

# 1

The building was depressing. It sat squat and ugly upon a small rise, it's brutalist style seeming to mimic the purpose for which it had been built. To house the criminally insane. Set back from the road and partially hidden behind some trees, the single building rose three stories in the air. There were bars over all the small windows except those on the ground floor that were for administration. The grounds upon which it sat were well-maintained, and Bastion always thought it looked like an unwelcome guest placed squarely in the centre of a miniature golf course.

Large fences surrounded the property. However, in the last ten years with the shift in societal expectations on how to care for those whose minds had departed reality, the gates were often open and people could be seen walking the grounds. That was for the non-dangerous tenants. The more dangerous ones were housed in the left wing, and the closest they ever got to freedom was an enclosed yard at that back of the building, hidden from public view. Not that it was a secret, but that it was unpleasant to look at. Society generally didn't like being reminded that some humans needed to be kept in cages. Better to keep them out of sight and out of mind hiding the possibility of us embracing our darker natures.

Bastion had been dropped off at the small visitors parking just inside the gates. He now stood by the sign wondering why he had thought this was a good idea.

*The Beverly Clinic.*

It made it sound like some kind of day-spa for the rich-and-famous, not somewhere people go who had burnt their spouses to death.

With his hands in his pockets, and shoulders hunched up around his

neck as though protecting himself from the cold, Bastion made his way up to the entrance.

As was often the case, two of his favourite guards were in attendance. In his mind he referred to them as Tweedle-Dee and Tweedle-Dum. He had never bothered to learn their real names, and they had never bothered to learn his, despite them seeing each other every month for the past five years.

“Back so soon?” Tweedle-Dee offered as he took off his shoes, and emptied his pockets into the plastic tray before stepping through the metal detector.

“Yeah. Just can’t stay away.”

Tweedle-Dee squinted at him as though not sure whether he was trying to be funny or not.

“Hands up.” Tweedle-Dum said, as he brought over a handheld metal detector to wave over him. When he was finished Tweedle-Dum hitched up his pants which was in an eternal battle with his gut to stay up. Over the years the gut was steadily winning. “Why so soon? Can’t be for the riveting conversation.”

Tweedle-Dum hid a laugh by chewing on his lip. They both knew who his mother was, and they both knew she hadn’t had a proper conversation since she was admitted over ten years ago.

“Nah, just wanted to come remind myself where I don’t want my life to end up.” Bastion responded.

Both Tweedle-Dee and Tweedle-Dum looked at him, again not sure whether he was making a joke at them or making one about his mother.

Suspiciously, Tweedle-Dee pointed to the visitors door.

“One hour. Wouldn’t wanna have to come find you.”

Like Bastion had never heard the reminder before but he just ignored them and waited to be buzzed through to the visitors waiting area.

*Assholes*, he thought for the millionth time.

Today’s reunion looked like it would be in the break-room. Bastion sat on a cheap plastic chair at a table that was bolted to the floor. To the left of him to shuffling inmates attempted a game of table-tennis, except one of them insisted on hitting the ball directly into the floor each time, and the other insisted that this was hilarious and let out a great big laugh each time.

Around the room, other proud occupants of the Beverly Clinic wandered aimlessly, said in dated armchairs, or otherwise gazed off into space. Bastion half expected to see Nurse Ratched walk in followed by a shuffling Jack Nicholson. Despite all the progress made on the outside, the more secure parts of the hospital were slow to pick up on progress. Of course, these were the tamer of the crew. The more volatile were not allowed such free reign, and certainly not in a space where visitors could come freely visit.

As far as he knew his mother had never been violent before or since burning his father to death while he slept. To begin with, she had been kept in the secure wing. But, over the years, and with no incidents they had all come to realise that she was harmless. That didn't stop her being accompanied at all times by a big burly minder twice her size.

Bastion's eyes flicked up when he saw the door on the far side of the room that lead to the inmates rooms buzz and open.

A shuffling woman of dirty blonde and greying hair shuffled in dressed in the drab green of the clinic.

His mother. Analise Grey.

She was gently guided by a large Samoan man who had one hand on one of her elbows. Both his arms were covered in tattoos and there was a large moon tattoos across the back of each giant hand.

The guard saw Bastion and guided his mother over.

"Hey Bastion, didn't expect to see you back so soon." The guard said, as he guided his charge into the chair across from Bastion.

Bastion shrugged. "Hey Sione. Was just in the mood to see her again."

Sione nodded, with a slight frown. "You good man? You look a little down."

"Yeah, I'm good. Just tired. Late night."

"Sweet. It's good man. Good to see your mum." Bastion nodded.

"Well, you know the rules boss. No sudden movements. No giving her anything without permission, etc., etc."

"Thanks Sione." For one of the guards, the Samoan was one of the better ones. He actually seemed interested in the residents wellbeing and was always respectful of his mother.

Sione backed away and positioned himself in a chair near the wall, but within easy reach, leaving Bastion in relative solitude with his mother.

For a moment he just sat and looked. Her hair was its usual limp dirty blonde. The grey was starting to come through more readily now.

The sight made him suddenly sad, mixed with an unexpected tinge of anger. She shouldn't be here like this.

Her eyes, which he had distant memories of as bright blue, were now a milkier shade of grey and had been for so long that he wondered if they had ever been blue at all, or were those just the highlighted memories of a child wishing something that had never been? They now darted around the room, never fixing on something for long, like a bird jumping from branch to branch. There was no recognition in them.

