

# **Sam, Jake and Dylan Want Money**

by [Sam Bowring](#)

**Episode 1  
Black Market Prawns**

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#### **Black Market Prawns**

'Someone made a big mistake when they named it the "washing-up"', said Sam. 'They could have saved everyone a lot of trouble if they'd just called it the "throwing-away".'

His tone was imperious, as if his ratty old swivel chair was a high throne, his shaky old desk a great balcony on which he rested his arm, and his overflowing waste basket a treasure chest brimming with gold. He gazed at Dylan from his garbage kingdom as if from on high, somehow, despite being lower than Dylan's eye level over in the far corner of the living room. He swivelled away with a dismissive flourish, and quickly settled back into his fast-and-slow staccato style of typing, alternated with long periods of holding the delete key.

Behind the long counter that separated living room from kitchen, Dylan stood by the sink with his arms folded.

'That's not really an answer,' he said, 'to the question that I asked.'

Sam's eyes narrowed. 'Dylan,' he said, 'I don't have time to help you with the washing-up, okay? I'm trying to meet my deadline. Now be silent and still.'

Dylan knew that Sam's deadline was entirely self imposed, and wandered about in time like Dr Who on LSD.

'I'm not sure,' he muttered, 'that a widely unread blog really requires a deadline.'

'What?' Sam spun about in his chair, knocking over his trash and scattering banana skins and screwed up tissues across the floor. 'What did you say to me?'

'Nothing.' Dylan picked up a saucer from the mounded heap on the kitchen bench. 'Look at this saucer. Isn't it astounding? It's very presence suggests that we are a household concerned with the possibility of spills. The fact that it is dirty means it was even used to prevent one, some time in the past. Which one of us, I wonder, was bothered by the idea of a few measly drips of tea, when there is peanut butter on the walls and anthills in the carpet? Not to mention you've just rolled your chair over half a banana?'

Sam glanced down at the squashed banana, then angrily waved it away. 'It's the cyclical nature of things!' he said. 'But you're right. There wouldn't be so much mess if everyone stopped trying to prevent it in the first place. And I won't be part of the problem, thank you very much.'

He turned back to thwack furiously at the keyboard. Dylan suspected he wasn't typing real words.

Sweat built along Dylan's brow. The day was shaping up to be another scorcher. His shirt was already stuck to his back, and pretty

soon his bum crack would know what his neck tasted like. This far up, on the forty-second floor of the Hazy Towers apartment building, there was nothing standing between them and the raging sun besides dirty windows without blinds and a concrete wall that was hot to the touch. Above Sam's desk, an air conditioning unit rumbled uselessly, occasionally belching a puff of dust through the webs of desiccated spiders. Along the kitchen counter, all the way up to where the sink used to be visible, piles of washing-up baked in the light, ceramic grown sentimental for its time in the kiln.

'If we knew someone with a ute,' Dylan said, 'we could stack these dishes in the back and take them to a car wash.'

'And if wishes were horses,' muttered Sam, then paused thoughtfully, 'then I guess we could use a horse and cart. I wonder if you can take a horse through a car wash? Have to put its blinkers on, I suppose.'

A blowfly surfed through the kitchen window on a dry breeze.

*Something?* it buzzed. *Is it something? If it is something, I shall try to put my tongue on it! Ha ha! It must be something!*

'Get out of here,' said Dylan.

*But I smell something! It comes from all directions!*

*Everywhere is something!*

Dylan shooed the fly away, causing the air to shimmer as any remaining moisture in smears of tomato sauce evaporated. He finally realised the hopelessness of the situation. Grime was being seared onto the crockery until it was actually bonded to it on a molecular level. No longer were pattern and stain separate things, but one and the same.

There wasn't really much else for it.

He started putting everything back into the cupboards.

Sam deleted everything he had just written and started again. It was hard work, constantly striving for perfection. Words did not come out on the screen quite as he imagined they should. The poetic concepts in his head were tricky to grasp hold of, like a panicking fish, or something else metaphorical.

*Poetry is like a fish,* he wrote, then deleted it.

How could he effectively guide readers through his dazzling and brilliant inner world? He knew he had an inner world, as he was always having deep thoughts about stuff. They just weren't easy to verbalise.

*Art isn't easy,* he wrote, then deleted it.

