

THE QUARRY

Glenn Kershaw

Thursday's Alice

Fuck me dead!

I watched as the arse end of my bus lumbered into the rain like some fat elephant from a Disney movie. I'd been running hard and came to a stop on the edge of the cracked and lumpy pavement just in time to miss it. I shouldn't have hung at Alice's place but then you don't say no to someone like Alice, not when it's free.

I should have brought my raincoat. It was a real nice one I'd nicked from this shop at Chatswood. Funny thing, it was only that morning I'd stood on Liz's front porch finishing off my coffee, watching the thick clouds come roiling over ... "Roiling", that's a good word,

isn't it? That's a Liz word. She used words like that, "Roiling". The dark grey clouds came roiling over. I could have asked Liz about my raincoat, but I couldn't, not really. See, she was out of it.

The rain was pouring down on me like a flood. My pony tail had come loose and the rain had plastered strands against my cheeks and shoulders. Fat drops ran down my neck and back. My jumper wasn't any good against the rain. I was getting all soggy standing there. It was a good bet I'd end up smelling like a pair of damp socks by the time I got back to Liz's place. Liz is my girlfriend.

So, I was left in a quandary, as Liz might say. I only knew the time for that one bus. Anyway, didn't matter. There'd be another along soon enough, there had to be. Stood to reason. But how long would I have to wait? This stop didn't have no shelter.

I squinted up and down the street through the rain. Down the road I saw head lights, dancing like butterflies, coming toward me and one or two orphan streetlights, that had come on due to the heavy clouds. It was only 10am but you'd swear it was evening. Up the road was the steady shine of some shops. Maybe there was a café. A hot coffee would go down a real treat.

Trouble was, if I went for a cuppa then missed the next bus—well, I didn't want to be out all day as I had a job tonight. You see Liz'd be back on planet Earth by the time I got back and we could have a bit of fun till I had to go to work. She's a bit of a pudding, is my Liz, but pretty good in bed. She'd been dead to the world when I left this morning as usual. That's why I packed my backpack before I left, saved awkward questions.

What goes in my backpack depends on my work for the day. Some days I'm a Stop/Go man on a road gang for this friend from inside. This mate is a frequent flyer so the work isn't too regular. I tell you, the going was bloody hot in summer and shitty cold in

winter. For those days I made sandwiches and a flask of coffee. Other days, I labour for this builder mate I know. I don't need lunch then as I get myself a steak sanger with the boys, so I just pack a couple of tinnies.

For my night work, I pack my tools. I don't need no dinner. Today I'd packed 'em just before I left, as I said. I'd told Liz last night I was getting up to go see a mate and I'd be home before I went out again.

My mate? Well, to be honest, that's Alice. Alice is, well, she's what they call in the trade a "professional". I met her a month or two ago. She likes me, so I get it for free. I pops round her place Thursdays. It's like this, Liz don't work Thursdays and Wednesday night she downs a couple of bottles of red and tops them off with a dose of her favourite Columbian nose cleaner. That lot shoots her to the moon till around ten in the morning. Liz is pretty good in the sack, and she's hungry for it all the time. But Alice is the best. It's probably better if Liz didn't know about Alice. Liz owns the house, understand?

I really like the way Alice calls me Billy. It suits me more than William or Will. 'Will what?' I'd always ask. With Liz, it's "William". I mean, fuck! Here's the thing, in another year, two at best, people will start calling me Bill. Only natural. 'See old Bill, over there in the corner. In his day he was something,' they'd be saying. Old Bill. Old man Bill. There was no happy medium, as Liz would say, between Billy and Bill. To Liz, I was this 'Charming Rogue.' Liz is educated, and she's got all these good words.

But the truth was, I was starting to feel as if I was wearing someone else's hat. It didn't fit. Like my ponytail. I had the long strands pulled together and running down my back. The pony'd been a great thing to pull in the girls when I was in my late teens and my twenties. Now, I was starting to feel like a 70's rocker trying it on. Young girls liked young boys, if you know what I mean. But old girls don't like old men.

‘Mutton dressed up as lamb,’ that’s what my old mum would’ve said. She said things like that from behind her thick makeup and the wine glass that was always in her hand, except when she was on her back. She’d said it to me the last time I saw her.

We were westies, with a houso over at Mt Druitt. Just me and mum and her one true love. It was like this, mum was in a deep, long-lasting love affair, that didn’t include the long line of “dads” who came and went. Most of them only spent an hour, some a day, the longest was a full week. That didn’t happen that often and not at all as she got old. But the one who stayed with her, was always there, came from the grog shop, usually in a dark coloured bottle, unless times were tough then it was a cardboard box.

