. Tamfern? He was that farmer with the daughter…there was something to remember about the daughter wasn’t there? Memory suddenly flashed back, Tamfern, Siegfried, going out, NedWomanFightPAINDARK! Tris panicked. He forced his eyes open, despite the heaviness of the eyelids but had to instantly close them again as the light burned into his brain. He moaned through clenched teeth.

“Tris?” Siegfried’s voice sounded desperately hopeful and unbelieving all at once. Tristan felt someone grasp his hand gently. “Open your eyes Tris, come on…please…”

He fought with his eyelids again and managed to open them a slit. Siegfried stared down at him, an expression of sheer relief on his face.
Siegfried almost collapsed in relief when Tris finally responded and opened his eyes. It had been three and a half hours already and Helen had been on the verge of calling the hospital about an hour ago. He’d sent her over to fetch Doctor Allinson when Tris had started shifting and trying to open his eyes.

“Hello Tris, good to see you.”

“Siegfried…” Tris trailed off and hissed in pain as he tried to move.

“No, stay still little brother. You’ve rather been through the wars here.”

“Cold…”

“I know. You’re hypothermic. You’ve also got other injuries so please stay still.”

“Siegfried?”

“Yes, I’m here. Hush. The doctor’s coming. You’re going to be alright.” Tristan fell quiet, frowning up at the ceiling. Siegfried squeezed his hand. He looked so fragile lying there, as though a soft breeze could blow him away. His skin was still far too pale and cold and the cut on his chin stood out starkly against the white of his face. His hair was mussed and covered in dry blood, it couldn’t be comfortable. The blankets heaped over his form hid the rest of the bandages and bruises but Siegfried knew they were still there, causing pain and distress. He looked up as the door opened and Helen returned with the doctor.

“He’s awake? Excellent.”

The doctor bent over Tris, who squinted up at him. The pain was just building up and up, now his arm felt as though it was full of large shards of glass, all rubbing together and shattering further and his ribs felt as though the entire Welsh rugby team had been jumping up and down on them. Not to mention the all-pervading cold and how his head was pounding worse than any remembered hangover. He drew in a careful breath and watched Doctor Allinson.

“Can you answer me Tristan?”

“…yes.”

“Siegfried.” The doctor said over his shoulder, “Some warm milk please.” The older Farnon nodded and headed into the kitchen. Helen followed him. The doctor turned back to his patient.

“Right, Tristan. I’m going to give you some morphine now, but I need you to try and stay awake.”

“Mmmm.” The doctor produced a syringe and shot the painkillers into Tris’s undamaged arm.

“There, now, can you sit up a little?”

“No.”

“Come on old chap, none of that, let’s get you up.” The doctor managed to gently pull Tris into a more upright position as the drugs kicked in, dulling the worst of the pain. He settled him back against the sofa and pulled down the blankets to examine his ribs and shoulder further. Siegfried came in just then, Helen tactfully waiting outside, and pressed the mug of warm milk into Tristan’s
good hand. He sipped at it slowly, feeling the warmth burn down his throat.

Doctor Allinson checked the bandages around the shoulder and felt the damaged ribs again. He paid special attention to the darkening bruise on Tristan’s collarbone.

“Well, I stand by my original diagnosis. Cracked, not broken. No strenuous exercise or heavy lifting for at least two weeks and bed rest for three or four days. Now Tristan, any other pain?”

“Heads.”

“Yes, you have a concussion. Can you remember what happened?” Tristan swallowed the last of his milk and felt Siegfried take the empty mug from his hand. His brother was still staring at him with those anxious eyes.

Siegfried couldn’t express how relieved he was to see Tris sitting upright and talking again. He just kept flashing back to those awful minutes in the surgery where he had honestly thought he would never see or hear Tris again.

“Ned Farnby, there was a fight? A brick?” The doctor glanced at Siegfried for confirmation. The older Farnon nodded.

“Good. Well remembered. Now, I want you to try and stay awake, alright? No dozing off. I’m just going to have a word with your brother.”

“Alright.”

“Doctor?” Siegfried asked as Allinson drew him aside.

“Is that what happened?”

“Yes. The police came by earlier, they’ve got Ned in custody.”

“Good. I wouldn’t have expected that of him. He’s lucky not to be facing a murder charge Siegfried.”

“I know. God I know.”

“If he’d brought that brick down just a little bit harder…”

“Is it normal? For him to remember I mean?”

“Oh yes. Concussion sufferers usually either remember everything in vivid detail or nothing at all.”

“Right. What next?”

“Well, wake him up every few hours for the next twelve hours or so. His temperature’s much better, not too much to worry about there. Come and fetch me if he starts coughing or running a fever. As I said, bed-rest then no strenuous work for a while.”

“Of course.”

“He’ll have headaches. Possibly nightmares too. He might be rather forgetful for a few days, be patient with him. Give him painkillers if he needs them but watch the dosage, I’m sure I don’t need to warn you about the dangers?”
“No, of course not.”
“Right. I’ll be off then. You know where to find me if you need me.”
“Thank you Doctor Allinson.”
“You’re very welcome Mr Farnon.”

*****

Tristan was asleep again, Siegfried realised, still sitting upright. He sat next to his brother and Tristan responded by shifting and curling up against him, head on Siegfried’s shoulder. Siegfried stifled a resigned sigh, easing Tris’s head down onto his lap instead and pulling the blankets more securely around his body. He couldn’t stop the smile tugging at the corner of his mouth though.

Helen padded back in quietly, smiling to see the picture they both presented. Siegfried scowled at her but made no move to dislodge his brother.

“I’ll tell Mrs Hall to serve dinner in the dining room.” Helen said softly.

“Thank you my dear.” Siegfried said. Tris stirred at the sound of his voice and Siegfried hushed him; running at hand carefully through his hair until Tristan relaxed. Helen smiled again and left quietly.

“Siegfried?” Tristan asked sleepily.

“Mmmm.”

“Stay here?”

“Of course Tris. I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else. Now sleep little brother. I’m here.”

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