He had plenty of poems on his website, but they attracted few hits. How could he generate the web traffic necessary to monetize his work? He dreamed of watching the bucks roll in as thousands of subscribers scrolled through his painfully beautiful verses, framed by flashing banner ads for porn sites and fat burning secrets. He knew it was possible – he had seen it elsewhere. It was one of his

greatest fears that he would only be recognised for his brilliance long after he was dead. Where was the money in that?

Maybe he needed to adopt a more practical approach. He'd recently read an article on how some successful bloggers expanded their readership by targeting niche areas, like 'How to Photoshop Your Own Genitalia' and 'Gamble Your Way to Good Health.' If he could capture the internet's attention with something genuinely informative, then surely folk would grow curious about his other work – his *greater* work – and begin to explore the vast backlog of his site.

With newfound vim, he began to type.

### *How to Write a Successful Blog*

*A blog article starts out like a chunk of granite, which you have to chip away at, getting rid of all extraneous bits and pieces until finally you have created that famous statue of the guy with the little dick.*

Sam frowned – he knew it did not speak volumes of his expertise to be so vague in the opening paragraph. He spun about to Dylan, who was still in the kitchen, trying to scrape some dots off a plate with his fingernail.

'Look at you,' said Sam. 'You're like a blind person who's just found their partner's suicide note written in Braille.'

To Sam's satisfaction, Dylan's mousey brown hair began to turn red. The fiery hue travelled up the strands like mercury in a thermometer, all the way from the roots to the tips.

'Are you speaking to me?' said Dylan.

'Oh dear,' said Sam, with a grin.

'It wouldn't hurt you to be a little more polite sometimes, you know.' Freckles started to pop out all over Dylan's cheeks. 'You know I turn into a redhead when I'm angry.'

'Yes, it's one of the few things I like about you. Anyway, calm down, I just want to ask you a question.'

'What?'

'What's the name of that curly-haired fuckwit with the tiny cock?'

Dylan shrugged. 'Julia Roberts?'

'No, no, the statue. You know, famous.'

'Oh. David?'

'Yeah.'

Sam made the edit, but already he was losing heart with his new project. He had, it seemed, thought of a fatal flaw – if he gave out excellent free advice on blog writing, he would only create new rivals in an already overcrowded marketplace.

He deleted everything and stared out the window at the city skyline, a depressing horizon of broken tetris pieces melting in the sun.

It was too hot to think.

There was a knock at the front door and Sam leapt up, thankful for the distraction.

'Stay in the shadows,' he told Dylan. 'I don't want people knowing that I live with you.'

'Why?'

'You're too short.' Sam opened the door and scowled. 'Never mind. It's only Hayes.'

Standing in the doorway was the owner of the building – a pale-skinned man with pale eyes, pale straw hair, and a pale personality. He was dithering nervously, wringing his hands and dabbing his brow. His pupils darted about like the sinkers on a fishing line that had hooked a large fish, strong enough to pull his gaze ever downwards.

'Er, hello,' he said.

'Enough of your relentless chatter!' snapped Sam. 'What do you want?'

'Now, er, look, Sam,' said Hayes. 'It's just that, I've come to check in with you about your, well, your, er ... your outstanding rent.'

'What an amazing surprise.'

Hayes gave a nervous titter. 'Now, you know, I really do think the time has come that you *should* pay at least some of what you owe. It really would be in your best, well, you know, *everyone's*, really, er, best interests.'

'Why?'

'Well, it's sort of, it's the way things work, isn't it? I'm your landlord, and that means, you know. I mean, the fact is, you really haven't, in all the time you've been living here, ever paid any rent, ever. Not even a single dollar. Now that's a little, don't you think, a little bit irresponsible?'

'How dare you.'

'Perhaps I used too strong a word, my apologies for that. I do very much enjoy having you boys as tenants, so I don't want to have to, er ...'

'Have to what, Hayes?'

Hayes' momentary attempt at assertiveness shattered. 'Well, you know – have to come around here asking for rent all the time, is all.'

'Sure, we'd prefer that too.'

'Really?'

'Of course. Who wants to have to deal with you constantly, you grasping old scrooge?'

Hayes was shocked. 'I'm only thirty-eight!'

'Yeah, well, we aren't all lucky enough to be born into landlordship so early in our lives. So good of you to come down from your ivory penthouse to visit us peasants.'

