

FOR ALL OUR SINS

by Duncan Ley

-SCENE EXCERPT-

ACT ONE - SCENE TWO

(The same evening, roughly eleven o'clock. HARRY has not moved from the couch.

GEORGE enters presently, without his jacket and with a bruised face. He has obviously been in a fight. He notices HARRY sitting in the couch)

GEORGE What are you doing up? Christ, I said I'd be home, didn't I? You don't have to wait up for me. What am I, sixteen?

HARRY What happened to your face?

GEORGE Nothing.

HARRY Bruises just occurred by themselves, did they? Blood bust out of your nose while you were sitting quietly?

GEORGE Something like that.

HARRY How's the other fella?

GEORGE *(shrugging)* 'Bout the same.

HARRY The club or the street?

GEORGE Street.

HARRY You start it?

GEORGE Yeah. No. Just a bunch of Lebanese on the prowl.

HARRY Yeah?

GEORGE Deliberately walked into Geoff. One thing led to another. You know how it is with them.

HARRY Yeah. I know how it is.

GEORGE Well, I'm home, aren't I? You can go to bed now.

HARRY Where's your jacket?

GEORGE Fuckers ripped it off my back.

HARRY *(absently)* Bought it for your birthday. Cost eighty bucks.

GEORGE Yeah, well, sorry. Not my fault, though.

HARRY Nothing ever is.

GEORGE What's that supposed to mean?

HARRY I want you out of this house.

GEORGE *(not quite believing what he's heard)* What?

HARRY After the weekend, I want you out. Gone. Monday morning go find somewhere else to live. I'll pay your first month's rent. Bond as well, if I have to.

GEORGE What the hell's all this about? What've I done now?

HARRY I didn't bring a son of mine up to be a thieving bastard.

GEORGE What?

HARRY Stealing money from Mickey! From your employer. From my friend who did me a personal favour taking on your sorry arse in the first place!

GEORGE I... this is a load of shit.

HARRY Three hundred bucks! What the fuck were you thinking?

GEORGE I didn't steal any money!

HARRY Liar! You little shit, don't stand there and lie to your own father. You think I'm stupid? Think you can just deny it and I'll believe you?

GEORGE (*under his breath*) That lying wog bastard.

HARRY What? What did you say? George, what the fuck did you just say?

GEORGE I said 'that lying wog bastard'. Your 'mate', he's a lying wog bastard, isn't he?

HARRY You'd better watch every single word that comes out of your mouth.

GEORGE I paid him back the money, didn't I? I paid it back. That fucking liar - he said he wouldn't tell you if I paid it back. Now he's gone and ratted on me.

HARRY You paid back the money.

GEORGE Yeah, every cent.

HARRY So fucking what! You think that puts you in the right? Gives you the right to stand there and call him names? Feel hard done by? Christ - you stole money from him! Lucky he didn't bring in the police! You know the worst thing about this George? You've embarrassed me. You've made me feel like a failure in front of my friend. That's what you've done.

GEORGE You don't need me to make you a failure.

HARRY (*stunned*) What?

GEORGE Don't say fucking 'what?' as if you can't hear me! You're a failure. I'm a failure. Get over it.

HARRY You think your own father is a failure?

GEORGE What the hell am I expected to think? You sit around here making speeches all day to anyone who'll listen - complain about losing your job - then have a bloody go at me for not being able to find any work. Well stiff shit, mate. Don't see you out there by my side knocking on doors, begging for a job, do I?

HARRY Listen, when I was your age I was out there working my arse off. I didn't steal from my boss. I didn't go out every night on the piss looking for a fight. Don't try to tar me with your brush. You think I'm a failure? Well, you wanna know something? Maybe I am. But after thirty-five years of making sure I could afford to look after a wife and two kids I've earned the right to fail. You - you little pissant - wouldn't know responsibility if it came up and punched you in the gut. And here's something else. You're not a failure. You wanna know why not? Because you've got nothing to fail at. You've got no-one to fail for. Least I have my pride. Least I can stand up and say I gave it a shot and managed to make a little something of my life. What can you say for yourself? (*GEORGE is visibly affected by his father's tirade. HARRY notices ALICE standing in the hallway door. She has heard all he has to say. He looks at her, waiting there in her dressing gown*) Thought you were asleep.

