

THE QUARRY

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BURDENS

DAMON HILTON

Constable Derrin was standing behind me whilst I was on the phone. In high school we used to call him Herc the Lurk.

‘I love you baby. Please! I won’t do anything like this again. Please baby. Don’t hang up! Don’t hang up!’

But she hung up. I turned around in defeat. I was face-to face with Herc. It reminded me of when we were forced to partner up in self-defence class. He kicked my arse. Ugh, in high school he was a loser. Actually, he’s still a loser. The only difference is the school blazer’s now a badly pressed uniform and its emblem a poorly shined badge.

‘Who was that?’ Herc asked.

‘Mara,’ I said.

‘‘She like princesses or something?’’

‘What?’

‘Come with me mate,’ he said.

His mother was Greek. Called him Hercules or some shit after a Greek god who fought monsters. I don’t know. I don’t care. There’s not even anything particularly

godly about Herc. I bet the only monsters he ever gets to fight are underage offenders. They aren't even monsters, they're just bored.

'Check out ya face,' he said.

He opened the bathroom door and let me in. Water had leaked underneath the mirror leaving a mass of black ooze in the corner. My face was blue under the light. On the side of my face there was a stain and on my cheek a splodge. Mara. Black eyeliner and pink lip-gloss. Her signature. I didn't wipe them off. I left them there for company. I missed her already.

'You like being a princess?' Herc said.

'Yeah, maybe you can be my Knight in Shining Armour and save me? Wait, aren't you a god or some shit?' I asked.

'Yeah real funny wise guy. I won't be saving your arse until I know it wasn't you. So until then I can't let you go.'

'What does that mean? Is there going to be a line-up?'

'Yeah mate, there's going to be a line-up.'

The cell bed sagged in the middle where various arses had been before. I'd been lying there for at least an hour.

There's a photo stuck above my bed. It's a school photo of Mara. It was taken in Year 11 a couple of months before we started dating. Her hair was blonde and long, and her lips tinted with pink lip-gloss. Sometimes I'd see sticky residue on the collars of other boys in my year. But then we started going out. After that the lip-gloss smears disappeared.

In Year 12 I used to smoke every afternoon at the train station. I'd smoke one, two, three cigarettes. Commuters would stare. I'd fight with Mara at the station because she wouldn't kiss me. She said my mouth tasted like shit. Then she said second-hand smoke was even worse than the real thing. She said that it caused cancer and if I kept it up I'd be dead by the age of 30. Than my brother Levi died. So I stopped.

The year after we finished school Mara decided she was going to move away and go to university. She ended up staying. I'm pretty sure she stayed for me. I was glad because I didn't really care about anyone else in our shithole of a hometown. Mara's best friend Larnie moved away though. I could tell Mara missed her. But she had me. She still has me.

'Mate you awake?' Herc asked.

‘Ugh yeah,’ I said.

‘It’s time.’

I stood against a white backdrop with seven random guys. Actors? Picked off the street? Other cops? I don’t know.

‘Is there anywhere in particular you want to stand?’ Herc asked.

‘Nah not really,’ I said.

Honestly, I just wanted it to be over and done with. Through the observation window I could see the witness’s hair in some sort of bun. There was a vein bulging on the left side of her temple. Frustration? Anger? Exhaustion? I’d seen her three times before. She worked at the jewellers.

She pointed straight at me. Her lips tight.

‘It was that one. He broke into the jewellery store... again.’

Herc took me by the right arm. He gripped it tightly as he walked me back to the holding cell, told me that in the morning they were going to take me to a corrections centre, a new fancy fucking way to say ‘jail’. I was a repeat offender. Breaking and entering as well as theft was my specialty. This wasn’t the first time I’d stolen something from that store. But it was the first time I’d stolen an engagement ring.

Herc leant against the cell wall, hands in his pockets. He was chewing gum that squelched around inside his mouth.

‘You wanna know something?’ Herc asked.

‘Ok,’ I said.

‘So you and Mara started like dating in year 11 or something, right?’

‘Yeah. What of it?’

‘Nothing mate. It’s just she’s a huge bitch.’

‘Fuck you! You talkin’ shit about my girlfriend? I’d fuckin’ kill for her.’

‘Are you fucking serious? Mate you gotta draw the line somewhere. She’s a bitch. That ring you stole was for her wasn’t it?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Yeah thought so. Just like all that shit you took last time? You know what your fault is mate? You’re massive idiot,’ he said as he shut the door.

Yeah I thought. I am a massive idiot. But I love her.

CATS ARE BETTER THAN DOGS

Joel Hilton hit me because I said his dog was stupid.