'Now that is hardly, er, fair. I actually have quite a lot of trouble making ends meet around here. Do you know what kind of upkeep goes into running a building like this?'

'Oh, I imagine it costs a fortune to keep the paint peeling and the stalactites pointy. Not to mention the army of groundskeepers you evidently employ to make sure the carpet doesn't grow back.'

Hayes gave a remorseful grimace. 'I do appreciate that the place could do with some improvement, but, er, in the meantime, all I ask ... you have to understand ... er ...'

'Look, said Sam, 'maybe we can discuss rent once you get the air conditioner fixed. Honestly, it's like Ethiopia in here.'

'Er ... but ...'

'Until then, you can just piss off.'

Sam slammed the door in the landlord's face. Dylan, who had sat down on the squishy brown couch in the living room, tutted.

'What?' demanded Sam.

'Nothing, nothing.'

Dylan didn't really like how badly the other boys treated Hayes. The man was an idiot, of course, with a spine like driftwood, so Dylan was not especially compelled to champion his cause. He could not help but sympathise with him a little, however, for he knew a bit himself about the plight of the loser. Not that Dylan thought of himself as a loser. It was fine that he hadn't completed anything he had ever started, and had no education, no job, no prospects, no girlfriend, and lived on government handouts while residing semi-illegally in the worst apartment building in the known universe with two degenerate lunatics. It was fine!

And even if sometimes he did feel a bit down on himself, well - there were losers and then there were *losers*, and Hayes was definitely in the italicised bracket.

Sam slumped down on the couch next to Dylan and pulled out a large spliff.

'Are you sure you want to spark that?' said Dylan. 'We don't have any food, and you know how munchy you get.'

'Don't be so consequences-oriented.'

Sam lit up, took a deep drag, and passed the spliff over. Dylan regarded it dubiously, as inviting white tendrils curled around his fingers. *Smoke us*, they seemed to say.

He suspected this joint would lead to another wasted day, in both senses of the word. Oh, he would tell himself beforehand that he would still be productive, but then he would smoke, and then he wouldn't be.

Or maybe not! Maybe the drug would inspire him. Maybe smoking weed would actually help.

It seemed like a plausible enough thought for the moment it took Dylan's traitorous hand to raise the spliff to his mouth.

Sam reached for the remote and turned on their tiny shitbox television. On its crackling screen, a cheerful ad began to play. A family was having a picnic in An Ideal Location while an over-enthused voiceover blathered on.

*'Have you tried horse flu? It's the craze that's sweeping the nation!'*

Dylan leant back into musty cushions as a green fog stole over his mind. The heat made being stoned heavier, somehow. Maybe he was dehydrated? Somewhere in his heart, he knew he should be doing something else with his day, something remotely worthwhile, but what? What was there to do? He felt like he had missed every single boat. Instead he was now standing on a deserted wharf, watching the vessels once moored there disappearing beyond the horizon. He tarried in hope that, in time, the wharf itself would rot to the point where it would detach from the land and float out to sea. In the meantime he lived out of the suitcase he had packed back when he thought he was off to see the world, and his recycled underwear were beginning to get salty.

On the ad, a little boy raced up to his parents, beaming.

*'Mum, Dad! I want horse flu!'*

A commotion sounded in the corridor outside. Footsteps, the squeaking of wheels, Jake's voice chattering excitedly. Something heavy thumped against the apartment door.

'What's going on out there?' said Sam, suddenly fearful.

*'Maybe you'll get horse flu for Christmas, little Timmy.'*

The door banged open to reveal a pile of bulging hessian sacks on a dolly, with Jake's idiotically grinning monkey-face popping over them from behind.

'Hello boys,' he said. 'Guess what? We're going to be rich!'

Jake pushed the dolly through the door. Behind him appeared three brawny men also pushing sack-laden dollies, all sporting bushy moustaches and heavily forested arms. They wore blue overalls smeared with grease and looked like they would be excellent at harpooning whales.

'Are they here to kill me?' whispered Sam.

'I don't think so,' said Dylan, patting his arm. Sam's stoned paranoia was nothing new.

'This way, gentlemen,' Jake babbled happily. 'Just set them down along here.'

Dylan watched with some concern as the muscled sailor guys dumped sacks all along the wall that housed their bedroom doors.

