

***I'm Not Really Here* by Gary Lonesborough**

It's a warm Thursday afternoon when we pull up at the front of our new home in our new town – the town of Patience. The streets are lined with small houses built of bricks and wood, most of which wear peeling paint and hold old cars in their driveways and discarded toys and swing-sets in their front yards. Our front yard is bare, no trees or flowers or garden – just a gate, a freshly mowed lawn, and a narrow cement pathway up to the house. There are two long rectangular windows on either side of the white wooden front door. The house itself is orange brick with a tiled roof, and looks about fifty years old, like the rest of the houses on this street.

Our real estate agent waves to us from the steps. She's wearing a light blue collared shirt underneath a black blazer, her short blonde hair slicked to the side. She stomps out her cigarette and I imagine what she's seeing as she approaches us: an early 2000s model Holden Astra with an Aboriginal family inside – Dad and his three sons.

Patience didn't look like much from the top of the mountain we had to travel over to get here. Surrounding it are acres and acres of dairy farms, which Dad says keeps the town running. Heading into town, we crossed a bridge over a river, and passed bare fields, where someone was riding a horse. I saw a lagoon but I couldn't see any ducks swimming. The main street was long and busy with shops and people and cars and traffic lights. Then, we drove over a big hill, passing a church and a school and a motel. We turned down a hill, and now, we've arrived at our new home.

Dad's all smiles as he waves to the real estate agent. It's the first time we've had our own home in years. Dad and Auntie Jo scouted the house online, already picked out rooms for us so we wouldn't fight over them.

'Here we are, boys,' he says.

Dad's first out of the car, and then me; Zeke and Luke follow. My legs are still waking up from the six-hour drive.

We walk into the front yard. Dad's been trying to get us to Patience for the past year. He's told us stories of growing up here, riding his bike around town with his cousins and friends, how they'd bike out of town to the river when it was hot, and how he won grand finals for the local footy team, but now that we're here, it feels kind of disappointing.

I look over the trailer attached to the back of the car. It's bulky and full, covered in a blue tarp. It's hard to believe our whole lives are contained beneath that tarp.

'Fred King? Lovely to meet you in person,' the real estate agent says as she shakes Dad's hand.

'You too, Miss Waters,' Dad says.

'Please, call me Wendy.' Wendy Waters. What a shit name. She points to the trailer. 'Looks like you're all set to move in.'

'We don't have much, to be honest,' Dad tells Wendy Waters. 'I've been in touch with my old school friend Cherry. She's got a spare bed frame and a fridge we can have. Once we've emptied the trailer, we'll go grab 'em.'

Dad gestures for me, Zeke and Luke to come closer.

'These are my boys,' Dad says. 'This is my eldest, Jonah.' I shake Wendy's hand and her palm is sweaty. She sees me – a fat boy with brown skin whose shirt is tighter than it should be. She can see

my man boobs and the sweat pooling on my shirt underneath them. 'He's in Year Eleven, a budding writer.'

'Hi,' I say. Dad always mentions I'm a *budding writer* whenever he introduces me to someone, all because I won this comp when I was ten and a few teachers went out of their way to tell him I'm a good writer.

'And this is Zeke and Luke, my eight-year-old twins,' Dad says.

The boys wave to Wendy Waters, not saying a word.

'Well, you really lucked out that we had a -three-bedroom house to fill,' Wendy says. 'I'm glad you could make it so quickly. Welcome to your new home.'

Wendy leads us up the four steps to the front door. After she unlocks the door, she hands the keys to Dad, saying they belong to him now.

Dad follows Wendy inside and me, Zeke and Luke loiter outside. There's a small concrete platform before the door – a perfect spot for a *welcome* mat or a *fuck off and leave us alone* mat.

'This is like our *old* house,' Luke says.

'Not really,' I reply, as Zeke and Luke disappear inside.

The bottoms of my shoes click on the lino floor. The front of the house is the living room, with a small kitchen behind it. There's an oven at the end with a bench and sink on one side and cupboards on the other. Everything is empty and bare and there's a strong smell of cleaning products in the air, lemon scented.

The hallway is narrow with doors on either side, and the back door is straight ahead, where the lino stops and tiles begin in the laundry at the end of the hallway. Zeke and Luke's voices are echoing from the first door to my right.

'This looks like a good spot for the bunk bed,' Dad says to Zeke and Luke. He holds his hands out like a photo-grapher framing a shot. 'We can put it against this wall. What do you reckon?'

'Yeah,' Zeke replies, rushing to the wall opposite the one Dad is envisioning bunk beds on. 'And I can put my Undertaker poster up here.'

'Yep,' Dad smiles. 'And Luke can put his Roman Reigns one next to it. And we could get a couple of beanbags as well.'

The bedroom is carpeted, with a built-in wardrobe, the doors of which are full mirrors. Dad spots me at the doorway.

'Your room's across the hall, Jonah,' he says. He follows me into my room, which is smaller than Zeke and Luke's. There's a large square window, white blinds rolled up at the top. I slide the window open and dust flickers in the air. The outside of the screen is dressed in cobwebs.

'Can I get curtains?' I ask.

'Yeah,' Dad says. 'We can get those hooks with the sticky stuff and put up a curtain. We'll get you a single bed and a bookshelf. Might be able to fit a desk in here as well.'