

©2022 Glenn Kershaw

Broken Things.

By

Glenn A. Kershaw

First published in Macquarie University's student magazine, Grapeshot, 2020.

Detective Inspector Sheridan Quay paused. It was one of the things he did, a technique he used with a suspect. Not that Johnny Dash was a suspect anymore. His alibi had checked out, still there was one last thing Quay needed to know, one last piece of the jigsaw puzzle. No, not a jigsaw. Susie, his wife, had always laughed at him for using that metaphor. She said solving a crime was like smashing a bowl then restoring it with gold paste and resin. As if what you finished up with was the same as the original. Better. The Japanese had a name for the art, he tried to remember, but the word wouldn't come. Susie knew, of course, she knew all about that stuff. For a moment, his mind left the interview room, and he imagined his daughter, Asuka, pushing herself around in her walker, laughing, getting into things as Susie tried to work on a pot.

Quay looked up at Johnny Dash. He was an everyday man with an everyday face.

'Tell me about your relationship with your brother,' Quay asked.

Johnny Dash looked tired. Deep lines ran around his eyes, his head drooped.

'I went through this with that copper,' he said, nodding behind him to where Detective Constable Andrew White rested his back against the tiled wall.

Quay lent forward, looking deeply into Dash's eyes, searching.

'Well, tell me about it, Johnny.'

Johnny Dash's eyes flared like fireworks.

'It's not Johnny, right! That was Franky. He was into all that. It's just John, John Dash.'

Quay liked this interview room. The lights weren't so bright they washed out the lies, nor the shadows so dark they hid them. There was no smell of cigarettes or fear.

'Right, John Dash. Tell me about it,' asked casually, more casually than he felt. He glanced at the clock on the recording machine. Time was against him.

Dash put his head in his hands as if the weight had become too much.

'We were just a couple of boys, you know? The type you see down the street. At first.'

Boys down the street, where all the girls meet. Quay filed that away.

'But Franky had it, just like dad, only more. Franky was good with the piano and fucking awesome on the axe.'

Blues for a Single Girl had played softly in the background while Quay and Susie had made love. Before the pregnancy.

'And Franky had the pipes, see?' John said. 'When the band did that gig at the Colosseum....'

'I had the live album,' Quay said. Susie had bought it for him. He kept the remark matter-of-fact, but it prompted Dash.

'Yeah. Like an angel. I felt the song in my soul.'

The song in my soul. Quay added that to the list.

'But you didn't have it?' Quay asked.

Now Dash stared Quay in the eyes.

‘I can play, you know. But it wasn’t that. Kelley, she’s my kid, Kelley and me, we liked to watch Franky and the band on the box, Wembley and the Greek. That was his life. It wasn’t mine.’

Quay changed tack, going slowly after his objective.

‘After the fifth album, Franky went into seclusion,’ Quay stated, ‘about a year before his murder.’

Dash folded his arms on the metal table.

‘Franky and the Flyers. Five straight platinums,’ John said. ‘You must have seen his mansion. Sixty-five rooms, and I forget how many loos. And the cars. But it changed him. By the last album, I didn’t recognise Franky anymore.’

‘What changed him?’ Quay asked, his voice soft.

‘The usual. It’s why I didn’t want our Kelley going into the game. People, family, they didn’t matter to Franky anymore. They were just the people you see on a ferry to him.’

Quay stored that, too, “Just people you see on a ferry”. The man couldn’t help himself.

‘Tell me about the cars?’

John Dash shook his head slightly.

‘He bought them like they were packets of fags. He’d bend one and get that assistant of his to go buy another. Once, he broke three in a week.’

‘Tell me about that? Was anyone hurt?’

‘Me and Kelley, we just read the headlines and turned the page,’ he said.

“Read the headlines/turned the page when you’re gone”. Off the Red album.

‘I think,’ he continued, ‘I read this bird got knocked about. Dunno ...’

*

It was raining. Big fat drops still fell out of the sky. The road glistened, and the scene seemed to be defined by the light of the single street lamp. The driver of the Lamborghini stood underneath. Someone held an umbrella over his head and a steady hand on his arm while he signed autographs for the paramedics, the cops and a fortunate teenager.

On the other side of the little shredded sedan was a gurney with the body of the woman. The rain glued her hair to her face. Her blue and white dress, now mostly red, was plastered to the shape of her. She had a ball on her stomach, and her arms hung limply. Quay had tried to get to her, but fear dragged at him. She was packed into the ambulance and gone by the time he arrived. He was left to stare at the red eyes that vanished into the night.

