

# THE QUARRY

## A Void Dance

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Drunk on the adulation of the humming crowd beyond the blinding white, and the tequila shot he had downed, he staggered, then leaned into his characteristic seductive sway, exaggerating each step.

‘Wish you, wish you were mine...’ His voice was deep and textured and his mouth touched the microphone intimately; his breath was loud and heavy as he examined the faces of the thousands of hungry people before him. A void, an emptiness was present in this stadium, masses of humanity, seething and moving, arms up, around and reaching out to touch him in some way. Their need as great as his; it was an unspoken exchange between them, a brief affair, a salacious ‘one night stand.’ Thousands of women and men’s faces, adoring, some crumbling under their emotion, ravenous for his gaze or acknowledgement even if for a second, like lions

paced waiting for their sinewy carcass at the zoo, a tinge of desperation mingled with violent objectification. The exchange was mutual.

He fixed his gaze on one tall blonde woman; her slender arms and fine shoulders excited him, her eyes looked back at him unflinching, strong and seductive. He wondered if they would meet later. Inside he felt this familiar falling feeling, like in his dreams very often, this sinking sensation in his gut he used to have when hurling himself off a cliff into the river of Ku-ring-gai National Park. Though that had been exhilarating, this however, was not. It was more like an ache, an abyss, an anxiety and an imperceptible void. It was usually only momentary.

Until he turned his back on the crowd and faced his band, catching the eye of Tim who was beating his skins with characteristic ease and flair, like he was himself dancing on top of each of them. He shot Dylan a satisfied grin. The song climaxed and they strummed the last remaining chords. Silence only for a moment, then the band resumed the next song, the drums lead and Jai came in with deep, driving bass. The crowd roared, thousands of people he would never know.

On this expanse of wood, with lighting, erected amplifiers, electric guitars and bass, a mass of drums, lights and images streamed across the audience, he felt he could exist here forever. His body was robotic in its sensuality. He missed his long dark hair that used to cover his eyes, now he ran his fingers over the shiny wetness of his bald head. He was neither conscious of his body nor acting deliberately, as if he left his body when he performed, occupying a space above himself hovering over the circus below and perceiving himself from the outside.

His father used to line up all of his children and demand one by one they stated what they had achieved that week, made to justify their worth. Dylan remembered his father's closed fist slamming into his face; full and hard like a plank of wood that reverberated sheer pain through his sinuses and nasal cavities. These memories were fierce but it was his father's words that haunted him more; no one will ever want you, look at you. Dylan knew his wife, Sophie, loved him and Zac and Angel...but there were the women...always an insatiable desire for this. Sophie understood mostly; he always made sure she knew that he loved her and never would leave, but you know, he was who he was, 'Dylan Johnson.' Flashes of their more vehement fights recently, unsettled him now, but he reassured himself of her loyalty and love.

Sweet guitar chords, deep bass and the driving of the drums reverberated around him as a tangible landscape and delivered him away. As the song faded Dylan turned to Jai, Tim and Michael who all stood next to him now and they all linked hands and bowed.

His ears rang as he walked off stage. Even though he had worn earplugs, it never seemed to totally block out the wall of sound that remained. Back stage there was an ecstatic vibe, people sipping champagne, chatting with band members, leaning against the wall, women playing with long strands of their dyed red hair as they focused on every word that Jai, Tim and Michael were saying and laughed in shrill tones.

Dylan laughed. ‘*Ahhh boys,*’ he thought. Images of those three from the past, flashed brief footage across his mind, everything they had been through, the births of both his children, Michael’s recovery from drug addiction and subsequent divorce and the death of Jai’s sister.

‘Great show.’ He patted Jai and Tim on the shoulder as he passed.

‘Fuck yeah.’ Jai embraced Dylan in a magnanimous hug.

‘As always,’ Tim answered with a cheeky expression.

Dylan smiled at both of them, that expansive, enigmatic grin curling at its edges that had appeared on many magazine covers, newspaper articles, online and television talk shows.

Their manager David tapped Dylan on the back.

‘Hey man, Sophie gave me this to give to you.’

‘Weird, thanks mate.’

‘No worries. Pretty old school, old school love,’ David said chuckling.

