

# THE QUARRY

Vanessa Rombaut

## Chapter One, from *What She Knew*

*This is an excerpt from a novel in progress entitled What She Knew, which is written for an adult female audience and falls into the genre of Contemporary Literary Fiction. Kitty is a traumatised and emotionally numb young woman trying to run from the ghosts of her past by changing everything she can about herself, partying hard and travelling the world in her quest for a perpetual summer. However the ghosts won't leave her alone. She soon realises that she has to face up to the fact that her father is a murderer and that she is the sole witness to that murder twenty years ago.*

*June 2007, Berlin*

On the day Kitty is forced to give up her fake life she calls in sick to her job as an English Language Teacher and heads to *Viktoriapark* to drink cheap white wine with her best-friend Sylvana.

‘This looks like a good place to sit,’ says Kitty, plopping herself on the ground in the deep shadow cast by the wide arms of a willow. She slips her shoes off and flexes her toes over the soft grass. Her skin is as white as a ghost-gum from avoiding the sun for years because she grew up in Australia and is paranoid about skin cancer. Sylvana is from Malta and doesn’t give a crap about skin cancer. She stretches out in the sun, lowering her bra straps over her shoulders to avoid tan lines.

‘I always wondered why the ground here is so uneven,’ says Sylvana looking at the grass field that slopes up and down like a toddler’s drawing. The lawn is dotted by groups of sunbathers, drinking beer or wine, smoking dope, reading books, eating hummus, playing the bongos. A group of Turkish boys kick a ball around, their dark hair soaked with sweat.

‘There are World War Two bunkers under the ground,’ Kitty says. ‘I think people used to hide in them when there were air raids.’

‘Ah, right. Mystery solved. You’re so smart Kitty.’

Kitty shrugs. ‘I just read about it in a guidebook once.’ She opens the wine bottle with a Swiss Army Knife, pours it into two plastic champagne glasses and hands one to Sylvana. They hold their glasses up, *Prost!*, Kitty sips delicately, the wine is tart and makes her mouth pucker.

‘Anyway. Do you know that so-called photographer, that pink-haired Swedish girl?’ asks Sylvana.

Kitty nods, recalling the pretty Swedish girl with washed-out pink hair, who turns up at art shows regularly, looking hip and vain.

‘Well, I heard that she’s not a lesbian. She says she’s a hobby lesbian so she can score cool points with the gay art community and all the lesbians have a huge crush on her. She’s a pussy tease. She’s as straight as a...’ Sylvana searches for a word, ‘as straight as a banana.’

Kitty frowns, ‘Bananas are crooked?’

‘She is crooked,’ replies Sylvana.

Kitty snorts and lights a filter tip cigarette, takes the bottle of wine and tops up her plastic cup. She leans back on her elbows in the grass and feels the earth under her fingers, spongy and damp. She smells water in the air and knows that the good weather isn’t going to last long, so she decides to enjoy this moment, the air still and calm, the sun’s rays rinsing the world in mellow amber. Kitty has a vision of them sitting in a moving painting, and she and everyone around her perform these orange-hued, warm actions over and over again in a simple sepia-stained loop, always framed in gold. Before her lies the sea of possibilities, winding out like every mid-summer evening, the heady scent of summer flowers, a constant stream of wine, every person

an old friend who is happy to see you, the music swinging, the sound of laughter. She wants to freeze this one perfect moment and keep it in a locket around her neck.

Sylvana chatters on about the saga of her almost-ex-boyfriend and his intense hatred of her new boyfriend. Kitty is nodding along, when her relaxed mood is interrupted by the sound of a low rasping voice, talking intensely. A chill shoots through her. She listens harder, Sylvana becomes background noise as Kitty concentrates on the rhythms of the speaker. She recognises her father's timbre, hollow and singular. Her stomach clenches, the wine sloshing uncomfortably. She glances up, and wills her head to turn in the direction of the voice, trying to look casual, and is relieved to see it isn't her father, but a man in his mid-thirties, talking in the ear of a woman who looks stricken. The pair stand out like a dirty smudge on the bright green grass, the woman dressed in a drab grey track suit, the man wears a filthy white baseball hat and a pair of dark sunglasses. Kitty realises that if she stands, walks over to him and whisks the glasses from his face, she will see the same eyes her father had, animal and hypnotising, like a lion. He rests his arm casually over the woman's shoulders, owning her with that one gesture. The woman's body leans away from him, her eyes searching, as if looking for help, and for a moment she locks on Kitty, who turns her head and stands suddenly.