‘Cats are better than dogs. Dogs can’t even look after themselves. You have to clean dogs. You don’t have to clean cats.’

‘Yeah well dogs are better than cats. Dogs can play fetch! Cats don’t do anything, they just sleep *all* day. Borrrring.’

‘No they don’t! I play games with my cat all the time. He likes to play games with this stick thing. It’s got a string on the end and you like wave it around and he chases it and tries to eat it.’

‘That sounds boring Gabby. Your cat sounds stupid. He’s trying to eat string. Cats can’t eat string.’

‘He’s not stupid! Your dog is stupid.’

‘Nuh-uh, my dog’s smart. He can play dead and everything.’

‘Yeah well he’s probably so stupid he should be dead.’

We both have time out tomorrow at lunchtime because Mrs Burrell says so. She says it doesn’t matter if cats or dogs are better. She says I shouldn’t have said what I said. But I don’t think she understands. Cats are better. They just are.

I hit Gabby Wright because she said my dog was stupid. But he's the smartest dog I know. He's smarter than Gabby. She's so stupid. Mrs Burrell says I shouldn't have hit her. So I've got time out tomorrow at lunchtime. Anyway dogs are better than cats. It's not my fault Gabby doesn't understand.

It's lunchtime and everyone else is outside in the playground. It sucks I'm stuck inside on time out. I asked my Mum if cats are better than dogs. She said yes. She said cats are better than dogs because cats are independent. I think she means that cats can go and catch birds and eat them if they're hungry.

I'm in time out. My brother told me I shouldn't worry about it. He used to get put on time out all the time. He also said that that dogs are better than cats because dogs can help blind people. All my friends are outside playing. Gabby and her cat suck.

Did you know in ancient Egypt the mummies loved cats? They made statues and pictures of them and stuff.

Did you know one of the first animals in space was a dog? I wish I could go to space with my dog.

Cats always land on their feet.

Dogs are used by the police to find things.

Garfield is a famous cat.

Snoopy is a famous dog.

Cats are better than dogs.

Dogs are better than cats.

Cats are better than dogs.

Dogs are better than cats.

'Have you two learnt your lesson?' Mrs Burrell asked.

LUNCHBOX

It was the 17th of January 1963 when the Bray family came to town. Fourteen children + one mother + one father + one uncle + one aunt + one grandmother = nineteen unwelcome Brays. Their clothes, tacky with tropical dampness, had dirtied in the dust as they set up their makeshift homes. Now they were all brown. George Wright watched through his bedroom window. His mother Patricia shouted from her sewing room, 'You stay away from them, you hear? They're filthy people.' But George ignored her. She never let him do anything. At church he'd often pictured God's arm crashing through the ceiling and grabbing his mother from the pulpit and taking her away like King Kong did to Ann Darrow.

Pa Keith was the only interesting grown-up he knew. He was 86 but George liked the fact that the wrinkles on his face were so deep he could stick a half-penny in there and it would stay. He also took George to see *King Kong* at the movies and let him have a whole bottle of Coke. Pa Keith told him it was their little secret. George's Mum never let him have Coke. She said it would ruin his teeth. She never trusted anyone with bad teeth.

By late afternoon, the vacant lot had been transformed into 'Brays' Land'. Their six horses ate the fresh, green grass beside their four caravans placed in a line like peculiar storefronts. Each wooden body had been decorated with patterns and pictures. The doors were round.

There were five girls and nine boys in the Bray family. George counted them on the morning of the 18th of January as they ran around the oval giggling and yelling. His mum said he had to stay inside because of his allergies. George knew she was lying but his dad was home so he couldn't argue.

George's dad had really white teeth. George's dad wore suits and only suits. His pyjamas were even ironed to have the same starchy stiffness as the business suit he sported every day over his body like a second skin. But it was a Sunday and Malcolm Wright was in his home office making telephone calls because 'A banker never rests son. One day you'll understand. Now what's one + five + nine + two?'

'17.'

'Good.'

At 11:00am Patricia Wright left for one of her 'Women's Meetings'. She took Pa Keith with her and dropped him off at the RSL to play bowls with his friends James and John. George left the house at 11:15am and walked to the oval with his lunchbox, packed with a sandwich just in case he got hungry.

'Who's that?' the oldest Bray asked when he saw George walking towards the cluster of children sitting underneath the only tree on the vacant lot.

'Oi, who are you?' he asked George.

'George Wright. Who are you?' George asked.

'Gary... Ain't you been told to stay away?'

'Mum said to stay away yesterday. I thought we could play or something...'

George smiled.

'Nah it's alright. We gotta enough kids to play with already. Whatcha got in that lunchbox?'