Hearing her name shot a painful sensation through him that he couldn’t explain. The sight of her handwriting on the envelope unnerved him, he didn’t know why. Smiling briefly at a brunette and blonde on the way, Dylan went to his dressing room. He could party soon. Sitting down before his mirror, he poured himself a scotch and opened Sophie’s letter. He sipped the scotch relieved there was a momentary break from everything. Opening it, he heard her voice as he read:

Hi Luke,

I can't do this anymore. You treat me like shit, your behaviour with women after shows is disgusting and you tell me I should be okay with it, your drinking, the pills, parties, your mood swings, irritability and rage. I'm exhausted in every way. You treat the kids badly and you're competitive with them, especially Zac. I thought I could handle the women and sometimes I hoped you would change, but clearly you don't want to. You always say you can't do 'normal.' What you mean is you want to do whatever you want, and fuck what I need. When you say you love me, it passes right through me as if I'm a ghost. You don't seem to know what love is. None of this fame shit is real, Luke. It used to be just us facing everything. When we met years ago, you chased me, wanted to prove your worth to me, doing things to please me, telling me you'd make it. I never understood this. I loved you already, Luke Johnson, quiet, shy and gentle. You were always Luke to me. Now I don't seem to know you at all. You're not the man I loved 10 years ago. I miss him. Was this ever you? I don't even know. I've been so alone for years now. You act as if I'm lucky to be with you. You're so arrogant. Your personality changes — Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde at times and it scares me when you yell and throw things. It's the same look you get when you see a new woman you want to chase. I don't want Zac to think this is how he should be or Angel to put up with this. You really don't care about me or anyone else, especially your kids. Whenever I raised your behaviour and tried to leave in the past, you'd argue, yell and blame me. I have to leave, for myself and the kids. Don't try to find us. It's best we don't see each other for a while. I'll ring you so you can talk to the kids.

Sophie.

Dylan threw his glass smashing it completely on the wall; golden brown liquid drew crooked lines down its whiteness. Tim and Jai appeared at the door. Dylan covered his face with his hands.

'What the fuck, Dylan?' Jai said.

Dylan didn't raise his head. After a pause he said, 'She's left.'

'What? That can't be true, she's left before man, don't worry she'll come back again,' Jai said putting his hand on Dylan's shoulder.

‘Sorry, man.’ Tim said.

Dylan didn’t say anything and picked up his phone. Dialling Sophie’s number he knew it would go straight to message bank. When it did, hearing her voice was painful. He sought to veil his heightened adrenalin and the familiar inflection of aggression in his voice.

‘Come on Sophe, you know everything is not as simple as this...Just speak to me, I can come to where you are, we can talk about it.’

He slammed the phone down sending items on the dressing table flying.

‘She won’t talk to me,’ he yelled at Jai. ‘I need to find her, I’ve gotta go...’ He made for the door staggering past Jai, who grabbed him.

‘You won’t be able to find her, man.’ Dylan struggled to free himself. Jai held him.

‘I will. I have to...’ He pushed Jai against the wall.

‘If she doesn’t want to be found she won’t be,’ Tim said.

‘You have no idea what I’m going through. Stay out of it.’

‘She’s come back,’ Tim said with concern.

‘This time is different, she’s determined,’ Dylan said walking out the door. Jai followed Dylan onto the street.

Dylan stood on the sidewalk of Kent Street, inner city Sydney. The din of traffic, people’s voices and laughter from nearby restaurants and clubs provided a cacophony of sound, in the cool evening air. Dylan bent over and nearly threw up. Jai approached him.

‘What the fuck am I going to do?’ He looked up from his hunched over position.

‘Don’t know mate, but I’m here for you.’

‘I feel safe with Sophie. What if she really does leave me?’ His eyes were wide and his face crooked with fear.

‘I don’t know Dylan, but maybe you should think about how she felt with you.’

Dylan and Jai walked to a bar on George Street. Dylan rang Sophie’s phone repeatedly, with no reply. After many drinks they found their way back to their hotel

in Elizabeth Bay. Jai stayed with Dylan, downing more shots of vodka in his room and listened to Dylan's bleary-eyed ramblings about Sophie and their fights recently and how it couldn't be over. Eventually, Jai went to his own room to sleep.

