

THE QUARRY

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Twenty Seconds

Cindy McMann slept sprawled across her older sister Stacey's lap in the police interview room, as Brian watched through the other side of the mirrored glass. He knew he was not going to be their saviour and his heart raced as he listened to the monotonous dial tone on the end of the phone. His wife was a lead case worker with child services and he would often call her at a time like this for advice. He had worked on a couple of cases similar to this one in the past. Junkies overdose all the time and it seemed as though it was always the kids who found their parents. Usually these kids were already in and out of foster care, and not to say he didn't care as much about those type of kids, but he did find it a lot easier to hand them over to the authorities. He thought most of them were little shits anyhow. He had proved this

suspicions over and over in court. There was no better feeling to Brian than watching their faces as his evidence proved his suspicions.

There was something about the McMann's that intrigued him. Brian remembered when Jason McMann had moved out from Scotland over 30 years ago. At the time he was nothing but a loud mouthed, 18-year-old, leather clad, tattooed lead singer for The Toasties. His high school girlfriend followed him and also married him two years later. The band remained a success throughout the 90's and even won a few awards. They were the Kimye of Australia at the time, with their eldest daughter Stacey always snapped in the papers with her curly blond bob and designer overalls, waddling after her parents at different events. As the girl got older she would pose for the paparazzi wearing her school uniform and showing off trophies she had won at school. The pride for their only child at the time emanated from Marianne and Jason McMann as they would allow the girl to chat away to local journalists and pose for photos. Brian observed the girl now, with her hair pulled back into a braid. Stacey looked exactly the same just slightly more mature. Cindy was almost identical to Stacey with brown curls bouncing across the 3 year olds face. Brian reflected back to 2003, when the girls father announced he was leaving the band. Quickly the family had transitioned into living a low key lifestyle. After a few years, the paparazzi stopped recognising him and by the time his youngest child, Sophie, was born even the shows that no one watches on late night television had stopped showing footage of The Toasties.

Although Brian and Meryl were too old to listen to rock music themselves, their son had collected all 'The Toasties' albums over the years so they had become quite acquainted to the deafening claps of thunder coming from their son's room throughout the 1990's. Now years later Brian found himself in the position of needing to help the same child, who was once plastered over the weekend papers. Interrupting the dial tone was his wife's soft voice. Brian tried to stop his own voice from shaking as he explained the situation to his wife. In most scenarios like this it was rare for there to be no next of kin. Through the glass he could see the pained expression of Stacey McMann, causing his voice to break as he explained the situation to his wife.

'They will probably be put temporary care together until something gets sorted. Not my area to assess Brian, you know that.'. Meryl hated not being able to help her husband, but in cases with no next of kin it was always so icky. She could never let

herself get involved, as she was one to get attached. That was the last thing she needed at 57 years of age.

‘It’s Jason McMann’s kids, love.’ He didn’t know why he said it, he knew he was breaking regulation. Sensing her husband’s emotion, Meryl took a deep breath before addressing her husband.

‘I know you can’t see it now love, but rock stars die all the time. They leave lots of money behind too. These kids will be fine.’ As Meryl hung up the phone Brian felt the tension release from his shoulders. He knew nothing about the financials of the McMann’s, but he assumed his wife was probably right.

Looking back into the interview room at the two girls Brian felt a tinge of guilt over the thought of the girls ever reading his report about their mother. According to his report all the evidence at the scene in which Marianne McMann’s body was found showed signs of an overdose. There were drugs and drug paraphernalia found inside the pockets of Marianne’s leather jacket. The autopsy was yet to be carried out but he could predict the results of that just by looking at the scene in the home in which Marianne was found. Forty years of experience under his belt gave him insight into these sort of cases, and although he was intrigued by this high profile case, he couldn’t let that blur his judgement. Especially when it came to reporting the evidence he had come across. He wondered if he could avoid going to the press with the case to prevent the media shitstorm. Tensely, Brian watched as his partner entered the room and handed Stacey a hot chocolate. In fact, everyone in the police station tensed at that moment. The coldness drew closer as Brian was introduced to the child services worker. Brian shook his head thinking he could only hope for the best from then on. Reminded of what his wife said he was comforted with the thought the kids would have lots of pocket money in the future.

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The heat of the sun snuck through a slit in the curtains and covered Stacey’s face as she squinted and tried to readjust her eyesight to the morning sunlight. The stained walls surrounding the bed reminded her of where she was – the boarding house attached to the private girls’ school. She stared at the bland, off white walls and

thought of the colours that splashed her own bedroom, wishing she could go back there. She did have the keys, and it was her home. She knew from the reading of the will that the house had been left to her. Nothing about the boarding school was familiar to her anymore, despite having attended the school her whole life. After the death of her mother the school had awarded her a scholarship that provided free boarding and education costs. The musty, sweat stained air reinforced the unfamiliar feeling that bubbled away in her guts - a feeling that was weening its way into her life way too regularly lately. The shuffling of soft footsteps in the hallway reminded her that a boarding house manager was going to knock on her door shortly to make sure she was awake. The warm sheets surrounding her were the only thing stopping her from getting out of bed. The safety and the security of the sheets wrapped around her shoulders keeping her warm and secure, the feeling of comfort spreading through her muscles and relieving the tension. She imagined her mothers' arms pushing the doona around her, ensuring every part of her body was warm. Stacey would always be loyal towards her parents regardless of what everybody else thought or said. They had provided her with everything she would need in life so why would she cave to the rumours? She hated how everyone treated her now. The whispers as she passed the other girls in the hallways at school taunted her. The sympathy etched into their eyes would watch her walk past followed her after hours. Living in the school meant she could never escape the looks of judgement. No one would ever say anything to her face, their furrowed brows and soft smiles said it all though. Stacey had never wanted the sympathy, she had never understood it. Regardless of the circumstances she knew she was still better than the stupid judge's A-grade daughter, or the wanker bankers prefect daughter.