'Are they narcs?' whispered Sam, as he 'surreptitiously' dropped the still-smoking joint down the back of the couch. 'You

have to take the blame. I won't last a week in jail. I'm too young and pretty, I'll get passed around like a prize bitch. But you're so ill-formed and stumpy, you won't be worth a brass cigar. They'll just ignore you, or think you're a paedophile.'

'Thanks,' said Dylan. He cleared his throat. 'What's in the sacks, Jake?'

'All in good time!' said Jake. 'Come and help!'

As the salty sea dogs left the room, Jake insistently pulled Dylan off the couch. Meanwhile Sam yelped and began to beat at the flames shooting up from between the cushions.

'Leave him,' said Jake, steering Dylan to the door. 'Come on! This is going to be amazing.'

'What have you done this time?'

'You'll see!'

They went down the corridor to the service elevator, where the shark fighters were unloading more sacks with professional efficiency. Jake nodded with satisfaction and wheeled a full dolly at Dylan.

'Put these with the others.'

'Piled against my bedroom door, perhaps?'

'Good idea!'

As Dylan pushed the dolly back to the apartment, he grew ever more curious about what the sacks contained. Jake might be madder than a psych ward at Christmas, but occasionally he had some pretty good ideas for making money – although usually after Dylan was there to filter out the bad ones first. He gave a sack a tentative poke, and something spiky jabbed his finger.

Back in the apartment he dumped the sacks with the others, and watched as the deck hands did the same.

'That's the last of 'em,' said one.

'Thanks lads,' said Jake, tipping an imaginary hat. 'Sure you don't want to take any for yourselves? On the house, of course.'

The three crusty mariners glanced at each other, back at the sacks, and shook their heads.

Once they had departed, 'Who were they?' said Sam. 'I don't appreciate you disturbing the delicate equilibrium of our sanctum with unannounced invitation of the unpredictable working classes.'

Jake went to one of the sacks and began to fiddle with the knot around its neck. 'You'll never guess,' he said. 'I was down at the fish market when an intriguing opportunity fell into my lap like a drunken stripper. You know old Captain Deckhard?'

'No.'

'No.'

Jake gave a dismissive wave. 'He's one of my Sunday friends.'

Dylan experienced a sinking feeling. Jake's 'Sunday friends' were random people he took a shine to while out and about roaming the streets. Not all of them knew (or enjoyed) the fact that they had



been adopted as friends, either. And it didn't even have to be on a Sunday that it happened.

'Turns out,' continued Jake, 'that Deckhard has landed this haul which doesn't pass government regulations, or whatever, and he's sitting on the dock all worried about what he's going to do with it. So I say, "Don't worry mate, if anyone knows how to shift illegal ocean produce, it's me".'

'You?'

'Why not? I have a background in advertising.'

'Just because you once read a pamphlet about an advertising course which you didn't take doesn't give you a background in advertising.'

'I know that, but does he? Anyway, who's to let a few credentials stand in the way of making a fortune in ...' Jake finally got the knot undone and opened the sack. Green, spiny bodies cascaded out onto the floor. 'One tonne of black market prawns!'

Jake beamed in triumph.

Dylan stared around at the many, many sacks and realised what he had been smelling.

'Do you know how much prawns are worth?' Jake ran his cupped hands through the prawns, spilling them through his fingers as if they were gold pieces. 'They're a precious commodity. People love them!'

'Um,' said Dylan. In the sweltering apartment, the pong was already beginning to set in.

'So we shift these for a handsome mark up – you guys help me and I'll cut you in on the action – and we'll wind up richer than the mook who invented mashed potato.'

'Jake,' said Dylan, 'how do you imagine we're going to store a tonne of prawns?'

'Not store,' said Jake. 'Sell!'

'Yes, but ...' Dylan struggled to find the right words to penetrate Jake's starry-eyed enthusiasm. 'It's not the easiest thing, you know. To sell a tonne of prawns illegally.'

'Why not? People love prawns.'

'You can't just keep saying that like it's some kind of magical solution.'

'Well,' said Sam, stubbing out his joint and rising, 'I'll have some goddamn prawns.' He scooped up a handful from the open sack and wandered into the kitchen. 'How do you cook them? Just chuck them in the oven? Or do you need to put them in a plastic container first?'