ALICE Does anyone want some tea?

HARRY Go on then. (GEORGE *sits down*)

ALICE I'll get something for your face, George. Want an aspirin or something?
(GEORGE *shakes his head*. ALICE *goes into the kitchen*. *Alice's presence has taken some of the fight out of HARRY*)

HARRY Why did you take the money, George? Christ, if you needed some why didn't you ask me? Well? You gonna answer me or just sit there feeling hard done by? (*he changes tact, realising this is getting him nowhere*. *He sits down*) Look mate, I know its hard out there – I've told you that before – but you don't have to steal to get by. You could've come to me. I'd have helped you out. You only need to ask, you know that. I've never been stingy when it comes to family. (*he sighs*) Look, I'm sorry 'bout what I said before. 'Course I don't want you out of the house. You're my son, you're staying here. But you gotta talk to me, mate. Tell me what's going on. Can't help you, can I, if I don't know what's going on in your life? (ALICE *enters with ice wrapped in a dishcloth*. HARRY *waits for her*. *She gives it to GEORGE*)

GEORGE (*softly*) Thanks.

ALICE Sure you don't want a cup of tea?

GEORGE Yeah.

HARRY You want something stronger? Go on, Alice – get the lad a bit of my whisky. I think there's some left. I'll have a drop while you're at it. (ALICE *looks at him, disapproving but silent*. HARRY *makes a helpless gesture*. ALICE *returns to the kitchen*. *Both men sit in silence*, GEORGE *with the dishcloth held to his face*) We've never talked much, have we? Maybe that's my fault. Maybe I've never known how to talk to you. Fathers and sons should talk, shouldn't they? I mean... we've never known how to go about it.

GEORGE Yeah. (*they lapse back into silence*)

HARRY You're not an easy one to talk to, are you? (GEORGE *shrugs*) Guess some men aren't.

GEORGE Is Charlie?

HARRY Well, I don't get much of a chance these days. But when he was still at home – yeah, we talked. But he's not here anymore, is he?

GEORGE You reckon? (HARRY *looks at him sharply, waiting for an explanation*) Not a day goes by without you talking about him, what he's doing.

HARRY I'm proud of him.

GEORGE Yeah, I know.

HARRY A father's allowed to be proud of his son.

GEORGE You've got two sons.

HARRY Is that what this is about? You nicking some money to get my attention?

GEORGE Don't be so fucking stupid! (*he tries to rein in his temper, and for once succeeds*) It's no good, is it? You want me to talk to you – want to have a nice father and son chat so you can feel like a good father – but it's no good. I don't have the... the words. I don't know how to talk to you! To anyone, really. I can't explain what's going on in my head 'cause I don't know the words to tell you!

HARRY Is that why you walk around angry all the time?

GEORGE Yeah. Probably. Whatever.

HARRY *(softly)* You don't think I've been a good father to you? *(GEORGE stays silent)* That hurts, mate.

GEORGE Yeah, well that's life, isn't it?

HARRY No it's not. No it bloody well isn't! *(now HARRY must try to control his temper)* I've provided for you, haven't I? Got you a job, didn't I? From the moment you came into this world I've been there looking after you. Who took you to league training, week after week, for ten years? You could've been playing first grade now if you'd stuck with it. But no, like everything else you packed it in. You can't keep blaming me for you not sticking to anything.

GEORGE Then how come you can pat yourself on the back and boast to your mates for how Charlie turned out? You take the credit for that every bloody day. If you're not to blame for how I've turned out you've got no responsibility for what Charlie's done. But that's just it, isn't it? I was hard work. Much easier for you to hold Charlie's hand – he was the one going places. Now he's gone you want to start helping me out. But it's a bit fucking late for that, isn't it?