Sitting on the end of his bed, Dylan blinked through the haze of copious amounts of scotch and vodka. He did take cocaine on occasions but not this evening. He wept lying face down on the bed. Everything seemed to be caving in on him. He felt like he couldn't breathe. He took out the picture of Sophie and Zac and Angel in his wallet and traced their faces with his fingers. Tears obscured everything before him.

Images of his mother's peaceful features, her green eyes when the essence of her life left them and she breathed her last, overwhelmed him now. His mother, his only safety was gone. Now this overwhelming grief swept over him, as if it had happened again. An insurmountable emptiness, pain and abandonment seemed to cave him from within – only this time he didn't think he could survive it.

He went to the drawer next to his bed where he kept his pills, sleeping pills mainly, though he had others for anxiety and depression as well. He examined the bottle. Opening his mouth, he swallowed a large handful of the small white pills with a shot of vodka, and laid down on his bed. Closing his eyes, he imagined his mother in her floral dress that played in the wind, hanging washing in their backyard and smiling at him in their swimming pool. Picturing Sophie or his kids was too painful. He surrendered now; the fight was over.

'He's tortured, Jaz,' Sophie said to Jasmine sitting in her living room late that evening. 'Do you still love him?'

'Love him? I think love became fucked up a long time ago, Jaz. I feel numb, nothing. There were times he was humble and pleaded with me and for a while he would be different, and then it would go back to how it was, switched sometimes in a moment, like a split personality. He doesn't seem to have a conscience. I've realised something though, Luke's addicted to the fame, attention, women and can't feel good about himself without it. Me? I've been addicted to him.'

'Sweetheart, you'll be ok. I'm here for you.' She touched Sophie's hand.

Jasmine got a call on her phone, 'What? Luke? In hospital? What for?' Jasmine listened to her husband David on the phone and turned to Sophie whose face was distraught.

'He's in hospital, Sophe.'

'What? What do you mean?' Sophie said, rising to her feet from the couch as if it was an involuntary action.

'He overdosed on sleeping pills.'

'I can't breathe Jaz... ' Jasmine took Sophie in her arms. 'Is he ok?'

'He's ok, Sophe, it's not your fault.'

Sophie cried into Jasmine's shoulder.

He opened his eyes as the scent of her perfume permeated the room, embracing him. She looked smaller, frailer in a way he couldn't define as she walked towards his bed. Like a flower separated from its source; browned at the edges and with petals precariously threatening to fall. Her shoulders seemed more exposed, the bones in her neck protruded from her green singlet, her body so familiar and beautiful, had always provided a sharp pain inside, bitter sweet like something he longed to possess mixed with dark regret, and inner unworthiness. Her hair was down, barely brushed, she had no make up on, and her green eyes regarded him with a weariness he had not seen in her before. Darkness framed her eyes. Dylan could barely look into them they seemed to blink away tangible pain. Tears traced her cheeks.

'Oh, Dylan,' she said barely audible. She took his hand.

'You never call me that,' Dylan said, looking down at her fingers in his.

'I'm so glad you're okay.'

'Sophe.'

'Are you ok?' she asked.

'I'm ok,' Dylan said, forcing a smile.

'You need help.'

'I know,' he said.

Dylan was pale, the lines in his face looked like crevasses, deep, chasms concealing underlying truth. Apparatus was attached to his chest, small round circles with winding chords, an IV in his wrist and a machine monitoring his heartbeat displayed green lines of security. He looked at Sophie as if he was a child craving his mother.

‘Please get help. Think of Ange and Zac. We can’t lose you.’

‘I know. I’ll try.’ He glanced into her face. She said nothing. ‘I know you’ve heard it before, sometimes we all need a wake-up call. I’ve always been doing my best, Sophie you know that.’

She looked down and let go of his hand.

‘What about us?’ Dylan didn’t like the sound his voice made uttering these words.

‘I don’t know. It’s more important you think of the kids. I should let you rest. I’m so glad you’re ok. I was so worried when I heard. I’ll bring the kids in tomorrow, okay? They really want to see you.’ She kissed her hand and placed it on his. ‘So glad you’re okay.’

‘Thanks Sophie. I love you.’

Sophie smiled slightly, though she did not look into his eyes. Her lips formed a straight line and her gaze became vacant like seeing an abandoned house on the inside when all human inhabitants had left. Dylan had not seen this in her features before. She stood up and left, leaving only the scent of her presence. He closed his eyes—he did not want to see, anymore.