*

‘Your daughter’s going into the game?’ Quay asked. He slid a bill from amongst the papers in the folder.

‘Yeah. That’s why I went to see Franky,’ John said, ‘to borrow some money and get help from the band for a proper demo. I asked if he’d help get it on the air.’

Quay nodded as if this was new information.

‘Franky said “No”.’ Quay said. ‘You were angry. You almost had an accident as you left his place.’

John Dash frowned. Andrew White looked puzzled, and eased his back from the wall.

‘How’d you know that?’ John Dash asked.

Quay thought quickly, 'It's our job to know.'

'Yeah, I was angry. They were my words in his mouth. But that bastard butler of his saw me go.'

Quay nodded.

'You couldn't have shot him and gotten home in time. We checked,' Quay said. 'Why wouldn't Franky help?'

Dash smiled but rather sadly.

'As soon as Kelley sang, everyone would know,' Dash said. 'The industry...'

Quay made a sound as if he was ready to finish up.

'You weren't jealous of Franky. After all, he had everything; the money, the mansions, cars, the girls'

'The light that shines the brightest,' John Dash said. 'It's something Franky'd never have. You're married. You got kids?'

Quay covered his wedding ring. The pain of a widower who'd buried his wife and unborn child was like a knife slicing through him.

'No. No, I don't,' Quay whispered.

'Kelley's the light of my life. It's all about her now.'

Quay nodded slowly and glanced up at White.

'Interview terminated at twenty-two twenty hours,' Quay said as he switched off the recorder.

‘I just needed to clear up that last point,’ Quay said. ‘Constable White will arrange for a car for you.’

Dash stood.

‘You’re not giving up, are you?’ he asked. ‘You’re still looking?’

‘Yes. We just had to clear you, procedure.’

John Dash nodded.

‘He had so much,’ Dash said. ‘But really, he had nothing.’

*

Quay was filling out a leave form on his computer when White stopped by his desk.

‘Couldn’t get a car, so I sent him home in a taxi,’ he said.

Quay nodded.

‘What was that bit about Johnny Dash almost having an accident as he left his brother’s place?’ White asked, he was guarded in the way he spoke.

‘I wanted to see how he reacted.’

‘But he wasn’t a suspect. We’d crossed him off.’

Quay stopped typing and appeared to think.

‘He might have arranged something. I just wanted to see,’ Quay said. ‘Monday, we go after Franky’s drug dealer. If the gun came from him, he’ll talk.’

White shrugged.

‘It was a throwaway, no serial number. We’ll never find the seller.’

Quay shook his head slowly and smiled briefly.

‘Someone sold it, someone knows, they’ll talk.’

‘Ok, gov.’

White turned away and made for the door.

‘Don’t be late Monday,’ Quay called. ‘We need to keep the momentum going.’

‘Right, gov,’ White said.

Quay finished typing, printed a copy, signed it and placed it on the Chief’s desk where he’d find it on Monday. Back at his desk, he took his phone from his pocket and typed into the SMS app, ‘Going to take a few days off. This case has reminded me too much of my wife’s death. I’m having trouble handling it.’ He selected White’s number, chose delayed send and set the date and time for Monday at 7.30 am. The phone went into his desk, which he locked.

Quay paused at the doorway to glance around the office one last time, then took the lift down to the ground floor. It dark and drizzling outside on the street. He turned right, then right again at the next street, and went down a few blocks.

Kintsukuroi. He knew he’d remember the name. It was a poor choice as a metaphor for solving a crime, but he’d never told Susie that. Sure, the bowl might be repaired and was possibly more beautiful, more valuable than before. What she hadn’t realised was that once the crime was solved, the victim was still dead. His wife and unborn daughter were still dead.

He made sure there were no familiar faces nearby, then hailed a taxi. A big black one with an engine that sounded as if it was grinding up small stones saw him and sidled over to the footpath.

‘Where to, governor?’ the cabbie asked as Quay climbed in.

Quay looked at him in the driver’s mirror. He wore a pork pie hat, had deep crevice’s around his eyes and folds of skin under his chin and eyes that said he remembered faces.

‘The airport,’ Quay replied.

‘Sure thing. No luggage?’

‘Meeting a friend,’ Quay lied. His travel case was waiting in a locker.

The rain came harder, hammering the roof of the cab. Cold seeped in through the driver’s window. Quay looked own into the rain, peering into the dark. He’d never be able to visit the cemetery with its single grave. The pain came back. It was there, always.

‘Domestic or international?’

‘International.’