

Not Enough

(Adult SS-9953)

I focus on the street lights' blurred reflection on the river's surface, as if it's the scenery that's brought us here. A flick of my hair, to pretend everything's cool my end, but I know my breathing is thin, my hands awkward on my lap, and my lips pulled too taut for what should be a relaxed occasion.

'So,' David's spidery arm reaches behind me and I hear the crack as he pierces the stretched plastic with a stab of his car keys, 'what's your favourite radio station?'

'Um,' my eyes fall from the midnight traffic making its way over the tiny bridge, to the radio in his flashy, late model Ford, 'I don't know.'

'Surely you've got to know which station you like the best?'

I swallow, my spittle thick and dry. Back in the country there was just the one clear FM station, but here there are hundreds.

The green, stubby-shaped bottle is now in David's lap. I pretend all my attention is on this rocked-lined, suburban excuse for a river, but the bottle opener on David's key ring is my real focus. I see him hook it under the rim of the lid, and with one quick flick of his wrist the lid flies off and lands in my lap.

I decided that when I left home my life was going to be that dream I had; suit job, writer's desk, straight posture and permed hair bouncing down my back, a perfect boyfriend who held out for me and waited, my Dad with a place of his own, no longer needing to drink because I'm here in Adelaide now to give him all my love, finally realising he deserves better than that venomous girlfriend he once had...

That was my dream.

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Now, as if it's leapt there, the bottle's stinging coldness is firm in my grip, and its fruity scent wafts about my head. I told David I don't drink. When he asked why, I said 'because I don't like it.' Then he asked what I'd tried, and when I said 'nothing', he said, 'So how do you know you don't like it then?' I just shrugged because I knew he didn't understand what I meant. I should have explained, but it would've been too hard, and how could someone like him possibly understand? His parents own a two storey house with a swimming pool for God's sake. I always thought rich guys were out of my league, but now I know even rich guys have a weakness.

David said he could buy a six-pack of his favourite, Strongbow Dry, after we finished work on Saturday, so I could try them. 'They're nice,' he said, 'and there's nothing wrong with a few drinks every now and then.' I went quiet afterwards because of the way he said that last bit, like I really had no idea.

When I first moved to Adelaide, Dad and I got a unit together. But after that night when he was drinking and left the front door wide open, and we got robbed, I decided to get my own place. When I told Dad, he said, 'I've waited so long for you to come back to me, now you're leaving me.' Then he laughed, like he was only joking, but I knew he wasn't. Then he moved back in with his girlfriend.

I haven't invited David over to my place yet because I'm too embarrassed. I haven't got a fridge, and the only furniture in the unit is a single bed mattress and a bedside table. The other week I just had enough money to put petrol in my car, so I rang The Salvation Army. I'd been there a couple of times before with Dad and he'd gotten us food vouchers, so I knew the drill.

The lady on the phone said, 'You need our help *again?*'

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I didn't know what to say, so I hung up. Then cried.

After my first Centrelink appointment I learnt that my school grades didn't mean shit in the real world. The lady asked me what sort of job I really wanted. I decided to tell her the truth, something I hadn't dared say out loud before. 'A scriptwriter.'

She let out a sigh and removed her reading glasses, as if to say, "I don't want to be the one to have to tell you, but clearly *someone* has to." Then, her eyes wandering from my face to my op-shop jumper, she said, 'Some of us need to have dreams, I know, but I think you need to be a bit more realistic, don't you?'

In the weeks that followed, when Dad and I did our usual check of the Centrelink board every couple of days, I applied for a few jobs – a shop assistant, a dishwasher, and a toilet cleaner at a night club. At the interviews, after looking through my school reports and references I had from my year twelve teachers, they all said I should be at university, which really pissed me off. If I wanted to go to university with all those other rich snobs, I would. Then, months later, the day after Dad helped me buy a car with the last of the money I had saved from my Austudy (he bargained them down to six hundred bucks), I saw the ad.

Must have own, reliable vehicle. No experience necessary. Immediate start.

I was so happy to get that job at Pizza Haven. I'd been working there for two months when I first met David. He walked in the store for his first day of work and he had his blue and red Pizza Haven hat pushed way back on his head, so his forehead looked huge. His hair poked out the sides, and his big, wonky nose stood out a mile on his thin face. Later I learned that he's smart, confident, and rich, so who was I to knock him back?