Jake went after him and opened the fridge door.

'Hey!' he said. 'There's temperature differentiation in this white cupboard!'

'Yes,' said Dylan. 'That's the fridge.'

'Fri ... dge?' Jake tested out the word.

'You know, the thing I sometimes feed you out of.'

'Oh. I thought it was for playing hide-and-seek. Why don't we put the prawns in here?'

'They won't fit,' said Dylan. 'Not a tonne of them, anyway.'

'We'll get one sack in, at least,' said Jake. 'Especially if we take out all these stupid shelves.'

Sam stood at the stove with an apron on backwards. 'Is this how it works?' he asked, fiddling with the stove top until all four burners were loudly hissing gas. 'I mean, really, it should be you doing this, Dylan. You're the, you know ... household dogsbody.'

'Do you think they would make good earrings?' asked Jake, holding a prawn to each of his ears. 'Once they've been hollowed out, of course.'

Dylan could feel his hair beginning to turn red. 'If everyone could just calm down ...'

'Who's un-calm?' asked Sam, as he begun to strike matches over the liberally spewing burners.

'Yeah, Dylan,' said Jake, taking an experimental twirl with his prawn "earrings". 'It's you who needs to calm down.'

Dylan rubbed his temples. 'Listen to me,' he said. 'We can't keep a tonne of prawns sitting here in our apartment. Do you know how quickly they'll go bad in this heat?'

'So let's get busy and sell some then.'

'Where?'

'I figured we'd try Mr Chiu's.'

Dylan had to admit Mr Chiu's was not a bad place to start.

Mr Chiu's was a Chinese restaurant across the road from Hazy Towers. It was dark and narrow, its pink walls adorned with tattered red curtains and faded red lanterns, above scuffed plastic tables and a checkerboard linoleum floor with sweet chilli sauce congealed in the cracks. At the front counter a bubbling fish tank housed three goldfish who languidly circled a toy castle like the laziest of dragons. Behind them stood Mr Chiu, a smiley man who took great pride in his dirty establishment.

'G'day, boys,' he said, as Jake and Dylan entered, Jake pulling a dolly with a sack on it.

'Traditional eastern greetings to you, Mr Chiu,' said Jake. 'Got some new goldfish, I see?'

'Yep,' said Chiu. 'These are Smaug, Puff and Olakanzar. I named them after famous dragons from great works of literature. Funny, huh?'

'Um, sure.'

'Anyway, what's in the sack?'

'Ah,' said Jake, patting the sack, 'wouldn't you like to know?'

'That's why I fucking asked.'

'Well,' said Jake, 'first, let me ask *you* a question. You make a few seafood dishes here in your restaurant, don't you?'

'I do.'

'And would you suggest that some of these dishes contain prawns?'

'I would.'

Jake picked up a menu. 'Yes, you see here? You've got honey prawns, pepper prawns, prawn curry, prawn dumplings, special fried rice with prawns ...'

'You going to quote me my own fucking menu? I already told you I cook fucking prawns.'

Jake smiled at Chiu, who smiled right back. Mr Chiu always smiled, but maybe this time there was an undercurrent.

Dylan didn't know what kind of dumb sales tactics Jake thought he was employing, but he decided it was time to cut to the chase.

'Mr Chiu,' he said, 'we have some prawns that we could sell you very cheaply.'

Jake glared at Dylan.

'Oh?' said Chiu. 'I would like to see such a thing.'

'Show the man the goods, Jake,' said Dylan.

Jake tried to revert to a winning smile while he opened the sack. Slimy green prawns glistened from within.

'Wow,' said Mr Chiu. 'That's a lot of prawns in there.'

'Yep.'

'What's wrong with them?'

'Nothing.'

Mr Chiu picked up a prawn, turned it around and inspected it from all sides, broke it open and sniffed. 'Seems okay. How much you want for these prawns anyway?'

Jake nodded. 'Straight to the crunch, I like your style, Chiu. Well, normally prawns cost, what, let's say like thirty five bucks a kilo?'

Chiu cast him a weary look. 'What kind of salesman are you?'

'I almost took an advertising course.'

'Listen,' said Chiu, 'you can't just say prawns cost "about thirty dollars" when that is obviously a figure you pulled screaming from your anus.'

'Thirty-five,' clarified Jake.