HARRY *(affected by his son's words)* It's never too late to help one of my boys. *(he pauses, then brighter)* I'll have another talk with Mickey. He's not that cut at you – you know that? He knows it's tough as well. And there was something in the mail you should take a look at. The TAFE college is taking enrolments for some their courses. Had a quick flick through the book. I'm sure there's something in there you'd have a chance at. They've got motor mechanics, all sorts of different stuff. Maybe tomorrow you'd like to have a look through. I can afford to pay for a course. But that's what you should be looking for. Getting a certificate in something-or-other. That's what you need nowadays.

GEORGE I'm no good at doing courses.

HARRY *(brightened by the fact he has actually got a response)* Yeah, but it's not like sitting in a classroom all day. It's all hands-on, these days. Learning while you're doing – that sort of thing. And you're good with your hands.

GEORGE Yeah. Guess so.

HARRY You've been unlucky up to now. That's all it is. It's a bloody tough life out there and you're one of the poor sods in the trenches. You just gotta be strong, mate. It'll turn 'round if you try hard enough.

GEORGE I'm sick of trying! *(he pauses)* I'm sick of it. *(he pauses again)* Mickey was going to get rid of me anyway. I don't know what he told you but that's the way it was. Thought he was getting another Charlie and instead he got me. I don't get things. They don't get through *up here*. *(he taps his head)* I'd hand back more change than the money they'd given me. I'd charge them the wrong price for something. Hell, I couldn't even make sausages properly. Sausages, for fuck's sake! I'm twenty-nine and I can't even use a machine to make a fucking sausage! *(ALICE enters with a small bottle of whisky and two glasses on a tray. She stands there, waiting and watching GEORGE)* So I took some money. And I'm sorry for it, you know? I'm sorry 'cause I couldn't even do that right. Couldn't manage to nick a few lousy notes without getting caught. For once I just want to do something and get it bloody right!

HARRY But why didn't you ask me for the money?

GEORGE Because I don't want to rely on you my whole fucking life! But I have to, don't I? 'Cause as you said, there's nothing for me to fail at and there's no-one for me to fail for. *(there is a pause. ALICE fills it by coming forward)*

ALICE Here's your drink. *(HARRY gets up and takes the tray)*

HARRY Thanks, love. *(he puts it down on the coffee table and pours two drinks. He hands one to GEORGE)*

GEORGE Thanks. *(ALICE moves away to return to the bedroom, then turns back)*

ALICE George? *(HARRY and GEORGE turn to her)* Don't make the mistake of thinking Charlie's better than you. You're both my sons. Both of you. *(she seems to want to say more, but catches herself and leaves instead)*

GEORGE Thanks mum.

HARRY Don't suppose you feel like drinking to anything, but here goes. *(he lifts his glass)* To sausages!

GEORGE *(he lets out a short laugh despite himself)* Yeah, alright. To sausages. *(they drink)* Look, if it makes you happy I'll have a look through that book in the morning. See if anything jumps out at me.

HARRY Good on you, mate. *(they drink)* I wanna tell you something. 'Bout myself. Might make you feel a little better. 'Course it might not, but there you go. And this is something even Charlie doesn't know.

GEORGE Really?

HARRY Yep. Scouts honour. When I was your age I couldn't even read or write. Fair dinkum.

GEORGE Honest?

HARRY Yep. Had a mate who worked at the plant. Remember Frankie Peterson? We used to go over to his place on weekends when you boys were young. Died – oh, must be going on twelve years ago now. Leukaemia, it was.

GEORGE Yeah, I remember. Had a couple of fingers missing, didn't he?