As Stacey's mind wandered from the present to the past the replay of memories that had been unable to escape pushed their way into her thoughts. The image of her mother, Marianne, laying dead on the couch, her face so content and dreamy never was branded into Stacey's mind. She wondered whether Cindy would ever forget the image. She was still angry at whoever leaked the autopsy to the papers. Stacey knew it was because someone had seen an opportunity to make some quick money. She was so enraged when the rumours about her parents came out. Despite fighting with her self over the lies she knew deep down that her parents weren't completely innocent and they had used drugs at times. They were not junkies though! Stacey's body

twitched as she felt the hot tears roll down her cheeks and she imagined her father sitting at the end of the unmade bed, smiling his goofy smile and convincing her to go out and face the world. A soft rapping on the door echoed through the emptiness around her.

‘Stacey. It’s time to get ready or you’ll be late.’ Stacey wiped her face and leapt off the bed and across to the door - catching her foot on the pocket of her suitcase and spilling all its possessions on the way. When she reached the door and opened it she shyly tilted her head up to see the school’s social worker, standing at the door sympathy etched in the furrow of her brows. Stacey tried to fight the urge to yell at that sympathetic face. Even the social worker didn’t understand her.

‘I didn’t expect you to get up so quickly. No school today Stacey. By the time we finish with the lawyer and child services it will be too late.’ The tension in Stacey’s shoulders tightened as the thought of Cindy sitting in a stranger’s lap, in the child services office, fought its way into her mind. Trying to distract herself from the negative thoughts brewing she turned her attention to the spilt contents of her suitcase. Within seconds she had given up and sat back on the bed. As she drew in her breath, barely letting it reach her sternum, her chest tightened.

Staring at the contents strewn across the ugly faded red carpet she caught a glimpse of her mother’s favourite leather jacket. After weeks of arguments with the police she had won and the jacket was rejected as evidence and handed down to her, the rightful owner. The jacket was covered in zips, the typical attire of her 90’s punk rock mother. As a child Stacey would play with the zips and it would keep her captivated for hours while waiting backstage for her father to finish gigs, or on the tour bus or planes or whatever other event she had been dragged along to. She remembered how after years of being teased by all the zips she had eventually discovered only 4 out of the 28 zips actually opened and contained secret pockets. Finding the exact zip she wanted she wiggled two fingers into the opening until she felt the plastic slide between her fingers. Pulling the contents of the satchel out of the pocket Stacey sat on top of her unmade bed and let the tears scroll down her face as she contemplated whether to use the drug or not.

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Meryl watched her husband curiously. For hours he had been sitting in the dim corner of the living room on the PC their son had bought them a few years back. It had always sat in a dusty corner of the living room taking up the space where her old sewing machine used to be. Meryl had never seen the point in actually owning a computer. She had one at work and something always seemed to go wrong with it. Her husband, Brian, also hated the stupid PC, taking any opportunity to openly voice his hate for technology. Yet, here he was intrigued with something on the clunky thing in the corner of their living room. Her curiosity begging to know what it was that kept her husband so intrigued. pulled her out of the reclining chair and walked her to the corner. Brian sat inspecting a photo. 'It's Cindy McMann, love.' Her husband's words echoed as Meryl observed the girls pale skin and brunette curls that complimented the sparkling blue eyes staring back at her. She thought of the little girl in the foster home and her heart sank.

Ever since the death of Jason and Marianne McMann, Brian had been at his wife to help their children. The idea of fostering came up, but Meryl had insisted she wanted to keep her professional life as a foster care case worker separate to her home life. The eldest girl, Stacey had since turned 18, so Brian's latest idea was to adopt the youngest child, Cindy, and provide her with a happy life with the possibility of the sister being a big part of the little girls' life. Since this conception, Brian had visited all the specific agencies and had completed all the required paperwork. Although, Meryl still had her doubts she had agreed to consider the idea. She hadn't signed anything yet, but did feel obliged as it wasn't often Brian insisted on things. She did have doubts of their capabilities though, especially as Brian approached 60. Adopting a child was not her idea of a quiet retirement. She thought of her son and his pregnant wife and wondered how they would react to the idea.

Feeling her husband's hand grasp her arm she turned her attention to him. The creases around his eyes deepened as he stared across to the television, his grasp tightening as he listened to the afternoon news reporter.

'Yes, that's correct. It is the daughter of the late Jason McMann. She was a boarder at St Michael's Boarding House, a prestigious school here in Sydney. At the moment it looks drug related. There was a leather jacket found with what is thought to

be heroin. Parents of the community must..' Meryl listened to the comments from the reporter as they splashed pictures of the teenager across the television. The picture bracing the screen was the cover of an old women's magazine. The photo taken fifteen years earlier at Bondi Beach showed Jason and Marianne McMann cuddling Stacey between them on the shore line. Meryl had seen the photo years earlier. Looking at it again now, she couldn't help but to notice the resemblance between Stacey and Cindy.

'This is fucking ridiculous. Do they not consider this poor little girl?' Brian angrily banged his fist onto the keyboard, causing the desk to shake and spill the unsigned adoption papers across the floor. Meryl watched as her husband stormed towards the television remote and turned the news off. She remembered being told once that it only took twenty seconds for someone to die of a heroin overdose. The thought gutted her that it only took twenty seconds to change a life in such a negative way. Catching a glimpse of the adoption papers scattered on the floor she thought of Cindy and she knew what she had to do. It would only take twenty seconds to reverse the negativity. She could feel Brian's eyes burning through her as she picked up a pen from the desk and began sorting the adoption papers until she came to the final page.