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David looks down at the bottle in my lap now, lifts his own in the air with a tilt of his knobby wrist, by way of encouragement. My fingers tighten around the bottle's slippery neck, and there's something comforting about having it there. I watch the condensation roll down the sides, and the guilt, and a sense of hypocrisy, creates a burning sensation beneath my sternum.

Because Dad can't just have a few.

The alcohol consumes *him*. Rapes him. Then dumps his body days later. I've tried my whole life to get him to stop.

But... I wouldn't mind giving it a try. And what we're doing now, it's not really drinking, is it? It's just me and David with a few bottles. It's not like there's a group of us and we're planning on getting pissed and being dickheads.

And I'm not my father.

I pick at the edges of the label, staring down there while I think of Geoffrey. I was still going out with Geoffrey when I first met David. I met Geoffrey in a car park not long after I started at Pizza Haven. He came over after I locked my keys in my car. He told me he played guitar and sang in a band and said that I looked sad, and that from his experience the most beautiful women always looked sad. Then he offered me a job as a sound mixer for his band. He didn't care I didn't have any experience because he said he'd teach me.

One night Geoffrey rang me, asked if I could come over to his place because he was really sad. He said one of his close (young, female) friends just died after crashing her car in the Adelaide Hills.

Dad didn't like the fact Geoffrey was his age, but he also thought he was a liar.

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'He's full of shit, Suz. Something like that doesn't happen without being on the news.'

I told him it did because Geoffrey told me it did.

That night I went over to Geoffrey's house and he sang me a song while playing his guitar. It was a beautiful song called *Crying* by Roy Orbison. Afterwards we had sex. When he was done, Geoffrey let out a huge sigh and said, 'Oh, Sweetheart, there's nothing like a good fuck.' I lay there thinking how repulsed I was by that word and how ironic a word it was considering I couldn't even feel his penis inside me.

With half-peeled label, I lift the bottle to my lips. I force myself to swallow down the tangy, bitter liquid, and with that done, David gives my bottle another clang with a wink and a grin.

We're onto our second. David holds up his bottle to reveal half left.

'See how much you can skol,' he says.

I lift my bottle and chug away, but all too soon my cheeks fill up like a puffer fish and I get the giggles. I cover my mouth with my hand so I don't spit the contents all over the car.

David just can't help himself, 'Swallow, Bitch!'

Now, with my head resting back on my seat, I close my eyes. My feelings and my heart are bullet proof. I've finally discovered the warmth of alcohol. Not just the type that's made me slip my shoes off, but the type that's seeped right through to the middle of my chest, where earlier the guilt burned. There's a smile on my face and it's there with no effort on my behalf. I'm still me, but a better version; someone I like, someone

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others could like. And with this knowledge comes absolute relief and freedom. The ecstasy of not being afraid. My mind is quiet. Its constant work of worry is no more.

Half way through our third we put the bottles in the centre console holders and climbed into the back seat. My head was hitting the roof.

Now we're back in the front, pants still off, and I'm unable to focus until my head stops moving.

'You're pissed, young lady.' A finger, maybe two, waved about my face. Licking his lips like a man satisfied.

His weakness is my power.

'Me?' One word, no slur. Well done, Suz.

'I need to do a piss.'

Door slams behind him. Lift my bottle to eye level. Squint. I bet ya I can skol the rest. See. I shake my head and screw up my face, like I've seen Dad do a hundred times, like he's been forced to drink poison. Hand behind the seat, just in case. Hand falls on shapeless plastic. All gone. Not enough. Hang on, I know where the bottle shop is. Only a couple of hundred metres away, just over the bridge. Rent money in my wallet. I'm fast so I bet ya I'll be back before he returns. And I see David's reaction now, as clear as a movie scene I see in my head before I write the script. I'll click my bottle into his and say cheers, and he'll wonder how I got them, and he'll think I'm bloody fantastic.

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With all the brimming excitement of a child, I move fast. Hurry to push my feet into my shoes. Heave and twist to get my pants up. Head flops to the side. Squirm and settle.

A pause in time, and I think of Dad. I think how all my love wasn't enough.

I taste the salt when the tears trickle between my lips. But all it takes is one wipe with thumb and fingers, and they're gone.

I just need more Strongbow.

So I turn the key.