'The price depends,' said Chiu, 'on the kind of prawn, the time of year, where they come from, all that fuck. Prawns range widely in value. Do you even know what type of prawns these are?'

Jake glanced uncertainly at the sack. 'Ocean-faring harbour prawns?'

'Harbour prawns? These came from the fucking harbour?'

'Ah ...' Jake wet his lips. Chiu's tone clearly implied that coming from the harbour would not be a good thing. 'No.'

'You're promising me these prawns did not come from the harbour?'

'No, definitely not.'

'Good, because then they would be full of carcinogenic pollution and no good in a fucking curry. You sell me harbour prawns and you kill my fucking customers. So, I ask again – what type of prawns are these?'

'Cheap prawns,' said Jake. 'I only said thirty-five dollars as a starting point for the bargaining. Why don't you go for a low counter - like ten dollars a kilo, for example?'

Dylan realised he had no idea what Jake had actually paid for the prawns in the first place. For that matter, how had he afforded them? He never had any money. None of them ever had any money.

Mr Chiu tapped his chin. 'How about eight dollars a kilo?'

Jake turned to Dylan with a querying look, as if to ask Dylan if he thought this was an acceptable price.

'Mind if I have a quick consultation with my associate?' Dylan asked Chiu, taking Jake's elbow

'Take your fucking time.'

Dylan led Jake aside.

'What do you think of eight dollars a kilo?' said Jake.

'What did you originally pay for them?'

'Eight dollars a kilo.'

'Right. So why are you looking at me with questions in your eyes if you already know that selling for eight dollars a kilo will result in zero profit?'

'It's a start.'

'It's shooting the runner on the starting line with the starter pistol.'

'Are you being sarcastic?'

'More just generally deprecating.'

'Ah.'

'Hey, wait a second. You said you bought a tonne of these?'

'Yep.'

'So that must have cost, like, eight thousand dollars.'

'Yah.'

'Where on earth did you get eight thousand dollars?'

'Don't worry your little head about it.'

'You're as broke as I am.'

'I had what you might call a "rainy day fund".'

'What?'

'On rainy days I like to go and gamble on the dogs. I'm really good at guessing which of them will run the fastest on a wet track. It's sort of a weird random talent.'

'Is that even remotely true?'

'Why not? It's based on which dogs I haven't secretly poked in the eyeball with an umbrella while posing as a kennel inspector just before the race.'

Dylan rubbed his brow. 'So how much have you got in this alleged fund?'

'Well, I *had* eight thousand dollars. I was waiting for a smart opportunity to invest it.'

'And then you just happened to find something that cost exactly eight thousand dollars?'

'Serendipity, right? Although I did round Captain Deckhard's price up a bit, for the sake of mathematical ease.'

'*What?* You paid more for a tonne of stinkin' prawns than you had to?'

Jake shrugged. 'Well, you know. Who's got the time?'

'If you had kept *any* of that money, we could have used it to put some proper food in the fridge!'

'Fri ... dge?'

Mr Chiu cleared his throat impatiently.

'It'll be nine dollars fifty a kilogram, Chiu,' said Jake, 'and that's our final offer. You know it's a good deal – you can freeze these guys and make curries for months.'

Chiu nodded. 'Very well. How many kilograms?'

Jake's look of pride at his own business acumen froze on his face. 'What?'

'How many kilos?' Chiu asked, gesturing at the sack.

'Ah,' said Jake, 'well, can we borrow your ... weighing device?'

'What weighing device?' Chiu smiled deeply. 'Does this look like some kind of weighing device party in here?'

'Surely a restaurant has a weighing device of some kind?'

'Why?'

'To measure out ingredients and stuff.'

Chiu folded his arms. 'I cook by heart.'

'You don't even use a tablespoon or anything?'

'You want to measure out a sack of prawns using a tablespoon?' Now there was no mistaking the derisive nature of Chiu's grin. 'You don't even know how many kilos of prawns you have. No deal.'

'Wait!' screamed Jake, more loudly than seemed necessary. 'I have an idea. We'll be back in a minute. Come on, Dylan.'

Jake wheeled the sack out of Chiu's, leaving Dylan little choice but to quickly follow.

When Dylan caught up in the street outside, Jake was pulling the rattling dolly along so quickly that prawns were spilling off to either side onto the baking pavement.

