

Rubbernecker

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All it takes to do a frontways flip is confidence, bro.

BMXing's about looking forwards, not back. Back's for fags, back's gay. That's why BMX is the shit, 'cause bikes only roll one way, dead ahead. They're badass. No brakes.

You're down at the Barrows instead of in PE, 'cause you can't look at the PE teacher and all her boobs and legs without boiling. The Barrows are, like, these mega-normous mountains of dirt where they're building the new development, scraping out holes that fill with lakes after it rains. They're not legit mountains but they're big enough to make the diggers look like Tonka trucks. They make the clouds look like the cotton wool buds Dad's girlfriend leaves in the bathroom when she stays over.

You stand on the seat and do some bunny hops. Your hands is bruised where they squeeze the bars. Your arms shake. The handlebars jolt. You bust through warning tape into, like, this area by the cliff where you're not sposda be but you don't look back. Helmets are for snitches and you forgot to wrap your school shirt round your face so it's a bandana and you get a feed of crane flies buzzing into your mouth but so what? The wind ruffles your hair, feels like Mum's fingers. They reckon chicks is good at multi-taxing, and that's 36% true, she'd be scratching your head at the same time as Tyse's and pressing the iron on a teatowel laid, like, real careful over your best hoodie. She was spesh... Not spesh like Tyse, like actually spesh. She went away when it got real sucky at home. Tyse was full-on, she'd give him a action figure and he'd twist its head round til it snapped, like, five seconds after she'd just bought it for him. Mum snapped too.

There's like this staircase of steps cut out of the mud with big bulldoze scoops, it leads down to the lowest part of the Barrows, the mud and lakes and reedweed, and you bump down some of the smaller steps, spilling dirt, braking heaps, trying not to get off and walk your bike, no rubbernecking, no backwards. Tyse woulda dared you to do a flip.

You hit the lowest point in the giant hole where it's all slushy and lookin up, you see the supervisor, the Big Dude, resting his blubber on his shovel handle. He's a real quiet, brown dude. You're pretty sure he doesn't know you bin watching him.

He's the only other one who knows how come Tyse had dirt on his dick. They thought Tyse'd been fiddled with, like, sexily.

Dumbasses.

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They sent you home 'cause you bin acting up like Tyson, that's how they said it. They expect you to be a total nerd now that Tyse's bin taken away. They reckon you bin changing, but that ain't it: the rest of your world's what changed. Stuff's always diff if you look at it as you're movin away.

If any of them teachers had given a fuck about you, they'd've asked you What's up, Dare, and you'd've told them how the teacher saw Tyson's name on the attendance roll and was like, 'Funny, he should've been deleted by now,' and you Hulked out, pulled the gap behind the whiteboard til it came off the wall. They bin fixing to suspend you anyhow, for selling Tyse's Ritalin in the boys' toilets, the pink ones, Tyse's bestest colour.

On the way home you balance shit out. You rumble these little Boy Scout faggots in the alleyway, or Mormons or whatevs. Their junk mail says this bullshit about 'Helping Out Our brothers in Africa'. Makes you red hot angus, that help-your-brothers junk. You knock the coins out of their hands and the little one drops his L&P and it foams everywhere. The bigger one of em starts crying and you think you're gonna puke. The walls of the alleyway's looking real close and your balls hurt like epic. Everything's gay after the big faggot cries. The big one's sposda be staunch.

The rusty chain squeals as you hoon off and leave the Girl Guide faggots behind you. This was kind of a dumb bike to borrow, it's really slow, you needed your bro's help on this one, he was mean at borrowin stuff.

It's only when you get to the Barrows that you can breathe normal and the air tastes more smooth. On the bridge, you stop to throw some rocks at the ducks; you find a stick what looks like a boomerang and hiff it at the beehive and jump back on your BMX and boost. Tyse always reckoned Mum and Dad fighting in their bedroom sounded like bees, if you put your ear against the bathroom wall, this sorta violent hum, like a electric fence, or like with beehives, like how you can hear it's around you and you only see one or two bees until you run right into them. That's Mum and Dad beefing.

The hood falls off your head and there's wind on your gums and you hold a wheelie for ages then slam it down and a whole wave of mud comes up and you're like, 'Random!'

You keep a eye on the sheds in the distance. Big Dude might'a heard. You're not sposda be in the Barrows.

Secretly, in the pocket of your hoodie, is the L&P and pink straw. Your bros don't know you come down here and sip L&P, 'cause if they seen you and the pink straw... yeah.

