

Feast for the Flies

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“You’re telling me I gotta go through these fields alone? Do ya even know where I’m going, mate?” I said in disbelief, speaking directly into my radio. The sun was out but setting fast. It always had in these parts. Rural town, middle of the tropics. Gordonvale had always been a bit of a stinker. The only thing worth seeing was the cane fields. Even that was all sizzle no steak.

“Old mate at the station said he heard voices yelling or something in the fields. Probably a domestic, but he swore it might be something related to them immigrant workers who disappeared few years back. Not like you have a choice though, aye Dezzie. She’ll be right, nahyeah?” My partner dismissed. He was fine. He chucked a sickie and left early for the night. Bloody useless. Sarge made me take this by myself, even though it shoulda been me and a few others. He seemed like he didn’t want me to take this though, weirdly enough. Almost unwilling to let me go off tonight. It gets dangerous in the dark here. “It’s probably just some cashed-up bogan who had one too many down at the pub, they’ll probably be in the shrieking shack. Sun’s gone in what, half hour? Better get running, ‘ey mate?”

“You owe me a cold one after this. This cane field is in Woop Woop I tell ya. My cruiser lights don’t even reach inside past the stalks. It seems a bit dodgy, but I’ll be back in an hour or two at the station to update.”

“Seems fair. If it’s dark and it feels iffy, leave it ‘til tomorrow. Stay safe, mate.”

I turned off my cars radio. The sun was already half set. I’d wasted time, and I didn’t want to leave this for tomorrow. Getting out of the car was the hardest part, sweat already starting to drip down onto my brows. Flies were gonna have a field day with me.

Google maps on my phone showed a walkway to the shack, but I opted to go straight through the fields instead. Pushing stalks side to side was a bit of work though, especially when my hands got all slippery and the cane came back to hit me. Small cuts had already started forming on my hands, and bites from gnats started to itch up my arms. It was still only about half a kilometre to the shack if Google’s right though. Gotta be a cheeky dunny there. I’d rather not stay for longer than I have to, but when you gotta go you gotta go. I had passed a few cans of beer outside the field, so someone had been sniffing about before.

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The worker’s disappearance was never a fully closed case, nor did we really open it. We just got told it was another runaway case, and to close it as fast as we could. Nobody was gonna question why though. Too complicated, and we all wanted to keep our job. The media went wild though. Tabloids went out and everyone at the station got an earbash from what seemed like every local in a 10km radius. A search team was sent out to comb the fields, but nobody found anything, so it felt a bit useless. They were all long gone now, and the whole incident was swept under the rug. Any similar cases of immigrants or asylum seekers ended up the same way. A hush-hush open then close. It was cheaper labour, and it was easier than trying to get proper workers to work cane.

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The sun was pretty much set by now. Cane wasn't normally this dense. Each one that I pushed the next seemed to grow taller and harder to move. A cloying scent wafted under my nose, and my eyes watered while I tried to ignore the wave of nausea that came over me. Google maps lit up my phone and in front of me was the shack. If you could call it that. The ramshackle remains of what looked like a granny flat. So far, I hadn't heard anything, especially any yelling indicating a dispute. Probably out having a strop. The loud creak of the door made me cringe as I tried to be as quiet as possible. All that met me inside were faded photographs and flies. *Lots*. Of flies. It was an uncomfortable, low buzz that made bile rise from my stomach.

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The cases were always dismissed because they were about the Italian immigrants. Being a small town, rumours spread faster than police can draw conclusions. Once there was a whiff of organised crime, everyone "*connected*" it back to them. It was easier that way. It made our jobs easier too. Then the whole woke agenda got introduced, and one whiff we were trying to push the immigrant affairs to the side to make way for real cases, the more people thought all police were crooks. Which wasn't true at all, we were understaffed and doing the best we could.

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I didn't realise there were small steps leading into different rooms. My head hurt from the hardwood floor, and I was about to get the shits with this place until I saw the flies. The windows were covered in a writhing mass and the sickeningly sweet smell that was viscous and hard to inhale. I didn't turn on my torch yet. I know what it means. A soft squelch was an unwelcome sound. "Oh god. Oh god no." I turned my torch on falteringly. My boot left a smear of brownish red across the floor leading away from an arm. A pair of brown eyes looked at me. I ran flat stick outta that room. The flies crawled and buzzed around me until a photograph near the front of the house diverted my attention. The glass shattered with blood splattered on it, still fresh. A picture of the dead man in the room. With Sarge. I grabbed it and ran. The pathway back to the cane was clearer now, having spent a while carving my way through before.

Flies were in the bottom of my boots and crawling up my legs by the time I got back to the cruiser. The moon was out, and so was the truth. Some of it at least. Old mate who reported it was probably a schizo or knew there was trouble brewing out. I don't think he knew that there was a body of a worker in there though. I was already halfway to my car by the time I realised a horde of bugs were following me. My legs couldn't take me any faster through the dead cane. A deafening growl from the bugs grew louder. Flies, cicadas, locusts, and beetles crawled all over the cuts I gained from running through the dense weed. My torch barely cut through the tall stalks, leaving me in trying to follow a path that looked increasingly wrong. Flies landing on my eyes were more than enough motivation to keep powering forward though.

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My cruiser was covered in dead bugs. The windshield is stained, and the front bumper is dented. I rolled into the station and slammed open the door, throwing the picture down on the front desk.

“Jesus Christ, you smell absolutely rank,” Sarge scoffed. His tone was strange though and he frowned upon seeing the picture but he kept composure.

“Did you know they died?”

“Stop throwing a tantrum and pull yourself together. Nobody died what are you on about?”

“The workers. What have you done?”

He wasn't expecting that, well he was acting like he wasn't. Taking me by the arm, we went out the back where the huge skips were. I should've known he'd been bought out by criminals. I thought it was just another case of runaway workers, which is why we were allowed to close it so fast. If there were murders involved, I wouldn't have done it.

“Don't be so surprised Dezzie. I can see you putting the dots together.”

“Oh, put a sock in it. Why did you do it mate? I should've known something was up when you tried stopping me from going out tonight, you're gonna be put away for this big-time mate-”

“We both will be, but only if you go runnin' your fuckin' mouth, rat. You'll end up just like him if you keep talking right now. Yeah, that's right I know you saw that room.”

We both went quiet. I should've listened when he said to not go into the shack. It would've been fine if I had taken the path beside the fields instead of through, followed the beer cans instead of being an idiot. I felt the dead flies in my boots crunch between my toes as I felt unease creep up my spine.

A hand on a service gun. Blue eyes looking into mine. I could tell what he was thinking. Tomorrow was bin day, but nobody checks the skips. Running had been an option, but naivety made me stay. Sarge knew he would be doing a brick in jail if I lived, and nobody wants that.

The flies feasted that night.