'Hold up,' said Dylan. 'What's your idea?'

'Dunno,' said Jake.

'Great.'

Jake stopped to look through the window of the local CGA supermarket, where fresh produce was laid out on display in air conditioned comfort.

'I have an idea,' he said.

'Really this time?'

'Just try to act subtle. And get a carry basket.'

Jake led Dylan into the CGA, then along the fruit and vegetable aisle until they were some distance from the checkouts.

'What are we doing here, Jake?'

'Come on, don't you get it?'

Jake nodded towards a heap of pink apples. Above them hung a large produce scale.

'Ah,' said Dylan.

'You're damn right, "ah".'

'It won't hold all the prawns at once, though.'

'That's why you brought the carry basket. We fill the scale with prawns, right, measure their weight, then we put them into the carry basket. Then we fill the scale again. And then we put the prawns from the carry basket back into the sack. No, wait.'

'That won't work if there's still prawns left in the sack.'

'Quiet, I'm trying to think. It's like one of those logic puzzles. You know, like where you have to get the fox, the goose and the grain all from one side of the river to the other, but you only have enough room in the boat for one thing at a time. And you can't leave the fox with the goose, or the fox will fuck it in the cloacca. And if you leave the goose with the grain, the goose will shit all through it.'

'I don't think that's how it goes.'

Jake bit his thumbnail, still pondering. 'Ok – however you look at this problem, it starts with us putting prawns in the scale. So help me lift up the sack and pour them in.'

Together they raised the mouth of the heavy sack towards the scale, while Dylan glanced furtively towards the checkouts.

'Don't act so suspicious,' said Jake.

'I'm trying.'

'Or is it "suspiciously"? I can never work it out.'

'Let's talk about it later,' grunted Dylan.

'Just try to make it look like we're measuring apples.'

'How are we supposed to do that?'

Jake cleared his throat. 'Boy,' he announced to the world in general, 'we certainly are buying a lot of apples over here! Wow-eee, I do like my apples!'

A couple of checkout chicks and a manager, none of whom had not been paying the boys the slightest bit of attention, began to pay them attention.

Jake pushed up the bottom of the sack and prawns started spilling into the scale, perhaps a little too freely.

'Jake ...'

'Boy,' shouted Jake, 'I can't believe we've been without apples for so long! We'll take them home and make apple pie, smothered with good ol' apple sauce. Some folks might say that's too much apple in one sitting, but the hell with those guys because I love apples!'

'Jake!'

As Jake rose on his tippy toes trying to be heard, he pushed up the bottom of the sack much too hard. Glistening, ill-smelling bodies cascaded out, filling the scale and spilling over its sides to smatter down all over the fruit.

'Hey!' called the manager, a big lady with thick arms who held her mop like a javelin. 'What are you two doing?' She began to approach along on the other side of the fruit display.

'Just gathering our apples, miss!' sung Jake, as he desperately clawed up handfuls of prawns.

'We have to get out of here,' said Dylan.

'Why,' bellowed Jake, 'I might cook a lovely apple soup tonight! Did you ever hear of such a thing? It's a traditional family recipe, invented by my old grandmama. The trick is to use plenty of apples!'

The store manager was now close enough to see that something was terribly wrong.

'What are those things?' she said, wrinkling her nose. Horrible realisation dawned. 'Are those prawns?'

Dylan grabbed Jake's arm and dragged him away, while Jake stuffed handfuls of prawns into his pockets.

'Stop them!' shouted the manager, but the checkout chicks were clearly afraid of the prawn-strewing madmen dashing towards them, and made no move to get in their way.

As they fled through the automatic sliding doors, a hurled mop smashed through after them.

'Home!' shrieked Jake, and they fled.

Sam was stoned out of his mind and hungrier than a hippo at a marble swap-meet. He'd been looking up prawn recipes on the web, then going to the cupboard to see if they contained any of the garlic, salt, sugarcane and other various things required. Every time he checked, the cupboard was empty.

'Well,' he declared to a passing cat, 'if prawn is all I have to work with, prawn it shall be!'

He set about cutting, blending, whisking and frying, and soon he sat down in front of the TV with a plate of prawn cakes topped with prawn puree, and a side of prawn with prawn sauce.

'Shame I don't like prawn much,' he mentioned to a passing cat.