She looked frail inside the oversized standard-issue shirt and pants. Her skin needed some sun, and there were light blue veins running down her arms to her birdlike hands which sat on the table folded neatly, quietly in front of her.

Grey. That was their last name. It was also the colour that his mother seemed to be fading into, a washed out version of a human being, slowly fading away until Bastion feared one day he might arrive and find that she had totally faded to nothing, disappearing into the background of his life.

"Hey mum. How you doing?"

Eyes flitted around the room. To the table tennis. To the television in the corner. To the windows. Back to the table tennis. Back to the window where they stayed for a moment longer. Never to Bastion, never acknowledging that her son sat before her.

Bastion sighed. Why had he come here? What was the point? He wasn't going to get any answers.

Leaning forward, and lowering his voice so that no one else could hear, not that anyone would be listening around here, Bastion said, "I saw dad."

Sione's eyes flicked over to them at Bastion's movement, but then flicked away again.

The words seemed to loosen something inside Bastion, and he found himself talking. He told her about the visit from the lawyer. He told her about the ring and then going to the bookshop and discovering the hidden door. He told her about the secret room underneath and all the books. The words streamed from him as though some valve had been open and all the pressure built up over the previous day was being released. He told her about his father, what he saw and heard from the man in the mirror. The strange story of spells and men coming back from the dead. As he talked he found himself relaxing, the frustrations and confusions of earlier easing from his body. He told her about what

his father had said about her and about him. He shared it all, and when he was done he sat back in the seat suddenly feeling tired, but in a good way, the kind of tired when you have done something that was good for you.

He leaned back in the chair, closed his eyes and rubbed his face. If nothing else happened here, this had been good. He opened his eyes and looked at his mother.

Her eyes were fastened on him, unmoving.

“Mum?”

Bastion sat up, looking into her face, seeing some recognition then. His heart started thumping.

“Mum, did you understand what I just said.”

Her lips parted, and her tongue darted out licking them as though preparing to say something. Her mouth moved, her jaw working itself, as though warming up. She reached forward slowly and grasped his hand across the table. It was like holding a bird, it was so light.

“Mum, what is it? Talk to me.”

Her jaw worked, and she frowned at the effort. He could see something in her eyes, something she wanted to say.

“Mum, talk to me. Please. Do you know about what I just said? Is it true, or was I just imagining it all? It doesn't make sense to me. These kinds of things don't happen. Just talk to me, tell me if you know about this.”

She gave his hand a light squeeze, using all the energy she had. Bastion squeezed back gently, letting her know he felt it. He glanced over at Sione, and saw that Sione was looking at them both, eyes fixed on them. But, he didn't move or say anything, just watched.

“Mum, please talk to me.”

Her jaw moved and her lips shaped themselves into something, then she gave a slight sigh and it was like the air was going out of her, her hand loosened in his, and she sat back in the chair. In disappointment, Bastion watched as the light faded from her eyes, her awareness receding back to wherever she lived inside her mind, and they resumed their flitting around the room.

She was gone.

The frustration of earlier had returned. He had felt good telling her everything, but for a moment there he had thought she might shed some light on what had happened. If anyone knew something about all this, it was her. And, for a second, a brief passing second, she had been about to say something.

“Mum please. Tell me about dad. Talk to me.”

There was nothing, just a shell of a woman who wasn't even aware he was there.

With a lump in his throat, Bastion signalled to Sione that he was done, and without a word stood, turned and walked to the exit and waited to be buzzed out. He had been wrong to come. There were no answers here.

Sione led Analise back to her room, his large hands holding her elbow. As always she was compliant, never resisting, never causing a ruckus. Not for the first time Sione wondered why she was being held here so long. It's not like she was a danger to anyone. He'd heard about what she had done, but he struggled to picture it himself. She was so gentle and timid. Having said that, there was a little old man in lock-up who also looked old and frail. He had nearly bitten guards ears off. Twice. So, Sione wasn't fool enough to believe that gentle little old ladies couldn't be dangerous. He just struggled to believe it with Analise.

But, orders were orders. Analise was to remain under watchful guard and Sione was to report if anything weird happened. What weird was, he didn't know. This place was full of weird stuff. Particularly with her son.

He pulled out his large set of keys.

“Here we are Analise. Home sweet home. ” He unlocked her door and ushered her inside and shut the door behind him. Before he departed, he gently pulled on her elbow, turning her to face him.

“So, anything you want to tell me about your conversation with your son?”

Sione waited, peering into her eyes, looking for that spark of life.

“Come on. We both know something happened there. What did he say?”

Analise's eyes continued their vacant stare into space.

Sione sighed. “You know I'm gonna have to pass this on right, which means others are gonna come and wanna have a word. Who knows, they might even need to go talk to Bastion.”

Still, she said nothing.

Sione shrugged. “Have it your way.” He led her to the chair in her room and walked out, but not before touching the three symbols that were placed around the doorframe, made to look like decorations. The tattoos on the back of his hand glowed for a second, and then he was gone, locking the door behind him.

Alone, Analise stared out the window, eyes unmoving. Her eyes watered and a single tear dropped onto a papery cheek. Her mouth opened, her lips worked for a moment, and she let out one, croaking word.

“Andrew.”