HARRY That's him. Well he was my best mate for years. We worked together – same shift and everything. He was a bit like an older brother to me. He knew I had a problem with words an' all. Well, when a new part came in he'd read all the specifications to me and I'd memorise them. Couldn't read 'em, but jeez; you could give me a fuel inductor assembly shaft and I could tell you who its mother and father was. Eventually I took evening classes and managed to learn what I didn't in school. Took me a while and I sure felt like a dickhead sitting there reading about Tammy and Tommy Going To The Beach, but I did it.

GEORGE That why you like reading so much now?

HARRY Yeah. Guess it is. I was so proud I could read guess I never stopped. That framed picture in the toilet. The front page of the Daily Telegraph – 15th June, Nineteen Seventy-Three. You and your brother never knew what it meant. That's the first newspaper I ever bought. I read the whole bloody thing – 'course, it took me a week to get through it all. And I decided to frame the front page. Silly, eh?

GEORGE Nah dad, not silly.

HARRY Don't give up on yourself, mate. And don't listen to those bastards out there who pretend they're sticking up for you. You know, the ones who are always larrikin-this and digger-that. I've never met a larrikin in my life, but apparently this country's fucking full of 'em. And between you and me, if I ever meet the little fucker who coined the term 'Aussie Battler' he's going to get his smarmy little head smacked in.

GEORGE Yeah.

HARRY And just remember what I say, mate. A brick falling from a ten storey window will kill anyone, regardless of their IQ. We're all equal under the laws of gravity. (HARRY *laughs at his own wit*) Look, I know it's the wrong time to ask you for a favour, but you got to stop getting yourself into fights every time you go out on the piss. Worries the hell out of your mother, every time you go out. She's got enough to worry about without wondering if you're going to make it home in one piece.

GEORGE It's not always my fault, you know.

HARRY I know that. Listen, I watch the news. Current Affair. I know these Lebs like hanging around in gangs. They're out there cruising and looking for trouble. I know that. All that gang-rape going on. Disgusts me. But mate, you can stay out of trouble if you try. Just walk the other way for a change. Don't go where they go.

GEORGE Don't go where they go? Whose fucking neighbourhood is it? They're the ones who should be finding somewhere else to make trouble. Never had trouble before they turned up in droves.

HARRY Mate, there's always trouble to be found if you want it.

GEORGE I don't see why I should cross the street just 'cause they're walking towards me.

HARRY Well, just make sure there's more than one of you, that's all I'm saying.

GEORGE Has to be, these days. So many of them. (*touches his face and winces*)

HARRY Hurt a bit?

GEORGE Not really.

HARRY Maybe you should get it checked out tomorrow.

GEORGE I'm alright.

HARRY Why do you do it, son? I mean, I had a few blues when I was younger – it's a part of growing up, becoming a man – I understand that. But every weekend?

GEORGE (*shrugs*) It's something... something I'm good at.

HARRY So? I used to be good at smoking – doesn't mean it was good for me.

GEORGE You're not going to start on that one again, are you?

HARRY No, no. Prefer you to smoke than get into fights every week. So come on mate, help me understand why it's always necessary to get into a punch up every weekend.

GEORGE Well... I dunno. It helps me out, you know. Makes me feel... good, I guess.

HARRY Being hit in the face makes you feel good?

GEORGE Pain's not all that bad. Makes you feel alive. It kind of... wakes me up. See things clearly.

HARRY (*not quite understanding*) Okay. I'll have to take your word for it.

GEORGE I should call it a night. (*gets up*)

HARRY Gonna help your mum out tomorrow?

GEORGE Yeah.

HARRY She'll appreciate that, mate. Looking forward to seeing your brother then?

GEORGE (*nodding, but not too convincingly*) You going to bed?

HARRY Nah. Going to sit up for a bit.

GEORGE Sure. 'Night then.

HARRY Yeah. Sleep well.

GEORGE This'll sound stupid – but well, it's nice to know something about you that Charlie doesn't.

(*GEORGE leaves. HARRY picks up the bottle, humming a tune. The lights fade on a contented father*)

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