Not that they're your bros really... Not *legit* bros. You only get one bro in your life and if you could make a new bro out of mud, like a Golem bro, like on that movie, it still wouldn't be the same.

You go around expecting peeps to arks you all the time, '*What happened, did he get pedo'd for real?*' but if you look back to think about it, you'll get hurt. It's called Rubbernecking, you heard them say it on *Police Ten 7* about peeps who crash 'cause they shouldn't've stared at a car wreck.

Up a newly-grassed hill you can overlook the hole they're fillin in. It's a monstrous-arse hole, bro, like the holes in Tyson's gums after his teeth came out. The big hole-supervisor? You hate him more than anything but you feel stink for him trying to fill that hole in. Around it, they've seeded the dirt and the grass is like

little green pubes on a shaved fagina. You pop wheelies, carve some decent ruts, and catch yourself lookin' back to check no one's eyeballing you. You don't want no one to see you fuck up 'cept Tyse. You pop a wheelstand, pull off a 540 even though all the pressure hurts tonnes on your split-open knuckles.

No one sees the 540. Well, Tyse probly sees.

Now they've nailed the wood and poured the concrete, they're smoothing out the land, filling in the hole as if shit's back to norms and this massive great, like, thing in your life wasn't never even there. At the bottom of the hole, there's this heinous clay-water. In the water is bugs and alien weeds and the mosquitoes is so thick you can hear em before you see em. That's where Tyse drank his first beer, 'til you told him that it was just a can you'd pissed in. They've built the skeleton of a bridge across the hole and they're heaping earth around the foundations and stuff. It's weird to see something as normal as a bridge stripped down to skinny bits of steel. You wonder if, under their overalls, all strong people look like that, uncoated and naked.

You wobble on the edge and whole plants stop and just their roots is stickin out. It's deep down there and you stare into it, dead-on. Tyse was the first to lose a bike down there, you couldn't believe that shit! He woulda bin sooooo busted, nine times outta ten, but you knew what he was thinkin: walk home, right, say somethin badass to Dad's girlfriend, get her all riled up so's Mum has to come home and have a family conference, everyone forgets about the lost bike: sussed. You could boost a new BMX easy-as, anyway, you might as well get a few in before they kick you outta school. Tyse was a brainbox, when he got his shit together, it's just with his brain-thing.... Y'know, it's hard for special needses to concentrate on spelling tests. He used to rark people up somethin fierce before we got split up.

As you start to tip, you stop pedalling and shit just floods into your head, like the brown water squeezed out of the mud as your tyres roll over it. You had to munt the springs on Dad's bed to get to see Mum last time, jumpin on it, folding the mattress in half and that. Mum was pissed but she kept giggling into her hanky too, she seemed secretly happy Dad and his lady couldn't sneakily root in the bed no more, and that she got the afternoon off work, and you and Tyse did your secret handshake under the table, like Mission Accomplished, bro. Didn't get rid of Dad's girlfriend though. FML.

The ground's crumbling underneath you like a gingernut that's been left in Milo too long. Your balls go cold, you knock the bike on its side. A meganormous, car-sized shelf falls into the hole, the big pit, these big chunks of dark, nasty earth like brown icebergs.

'Do it Dare! Do it, Pussy! Puuussssy!'

There's a ledge beneath you, a different kind of rock, where the cliff's not as steep. It's only like ten metres and there's gorse bushes to land in.

'Do it, Darek'

'Shut up, dick. Take a chill pill.'

'Wanna try one?'

'Mum said you gotta take it. She said, bro.'

For a sec, the BMX is slippin out under you, then the world king-hits you and the handlebars go someplace else and it's weird to see mud fallin slower than you.

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This face like a Cookie Time with black chocolate eyes peers over the edge of the hole, sees you're not dead, and vanishes.

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The Big Dude's got a winch on the back of his ute and he lowers it right down to the bottom of the hole.

He hauls your arse up outta there and sits you down and there's this faggy paedo silence and you think he's gonna say somethin about the broken window of his ute, which he still ain't got fixed, then he offers you a smoke. He's got a sausage roll in the chest pocket of his overalls and a smoke in his lips and there's this shiny bit of sausage grease on the gold bit of his smoke. His back is like a rubbish bag full of pillow cases and framed photos, all corners sticking out of this round bulk, like Mum's rubbish bag full of shit, and he blocks out the view. Could the Big Dude take your dad in a scrap? Dad's pretty staunch, Tyse used to nut out some days and come at him with rakes and shit and Dad would turn away so his back would take the impact 'til the rake broke and Dad was covered in muddy rake-marks. Then Dad would put his hi-vis socks in the wash and make tea for us without sayin nothing, not dissing Mum, even.