He reached for the remote, switched on the television, and was disappointed by the sight of the news.

'Hello and welcome to the news,' said news presenter Stacy Bleakbank.

'Take your top off,' said Sam.

*'As fire-fighters battle bushfires raging in the south, rising temperatures and hot winds continue to hamper their efforts. In international news, US President Root McTooty faces renewed calls to withdraw troops from war-torn Stanistan, an election promise he has so far failed to deliver on. McTooty had this to say.'*

President McTooty appeared at a podium. *'There is still work to be done in Stanistan. No one said waging the War on Consternation was going to be easy. America and her allies made a firm commitment to liberate the Stanistani people, and that commitment has not yet been met. It will be a cold day in Hell before we abandon pursuit of the democratic process.'*

'On a cold day in Hell,' Sam informed a passing cat, 'Root McTooty can suck my balls.'

This comment, stupid and incongruous as it was, did not seem overly significant at the time.

Sam realised there were more cats passing by than usual. He also became aware of a background noise he had hitherto not registered – a sort of satisfied communal meowing. As he turned towards the sound, he almost choked on variously textured bits of prawn. Several of the sacks piled along the bedroom wall had been torn open at their bases, their contents spilled out into a steaming pile. At the edges a dozen feral cats munched and purred happily, their whiskers slick and chins greasy, bellies bulging and tails held high. Former bitter rivals to the smallest bit of kitchen scrap stood shoulder to shoulder, glancing at each other with brightly shining eyes, all territorial disputes forgotten.

*How good is this?*

*Better than a kick in the feline herpes, that's for sure.*

*Hey, look at Lord Ratslayer – he's got an extra set of whiskers!*

The cats laughed at a big ginger tom who had prawn feelers sticking out of his mouth.

*That's funny.*

*Hey, I heard you shagged Lady Bumsniffer last night?*

*Could be, could be – but a gentlecat does not hook his barbed penis into a female's vaginal cavity and tell.*

*Say no more. Hey, speaking of which, did you hear that Prince Arsehole was caught by the Cat Protection Alliance last week?*

*Really?*

*Yeah, they fixed him and let him go.*



*Ouch.*

*I sure do hate those guys.*

*Yeah. You know what they say – if it ain't broke, don't fix it!*

*Haha. Or rip its balls off.*

*Haha, yeah.*

'Oy!' Sam rose shakily from the couch. 'Get away, you dreadful thieves! Those are our prawns! Ours. Do you understand?'

*What's with this prick?*

*Dunno, but he's asking to get hissed at.*

*Yeah. Does not know who he is fucking with.*

Sam ran to the kitchen for a broom and, much to his surprise, found one.

'Out!' he bellowed, swinging at the strays. 'Get out of here you vagrant scum!'

*He's got high tech weaponry!*

*Curse our lacklustre evolutionary development.*

'Meow at me all you want,' said Sam, swinging hard at a mangy grey. As cats scattered throughout the apartment, one jumped onto the couch and knocked over Sam's plate of prawn-on-prawn action.

'No, no, no!' shouted Sam. 'I hated eating that, but it was my choice to make!'

Several cats fled through open windows, and Sam steered others in the same direction. Some proved more stubborn than others, dodging him and circling back to the prawns.

*The stink is too hard to resist.*

*Just one more mouthful! While he's distracted!*

'You spit that out! That's ours!'

A few more swings and the last cats fled, running away along the high ledges from whence they had come.

Sam slammed the window closed, which seemed to concentrate the sunlight upon him like a magnifying glass. The air of the apartment quickly grew stifling as the half-eaten prawn carcasses fermented on the carpet. Sam tried to get them back into the general vicinity of the sacks with a couple of half-hearted kicks, but in the end he gave up and retreated to the couch. He could not bear to look at what he'd been eating, and reached instead for a half-smoked joint resting in the ashtray. At the very least, he figured, he could create a protective cloud around himself to shield him from the smell, even if he was forced to smoke continuously.

'Oh, man,' said Jake, as he and Dylan emerged from the lift. Outside their apartment Hayes was tapping on the door so lightly that, should it have been a door-shaped cake coated in icing sugar, he would not have knocked any off.

'Mr Hayes,' said Dylan, making the man start. 'What is it? We're kind of busy right now.'

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