

THE QUARRY

Cassie Hamer

The White Line

It was the woman's stomach that Kat noticed first – round and ripe as a February mango. Eight months pregnant, she guessed.

Kat shuffled along the bench to give her extra space.

'Thanks,' said the pregnant woman, panting a little as she lowered herself slowly onto the seat. The air in the station couldn't be good for the baby, Kat thought – sooty and still – almost like smoking.

The chimes of a station announcement sounded.

'We regret to advise that all trains on the western line are experiencing lengthy delays due to a medical emergency at Redfern. We apologise for any inconvenience.'

The pregnant woman sighed. 'Not again,' she muttered and rubbed her stomach in circles.

At the other end of the seat, two men in suits and loosened ties sat down.

‘I’ll bet it’s a suicide,’ commented one of them.

‘Selfish bastard,’ said the other. ‘Why couldn’t he have just thrown himself off a cliff? Save us all the hassle.’

Kat stopped listening. Unfeeling, banker pricks.

Next to her, the pregnant woman moaned softly and clutched her side.

‘Are you OK?’ Kat asked.

‘I’m fine. I’m fine,’ she said, waving away Kat’s concern. ‘It’s just the baby kicking the crap out of me.’ She smiled wanly. ‘I’m over it.’

‘How long have you got to go?’

‘Two weeks. Thank god.’

‘It’s hard at the end,’ Kat offered, sympathetically, remembering how every step had felt like a bowling ball, grinding on her pelvis. She had wanted it all to be over – to have her little girl out, and in the world. Now, she would give anything to feel that pain again.

‘You’re a mum?’ asked the pregnant lady.

Kat paused. She never knew quite how to answer that. ‘Um, yes. I had my baby two months ago.’

‘Two months, and you’re back at work? That’s amazing.’

Adam had been cautiously supportive when she said she wanted to go back.

‘You’re sure you’re ready?’ he’d asked, frowning.

Kat wasn’t sure, but she could think of no other way to climb out of the black hole. ‘I’m sure’, she’d lied.

‘OK, well, I guess it might be a good distraction.’

‘I hope so.’

‘So you’ll stop expressing then?’

‘I guess I’ll have to.’

But she hadn’t. Every day, in the toilets at work, she pulled out her breast pump and cried, silently, as she watched the milk drip out of her.

Everyone had been so kind, at first.

‘Kat, if it’s not too much trouble...’

‘Kat, I know you’re probably snowed under, but do you think...’

‘Kat, I don’t want to put too much pressure on you...’

But after a couple of weeks, their extra words dried up. They went back to exactly the way they’d been before the baby.

Kat would never go back.

She still hadn’t gotten around to changing her screen saver image – a photo from the 12 week ultrasound image. The outlines made her baby look like an alien ghost.

The dirty wind of an approaching train blew into Kat’s face. She looked at the painted white line, separating the platform from the tracks, separating life from death. Stepping off would be so easy.

Damn that white line.

‘Kat, I’m sorry, I can’t find a heartbeat.’

That damn white line – flat and dead on the ultrasound machine.

The train squealed into the station.

The two young men leapt up, while the pregnant woman lifted herself heavily off the bench.

Kat stayed seated.

‘Aren’t you getting on?’ asked the pregnant lady.

‘No, I think I’ll wait for the next one.’

‘Don’t you want to get home to your baby?’

To a home with a nursery that had never been slept in? And a fridge full of breast milk that would never be drunk? No, Kat did not want to go there.

‘It doesn’t stop at my station,’ she lied.

The train took off with a groan and Kat stayed sitting, watching the white line.