You didn't figure, watching the dude from ages away, that up close you'd only come up to his chest. His hand's the size of a Frisbee, bro. It's heavy and warm on your shoulders like a backpack with two scoops of chips in it.

You don't look back at him as he marches you over to the work camp. Things here are pretty much done once they've cementalled the bridge legs and filled the hole in, so there's like no workmen around. The sky's bruise-coloured and the cold wind is the only person talking.

He makes you sit on the barrel, and you wait, drumming with your heels. He comes back with your bike and uses coffee from his own thermos to wash the dirt off your knees and it feels like a warm dog tongue and he scrapes your bike clean and lays it down on a tarp. The way he sets your bike down, real gentle, is like how Mum would put your hot, ironed laundry down outside your door when you couldn't hear her knock 'cause you was playin GTA and Tyse was screaming about the pink cars. Him and pink, bro... the pink he nuttered out over most was his diddle, he used to play with it all the time, like at the movies and church and shit.

They're gonna fill the hole three-quarters, Big Dude reckons. Leave a circliar lake around the outside. His words are the loudest thing in the whole valley, but there's something munted about his talk, he sounds like a Downer. You're surprised, for a second, that he even needs to speak, 'cause you two sorta had a understanding. They'll chuck geese and swans and all that gay crap in the lake.

'Like, a moat?' you go, 'Like a park?' His big head wobbles. It's already a park. Just leave it, bro.

You ask the big dude where you and Tyse is sposda practice your flips and he goes, 'Chew should not be dooink dancherous fink.' He can't pernounce shit

properly with his big lips and nose and ears, like he says 'fink' instead of 'things' and he says 'chew' instead of 'you.'

He gets up and you think he's gonna waste you and you close your eyes and lean away and your dick fills with piss but the big dude just hands you a Big Blak Sak. He's got one himself and he starts fillin it with workmen's rubbish, BK cups and smoke butts, pie wrappers and used-car ads and Miss June. He doesn't say nothing. You groan and pick up a napkin with tomato sauce on it, and a Coke can, the horse pages, a random graph drawn on a page and lots of squares of broken window glass from his ute, and after you've filled a whole rubbish bag, he takes your bad hand, the one you used to punch the whiteboard, undoes a strap on his overalls, spits on your cut knuckles and wipes the black blood off.

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Mum was being a total skank, she was paranoid, bro. Dad would *never* pash your PE teacher, Mum musta bin on crack, or had her period. Probly both. Mum was on edge all the time 'cause it was usually her what took care of Tyse and she hardly got enough from the caretaker's benefit and it stressed her out to the max, and on that day Dad'd psyched out at Tyse for making a moat on the lounge carpet with his L&P with the red food colouring in it when yous were playing Castle Baghdad and Mum came back with some shit about the bedseets bein folded the wrong way and "TELL ME WHO MADE IT" and yous were hiding under the table filmin it on your phone and crackin up and Mum heard and yelled at yous to 'Piss off And Don't Come Back'.

You stopped your bikes out front of the Punjabi shop and you bought Tyse a L&P. He almost stopped crying, sucked the snot back down his throat. You went back inside the dairy and asked, without even swearing, for a straw (a pink one) and that stopped his tears better than any hanky.

'Shot Dare,' he went, licking bogies off his top lip. He looked up and grinned at you. His mouth was dark and pink except for his bottom teeth.

Wheeling past the hole, headed for the big shed, you dared him to do a front flip off the edge of the cliff and land in the bottom of the hole; he started giggling and touching himself.

If you rubbed the diesel smog off the glass and stared into the blackness of the workmen's shed real hard, you could see calendars with titties on them. You had to hold Tyse back 'cause he wanted to see so bad but there was only room on the oil barrel for just you. He wanted to see them titties so bad he pitched this stiffy in his pants that actually pulled the pants away from this stomach! He had to get off his bike and push, that's how hard his stiffy was, bro! You shoulda seen it.