'A sandwich.'

'Can I have it?'

'It's turkey. But can I play with you?'

'Yeah but only if ya give me ya lunchbox.'

'Ok.'

George played tips with the Brays until their legs were too tired to run anymore. Then George helped them feed the horses. His favourite was called Onyx. His favourite Bray girl was called Maggie. She gave George a kiss on the cheek. Her teeth were yellowed and gritty. She smelt like ants and melted sugar cubes.

‘You’re nice,’ she smiled and then walked away.

George blushed.

‘George William Wright!’ Patricia Wright screamed.

‘I need to go home,’ George said.

‘Don’t you want to stay for supper?’ one of the Brays asked.

‘I can’t.’

George saw his Mum crossing the vacant lot. Her blue dress threatened to lift and expose her underwear.

‘What did I tell you? What did I tell you about going near these filthy people?’ she said.

‘I was just...’

‘You never listen to me George! Why is that? Why are you disobedient? And why does that boy have your lunchbox?’ she pointed to Gary Bray.

George Wright knew what would happen if he told her the truth. A bar of soap in the mouth, a few smacks with the belt and no dinner.

‘I was having lunch in the park and he stole it so I came over here to get it back.’

‘Gary didn’t steal nothin’! That’s a lie!’ Maggie said.

‘Shut up you filthy little liar! Shut up!’ Patricia Wright said.

On the morning of the 19th of January the revelation that a Bray child had stolen George Wright’s lunchbox was the talk of the town.

‘You can’t trust anyone these days,’ Pa Keith said.

‘Yeah, you can’t trust anyone,’ George said as he sipped some Coke.

The police said they couldn’t do anything so a group of men including Malcolm Wright went to the vacant lot. George heard that Mr Bray had some of his teeth knocked out by a cricket bat. They cracked and splintered. Little white dots like breadcrumbs thrown for the birds on the green grass. The Bray family packed up their things and left.

NARCISSISTIC MUCH?

How's the train ride going? ☺

I've got some bogan sitting next to me. He smells like that Lynx chocolate spray all the guys used to spray on themselves after P.E.

HAHAHAHAHAHAHA it smells so bad! Sucks to be you!

Fuck you. I'll buy you some for your birthday. :P

Ok. All the boys will want me cause I'll smell so good!

You wish bitch.

LOL. I've gotta go. Talk later. xx

My skirt is riding up my leg again.

The guy sitting next to me on the train looks like such a pervert. Shit, he's looking at me.

Great so I picked the carriage with the seedy looking guy. His red windbreaker reminds me of James Dean in 'Rebel Without a Cause.' But he isn't James Dean. A curly orange mullet cascades down the back of his freckled neck. He has a suitcase.

His nose is inflamed and crusted around the nostrils. Wait. Crust around the nostrils. Cocaine? OMG you are such a prude Martina. He keeps twitching. Fidgeting. There's sweat on his upper lip. Why can't he keep still? I get my book out of my bag. Sense and Sensibility. I'm just going to ignore him. He'll eventually get off.

'Hey is it alright if I leave this here?' I hear someone say.

'Ummm yeah. Yeah that's fine... Wait, what?' I reply.

I look up and no one's there. I look backwards down the aisle and I see the guy with the red windbreaker already moving in the space between carriages. Where's he going? Why'd he leave his suitcase?

I read the tag. It says his name is Sam Bray. I go back to reading my book.

40 minutes later and that guy hasn't come back. I'm trapped. Trapped forever in an endless sea of green seats and beige plastic walls. I just want to know if he's coming back. I just want to know why he left his bag because like, is it even normal to leave your bag with a stranger?

It's been over an hour now. I remember reading a sign once at the station that said you should report unattended baggage. I'm not overreacting am I? Wait, is this even unattended? He sort of implied I watch it, right?

Fuck. Maybe he's somewhere doing drugs? Maybe he's hiding in the bathroom snorting more cocaine? OMG what if he's left me with his stash of drugs? What if the cops come on and do a random bag search? I'm not a drug mule!

Some guy left his bag with me and disappeared. He's been gone for like an hr. Wat do I do?

IDK. Move to a different carriage? xx

OK.

I put my book in my bag and stood up to leave. I walked past an elderly couple sleeping in a huddled mass. The woman was snoring like a pig. The thump of footsteps stopped behind me.

'Hey! What are you doing? I asked you to watch my fucking bag!'

'I was! You were gone for like an hour!'

'Yeah so. Just let someone steal my fucking bag instead yeah?'

'But you were gone for ages.'

'Yeah and? I was on the phone to my Mum OK. Is that a crime?'

'No.'

‘Fuckin’ bitch.’