

23 July 1993:

## Coarse language studies

‘Seriously, why not?’

Becky didn’t make eye contact with me, she just kind of smiled knowingly as she continued to write on her notepad in our tenth grade English class at Redbank Plains State High School; the school was often called Deadbank High by the kids, a nickname that said more about people’s opinion of the suburb than the school. Redbank was the suburb next to Goodna, so most of the kids from my neighbourhood went to high school here.

This was week two of my ‘must get Becky’ campaign and I had no plans of stopping here. I had made questionable headway, if any at this point, but for reasons beyond my understanding I couldn’t get Becky out of my head; worse, I couldn’t get her out of my stomach. When I saw her, I got butterflies. The butterflies were both awesome and horrible, I felt weirdly happy, but wanted to vomit. I had never had butterflies before and I didn’t want them to go away.

‘You know why, I told you,’ she finally looked at

me, 'I have a boyfriend.'

I didn't even hear what she said, all I could see was her eyes. Gorgeous light green pools that I wanted to drown in and never leave. As far as I was concerned, Becky looked just like Erika Eleniak from Baywatch, one of the only shows Dad and I religiously watched together. There was a consistent argument amongst all my male friends over who was hotter—Erika or Pamela Anderson. I was team Erika, and by association team Becky all the way.

I pictured Becky running in slow motion towards me in an iconic Baywatch one-piece sheer red swimsuit, hair and breasts bouncing gloriously. My butterflies flapped. I told them to stop, I needed to focus.

'Dane? That guy? Seriously, what do you see in him? I'd be a way better boyfriend than him.'

I had absolutely nothing to substantiate that claim, but I believed strongly in a rule of 'at all times, project confidence'.

'Oh you would?'

'Absolutely. Name something that guy has that I don't and I'll name something that I bring to the table that he doesn't.'

Becky's smile was playful and mischievous. Despite her protests, I could tell, she liked me trying to win her. If she wanted me gone, she'd tell me to fuck off and probably kick me in the balls. Goodna

girls were subtle like that.

‘And if he has something that you don’t, you’ll quit asking me out?’

I hesitated. My ‘project confidence’ rule suddenly felt like arse in my mouth. What if I was overplaying my hand and Dane was awesome?

I didn’t know too much about Dane though I’d met him before. He seemed like an okay guy, and even though we’re not actually friends I did kind of feel like an arsehole for doing this. Adding to this dilemma was the fact that Dane did kickboxing and had a ring through his nose. The latter part wasn’t an issue, but the first meant that if he found out I was hitting on his woman, he’d most likely wipe the floor with me and rightfully so. But Dad always said that when it came to girls, you had to be honest about your feelings. Even if the girl didn’t share those feelings, even if there was someone else, she would respect that you took a chance and were willing to fight.

That’s how my Dad got Mum. As far as I was concerned, my father held all the secret knowledge of wooing women. I treated his advice like the holy gospel and cherished every word he uttered on this particular topic.

Jesus, would totally listen to Dad about girls.

As I mulled on the image of Dad speling to Jesus about women, I was struck by a sudden doubt. Did Dane own a car? Lots of seniors had cars and all the

girls would pile into them after school ended. Most of them did burnouts on the dirt patch in front of school, while the other kids cheered and the teachers went nuts. Fuck. If he had a car, I was fucked.

Fuckity fuck fuck.

I struggled to remember if I had ever seen Dane get to school. I had a vague image of Dane chaining up a BMX bike to the bike racks. No car—I had a shot.

I nodded in response to Becky's question. I was all in.

Becky smiled and leaned in conspiratorially towards me. As she did so my attention was captured by the sight of her breasts drifting forwards in her shirt. For a moment I forgot where I was and what I was doing—from this angle I could see perfectly down her top. She was wearing a lacy bra. It was black. I had never seen a real black bra before. All the girls I had seen wore white bras or ridiculous trainer bras with flowers on them like they're still kids. None of them wore lace.

I took Caryn home once and made out with her under my house. We were both studiously re-watching Kevin Costner perform in 'Dances with Wolves', while not watching the movie at all. With my eyes still fixed on the screen I had slipped a hand under her shirt and started running my hand up her back to undo her bra when I encountered a mystery—no clasp. I was so surprised I completely broke the

ruse of pretending to watch the movie and said out loud 'there's no clasp on your bra' like a fucking moron. She got all embarrassed and had to explain what a training bra was.

Becky had clasps on her bra. She had lace. This wasn't a training bra for little girls; this was a woman's bra.

In my mind, I had visions of Becky standing before me, her torso clothed only in that sexy black bra. She gave me a knowing look and as her hands reached behind her back for the clasp, my ears filled with the chorus of angels and a soft glow emanated from the upper edge of where her breasts met the material of that holy relic, the only thing that now stood between me and that which I so desperately wanted to see...

I locked the image in my head for a moment longer. One of my friends told me that the only reason a girl wears a black bra is if she wants a guy to see she's wearing it. I prayed they were right, because I would do almost anything to see those breasts in all their glory.

The sound of Becky starting to whisper to me suddenly reminded me of the seriousness of what was happening. In the next sixty seconds, I would either spiel my way into Becky's good graces, or into another round of dismal, dismal rejection.

'He has, a really, big... dick.'

I paused. Did she just say that Dane had a big

dick? Was this the only ace up Dane's sleeve? In my head the mental image of Becky was replaced with the picture of my Dad, beaming with pride at the full house his son was secretly packing.

Thanks for the DNA Dad; I'll take it from here.

Poker face time. I did my best to look completely unimpressed, 'Uh-huh. How big?'