'I have to go,' she says slipping her shoes back on.

'Are you ok?' Sylvana asks, ashing her cigarette.

'I forgot, I promised to meet Fabrice in half an hour, so I should go,' says Kitty shrugging her shoulder.

'Sure, ok. Call me later, yeah?' says Sylvana, handing Kitty her bag.

'Ok,' says Kitty, who turns and walks out of the park, not daring to look to see if the man is still there.

Kitty and Fabrice are lying naked on Fabrice's bed, the sheets are soft from sweat and smell like sex and dope from the countless afternoons they have laid there talking and dreaming. A browning orchid sits on the windowsill, a pile of dirty clothes are heaped in the corner next to Fabrice's drum-kit.

'Tell me a secret,' she says, her head in the crook of his elbow.

Fabrice takes a drag of his joint and blows a plume of smoke out above his head, the earthy smell of marijuana floating in the room.

‘A secret? I don’t have any secrets,’ he says, his voice slow and soft, his French accent stronger now that he is stoned. She looks at his face, high cheekbones, aquiline nose and thinks to herself that it is carved from pure light.

‘Sure you do, everyone has secrets, sometimes they don’t even know they’re hiding them,’ she says running her finger around his nipple.

He catches her hand. ‘That tickles,’ he says laughing.

‘Come on, you must have something,’ she says. Suddenly she has to find out what is behind his placid smile.

‘Ok, uh, when I was in Nepal I snuck over the border of Tibet in the back of a truck, and then the truck driver tried to blackmail me into paying him a hundred dollars or he’d turn me over to the Chinese government, so I hit him and ran off and hitched a ride back with a different driver who I paid a hundred dollars to get me out of there.’

‘That’s not a secret, you’ve told me that. That’s an adventure story,’ she sighs, plucks the joint from his hand, rolls over and takes a drag.

‘Ok, sorry my secret isn’t secret enough. Do you have a secret that will show me what type of secret I might be secretly hiding?’

‘You’re so stoned!’ she laughs.

He laughs too, his white teeth flashing, eyes half closed. She takes a drag of the joint and sits up, her naked body cold in the smoke-filled room.

‘Yeah, I got a secret, a real weird one. I think my Dad is a murderer. I think he killed two girls,’ she says. Her voice echoes in her ears, and she feels that what she’s saying can’t be true, it’s an absurd joke.

‘Bullshit,’ he laughs, taking another drag.

‘Yeah. It’s true. I was just a kid. But I wasn’t Kitty back then, I was Lisa,’ she says, her former name rolling around her mouth like a slippery stone. She feels her hands shaking and holds them trying to stop the tremor, but her arms start to shake instead. Fabrice looks at her, confusion on his face.

‘Really, I think he killed two girls that lived next door to us and hid their bodies.

The police questioned him and everything, but the bodies were never found,' she says. Her chest wells up as if a tight white ball is inflating inside her and she's afraid that if she says anything else it will explode and her body will fly apart.

Fabrice sits up, his smile gone.

'That's heavy,' his shoulder slumping, a line furrowing between his brow.

She snaps back to the room, realising that she's said too much. She doesn't want him to ask questions, she's scared she'll blurt everything out and then she'll have to face things she doesn't want to know about. She doesn't want to know what she knows.

'No, I mean. Nothing happened. The police just wanted to question him, and they did and then nothing happened,' she says, backpedalling.

'Really? Then why did you say you think he's a murderer, when he only got questioned?'

'Because, I don't know, I don't remember,' and it's true, she can't remember.

'I've got to go,' she says, untangling herself from the bed sheets. She picks out her fishnet stockings from the pile of clothes next to the bed and pulls them on.

'I'll come with you,' says Fabrice, grabbing a pair of ripped jeans.

'I want to be alone,' she says glaring at him.

His hands, holding the crumpled jeans, stop in mid-air. He looks at her and doesn't say anything. She smiles.

'It's bullshit,' she says, zipping her black denim skirt shut and picking up her bag.

'Ok. See you at the show?' His eyes are hopeful.

Kitty sighs. She'd almost forgotten they had to perform that night.

'Yeah. See you,' she says, walking out of the studio apartment, slamming the door.

It's only when she is half-way home that she realises she forgot to kiss him goodbye.