So, 'cause there was no proper chicks around, Tyse and you builded this woman out of mud, but she looked too much like Mum so you changed the face. Tyse had this wig he'd found under Mum and Dad's bed after Dad's secret girlfriend stayed over, and he had it stashed down his pants and soon as you finished drawing the fanny on the mud-chick with your stick, Tyse put the wig on her and dropped to his knees and, like, started banging this mud-chick. Turns out you built her a bit short 'cause Tyse's knees was, like, touching his elbows, but he

was into it, and you were like, Bro, you're sick, so you stuck Miss March on the mud-head and weighted it down with a rock.

'How is it?'

'It's dry', he went, *'Pass my L&P, Dare, pass it.'*

He cracked it open and poured L&P on her fagina and banged it harder 'cause she was frigid and, *bro*, he fully jizzed! There was even like a second spurt when he stood up! So, like, his dick was black with mud and he was spitting in his hand and wiping it off while you and him shared L&P through the straw.

'Look, Dare, hur hur! Now it's pink!'

'You're a full-on paedo, bro.'

After you'd had a go of the mud-woman yourself, Tyse started laughing at you, cause he said you were drinkin his jizz.

You were trying to karate chop him but he was too quick on the BMX, and anyways you were laughing too hard and it hurt your abs so you went, 'Chill, I'm not gonna waste ya: you gotta do a dare instead.'

You dared him to smash the window of the ute 'cause you'd seen smokes and a Playboy in it. Tyse hadn't taken his medication so he was game-as. He picked up this massive rock and busted the window and grabbed the big dude's Playboy and boosted.

Honest, you wish you'd never dared him.

Thing is, the sides of the hole looked all good if you had time to straighten up while you were falling. If you got right to the bottom of the big hole, you could run to the other side and it'd be way hard for the big dude to catch you.

So yous were biking around the outside of the hole, looking for a bit that wasn't too steep to jump from. You were supposed to jump first, 'cause you were his big bro.

The big dude rumbled up in his ute, lookin out the broken window, lookin pissed and you were like, *'Bail!'*

'C'mon Darek,' he went, *'Just go forward,'* but you couldn't find those hard structures in your legs, your legs was mud with skinny thin naked chopsticks in the middle. Just go over the edge, land on the side, ditch your bike, nick a new one later, no probs... plus the flip, you haaaad to flip it, else you were a fag.

But you couldn't dare your little bro back, 'cause that would make you a piker.

He pulled in front of yous. His big Ford was too massive to go around. He was halfway outta the cab quicker than any human shoulda moved, specially a dude as bulky as him. He grabbed Tyse's handlebars and flipped him off like Tyse was just a spider or somethin. You thought he was gonna smash Tyse but he helped Tyse to his feet, and Tyse didn't like that: Tyse just went for it.

The big dude was wearing that bright orange vest. Tyse was kickin holes in his fat orange guts, pounding and pounding, and the big dude was having a hard time holding him out of kickin range. Tyson screams when he's having a proper spaz, and gets all this foam on his chin like bubble bath. I don't think Tyse liked the colour of the big dude's vest.

The last time Tyse had screamed like that was when Dad had said he'd had

Enough. It was Just Coffee With 'The Boys' Teacher, Dad'd went, but Tyse'd jumped on the bonnet of Dad's car and ripped the windscreen wipers off and bitten them til his teeth folded and his gums went purple for like a whole month.

Tyse and the big dude were getting hella close to the edge of the hole and you cracked up when Tyse's shoe clobbered the big cunt in the dick – he was fully gonna take him! The big dude even stumbled back, but he musta done boxing or somethin 'cause the dude had good footwork, you shoulda seen it, he caught his balance on the back foot, stepped forwards and – swear to God bro, you didn't even see his arm – he grabbed Tyson's fist and whirled him around like a tango, bro, not even telling him to calm down like the Teacher Aide woulda. But Tyse – not looking backwards, all full of mental – took another swing.

You don't smash someone that's holding onto you. Tyse shoulda knowed.

It was like someone'd hit the delete button, bro, suddenly Tyse just wasn't there. You thought, just for one tiny second, *Hang on bro* – forget the dare. Cancel the dare, it's too steep, don't –

The big dude was already in his ute, flashing lights on top, rubbernecking and driving away.

That was the first time you jumped down the cliff – well, *fell*. Ordinarily Tyse woulda held you back.

'It's too slopey, Dare.'

The crumbly ledge hadn't held him – he'd fallen through the gorse so his lips looked like squashed strawberries. Even though he had dirt in his eyes, he was lookin at you. His head and his body was facin' completely different ways, he was rubberneckin, lookin back at you.

That's what happens when your neck's broke.