Becky adopted a studied appearance of disbelief that indicated I should not embarrass myself, 'Danny, he's a senior,' she made a noise that clearly indicated an inability to grab the correct words for why this conversation was completely ridiculous, 'He's like twice the size of you,' Becky made a show with her hands indicating Dane's height and width.

I allowed a small smile to creep onto my carefully composed face. It was my turn to lean forward, the motion making us almost uncomfortably close, our faces mere centimetres apart. The words came out of my mouth slow and light, in a show of complete confidence, 'How... big?'

Becky sat back in her chair, putting some distance between us as she mulled over my reaction. Her previous expression had disappeared completely and in its place a shrewd thoughtful look adorned her features. Clearly coming to a decision of some kind she muttered the word 'okay' and leaned forward again, just close enough to keep things private, before holding up the index finger on each hand and spacing

them apart at about roughly six inches.

My smile grew and I made a ‘pfft’ noise to indicate I was significantly unimpressed.

She gave me a tiny, naughty smile and said saucily, ‘and then, it gets hard...’

Slowly, the space between her upright fingers grew.

It spaced out seven inches, and I paused.

Eight inches, my confidence wavered.

Nine inches—

‘Oh c’mon his dick isn’t that big—’

‘MR KROKER!’

The class giggled as our English teacher bellowed at me.

Shitshitshit! Did I just say that out loud?!

I turned to watch Mr Ensich stare at me over brown thick-rimmed glasses pushed down low on his nose. He had curly salt and pepper hair that stood out at about two inches from his skull in a manner that suggested he’d been electrocuted recently. I couldn’t remember ever seeing this guy smile. I actually quite liked his class but I wasn’t entirely sure he liked me. That actually put him ahead of at least 50% of my teachers who I knew with a certainty hated me.

I tried to pull my entire body into an invisible fetal structure at the sound of his voice and uttered the words, ‘Yes sir.’

‘Mr Kroker. The class we are in is called ‘English

language studies’, not ‘coarse language studies’. If you find it absolutely necessary to discuss another man’s penis in this class, then please, at least refer to it by its proper name.’

‘Yes sir,’ I again repeated glumly. The class sniggered in response but was drowned out by the bell signaling that lunch break was starting. Without waiting for instruction to do so the class began to pack up, eager to leave. I grabbed my books and followed suit, quickly putting my things away until Mr Enschede raised his voice above the sounds of the clanging, ‘Before you leave Mr Kroker you shall write a sentence for me five hundred times to ensure that you remember the correct way to speak the next time you are in this class.’

I groaned. Damn it. Detention, again. I turned back to Becky only to watch her exit the room with the rest of the class. Inside, I crumbled. Becky had given me a chance to woo her and I’d not only blown it but managed to look like an arse in front of the entire class while doing so. My butterflies were swatted by the cruel hand of despair as the last of the class exited the door.

I was devastated. She was gone, and I had no idea what to do next.

I turned away from the door and sat down in my seat, pulling my notepad and pens back out of my bag as I prepared to start my lines for Mr Enschede.

‘Ms Jones, can I help you?’

I looked up from my notepad in surprise and turned back to the door. Becky stood there, leaning against the frame of the door. She had her backpack slung over her shoulders and was holding each of the straps in her hands. She’d come back! My butterflies weakly flapped their wings on the floor of my stomach, clinging to life.

She looked a bit embarrassed to be standing there and if she had heard Mr Ensich’s question she ignored it, choosing instead to speak to me.

‘What would you bring to the table Danny?’

I could feel Mr Ensich’s eyes on my back as he watched our exchange and did my best to ignore it. If he had a problem with this particular interlude, he wasn’t saying so.

I quickly thought back to Dad’s advice, the thing that had guided me to this point in the first place. I quickly reiterated to myself what he’d said to me.

Be honest, fight for the girl, damn the consequences.

Okay, but be honest about what?

The only thing I could think of was my butterflies—that I’d never felt them before, not with any girl but her. But I had no idea how to explain those feelings, no idea that if I had them, that they would even mean anything to her. I tried to think of a way to explain why they mattered. I was terrified, and

when I get scared I make jokes—truckloads of terrible jokes. But I didn't want to be funny, I wanted to be real. I tried to think how someone else would say this, someone who was better than me, more serious. I thought about all the books I read, stories about knights and honour. What would one of my dragon-slaying heroes say?

I stood up, opened my mouth and let words fall out.

'I'd treat you like a princess. Like my princess,' I stopped not even quite sure of what I'd said, but sure that it felt right. Language like lightning arced through my mind, a chaotic whirlwind of words working to come together in such a fashion as would enable me to articulate that which was inside me and why I thought it was important, 'If you were mine, you'd be the only girl that mattered to me... and every day, I'd make sure that you knew it.'

The room hung ominously silent as I watched for a reaction from Becky.

Becky's embarrassed expression faded, replaced instead with surprise. After two weeks of banter and just dogged persistence, she clearly hadn't expected this side of me. To be honest, neither had I.

A second more passed as she digested what I'd said. A slow smile spread over her face.

'See you in English tomorrow Danny.'

With that she turned and walked away.

At her departure, I sat down suddenly, my legs unwilling to support me any longer.

See you tomorrow...

A big toothy smile split my face.

I'm still in.

'Congratulations Mr Kroker, despite appearances, it would seem that you are in fact a gentleman and a scholar.'

I looked up at my English teacher; I'd almost forgotten he was there. As I realised what he said, I took a moment to beam under the compliment, 'Thank you sir.'

'Now, do your lines.'

'Yes sir.'

I began writing. Ordinarily, five hundred lines would give my hand cramps. But today, five hundred lines felt like nothing.

Today, my hand was held high by butterflies.