‘Bottle-O first,’ she’d say. Then to the supermarket if there was money left.

I remember when I was ten, I made up this game. I tried to remember the men’s names and especially their faces. Sometimes I’d be outside playing when they came, during the week or weekend, didn’t make no difference. I’d look at them and try and fix their faces, and I’d ask them their names. I was interested in their surnames, to see if any matched mine. A lot of them were just “Smith” or “Jones” or they’d simply grunt my way as they went in. I asked my mum once if any of them were my dad, my real dad. She’d looked at me blankly for some time then said, ‘Dunno’, then filled her glass and switched on the box.

As mum aged, she put on weight, her face became all mottled, her legs looked like a set of purple railroad tracks and there were less dads. She relied more and more on her “Wages”, as she called it, from the government. Casks replaced the bottles.

Anyway, I was standing in the rain, weighing up my options, my backpack wet through and my tools weighing me down when this cop car drives up, its tyres pushing the streams of water out of the way. The copper in the passenger seat drops his window and examines me. I bent over a bit and peered in. It was only Micky and Davo. I’ve known them

for years. They're a couple of lightweights. Mick's just a senior and him with a flash of silver in his hair now. Dave was a probational when we first met. Even back then you could tell where his mind was by the form guide peeping out of his top pocket.

'Billy,' Micky said.

I lent in, all smiles and friendly like. Micky was in the passenger seat, and I dripped on his uniform.

'Micky, Davo,' I said. 'How're you going, boys?'

'Good, mate, good,' Micky said. 'What are you up to around here?'

I had to be careful what I said, so gave them the same story as I'd given Liz, 'Visiting a mate.'

'Really?'

'Yep, that's it.'

'Only a jewellery store was knocked off a couple of blocks over,' Micky said. 'You wouldn't know anything about it?'

You could have knocked me over with a feather. I'm usually up on these things, but I'd not heard a dicky. Some young gun probably. Well, good luck to him.

'Me? No.' And that's the truth. Only thing was, I thought about the tools in my backpack and I guess it must have shown on my face.

'Who's this mate?' There was a look in Micky's eyes I didn't like.

I'm usually a steady guy but my heart started to pound a bit.

'A mate,' I said.

‘Aren’t you shackled up with some chick down at Lindfield?’ Davo asked. He was leaning towards me, his elbow on the armrest.

‘That’s right. Lovely lady she is. Took me in and we’re as happy as two love birds.’

‘So, who’s this mate of yours?’ Micky asked. He always was a bit of a dog with a bone.

‘Me?’ I replied.

‘I’m not talking to your shadow,’ Micky said. Which was funny as there weren’t any shadows today cause of the rain.

‘Just a mate,’ I said.

‘The name ...’

I got a bit desperate and grabbed at a name.

‘Davo,’ I blurted, then cursed softly as I’d fucked up.

‘Davo?’ Micky said. ‘Hear that, Davo.’

Micky didn’t look at Davo but the grin on his mug was for him.

‘Billy’s been visiting his mate, Davo,’ Micky said. ‘And Billy, where does this Davo live?’

‘That way.’ I pointed vaguely in the direction of the houses down the street. Then I had an inspiration. ‘A couple of streets over.’

‘And the address?’ asked Micky.

‘Dunno.’ What could I say? ‘I just walks ...’

‘How about we drive you there, get you out of the rain. Then this Davo mate of yours can confirm your alibi.’

‘Alibi?’ I said.

I knew where this was going. I’d done this particular walk before. Alice wouldn’t be too pleased to have cops stomping through her establishment, especially if she had a client. She was popular. And if the cops were looking for a mug to fit up over the robbery...

‘And when your mate, Davo’s, done that, we’ll drive you home.’

Liz, Dr Elisabeth Marsden, might be a bit ‘perturbed’, that’s a Liz word, at that. She, well, keep this to yourselves, Liz had some stuff at her place she shouldn’t have and wouldn’t want the cops to see. If I walked in with Micky and Dave in tow, that’d be the end. I’ve slept rough before and it wasn’t no joke, especially in winter.

‘How’s that sound?’ Micky asked. He had this big grin all over his face. ‘I’ll tell you what, first off, why don’t you show us what’s in your backpack, mate?’

Fuck me dead!