

# Hole in the Wall

By Rob Dunn, Tau / Hamilton

"Cheers dude," I say as Coop passes me another beer.

We crack open, drink, and lean against the wall, watching Killer Dave, Grant, and the two Micks play Beirut. We just lost to the two Micks, whose true names are Bob McGregor and Mike Spencer, but both introduce themselves as Mick. We'd all met playing rugby freshman year and have been together since. McGregor and Mick Spencer had beaten us in a three-in-ten game, and beaten us badly, which meant that Coop and I had more to drink than was probably good for us, the beers warm and flat as they always get in a game of Beirut. It was my fault, it was our third game and I had lost my shot, though normally I'm pretty good. Normally I'm real good.

We're hanging out in the common room and adjoining pool room and lounge of one of the old fraternity houses. An attached kitchen is used almost exclusively to hold beer and paper towels to clean up the occasional puke. Guns N' Roses rocks from the stereo in the common room, Welcome to the jungle, we got fun and games and McGregor is telling Killer Dave that he has no chance of making his next shot.

I take what I think might be the last full pull from my flask. I had filled it with whiskey this afternoon, and had been drinking it since then. Seeing as how it was nearly empty, I probably needed a bigger flask. I dropped it back in my pocket. When I look up, Eileen is looking at me but she turns away as soon as eye contact is made, turns back to one of her girlfriends and laughs at something I can't hear. She lives in the building, this beat old house, and hangs out with us whenever we party here. I watch Eileen for a moment, listening to a story that some other girl is telling her.

Eileen is pretty, damned pretty, black wavy hair to the shoulders, athletic, big smile. She looks over at me and Coop and smiles at both of us. Not an inviting smile, but a smile that says she acknowledges we are here. She is very beautiful when she smiles.

There is a group of people I don't know at the other table, maybe freshmen, maybe just people I haven't met or have forgotten, and a few other packs of people talking and drinking. A few of my friends with some people I don't know by name but with recognizable faces are in the other room smoking a bong. I wonder how good their weed is. I glance around the room, elbow Coop and motion with my chin to where Paul is hitting on a cute brunette. I recognize her, she's in one of my classes, but I don't know her name.

Paul never gets any play. He's ugly, balding, bad teeth and bad skin and bad manners, socially incapable and generally lame. I pity the girl he's talking to. Coop chuckles, enjoying watching Paul's hopeless floundering. I can't stand to watch too long, it makes me uncomfortable. To hell with Paul...I can't stand the sight of him, and I don't question why, and I don't intend to change.

Friday night, the official beginning of the weekend. Unofficially, it starts on Thursday night, but I had a paper due today, so I didn't drink last night except a few beers. The paper is behind me now, and it doesn't matter what it's about. It doesn't matter what grades I get. One more pretty bit of meaningless to let me know my worth as a person. All bullshit anyway. Work all week with ideas and beliefs that are deeply significant, receive a totally insignificant pretty bit of grading on whether you understand, whether or not you're prepared, whether or not you know...something. Spend the first twenty two years of your life sitting behind a desk and learning about amazing, wonderful and terrible things, but always learning through a book or lecture, and then you get a job. A job behind a desk. The weekend is an opportunity to forget all that, anyway you could. To nullify your life, anyway you could or anyway you would. We know many ways

and we're always looking for more.

"You cool dude?" Coop asks me.

I turn to him and say, "Yeah, what's up?"

"Nothing, you were just staring at the floor for a minute there."

"In my own world for a moment," I say.

"How was it?"

"Same as yesterday," I say. Coop chuckles, too loud, he's drunk. "Damn man, Paul is so sketchy," Coop says. He's still watching Paul, can't seem to tear his eyes off watching the lousy bastard. Coop continues with, "It's like reality television dude, watching him try to talk to this girl. The drama of real life."

"He's too ugly for television," I say, and Coop nods in quiet agreement. The conversation doesn't have anywhere to go after that. I pull out my flask again, just to check if it's still empty, and of course it is. I look at Coop, who grins and takes his out. We finish the whiskey in his. I finish my beer, toss it in the trash and look back at Eileen. I catch Coop watching me look at her, his eyebrows raise up.

"I'll give it a shot," I say. Coop smiles. I move around the room, approach Eileen, smile for her and ask, "How's your evening going?" She doesn't respond, but turns away and keeps watching the game as Grant sinks the double, which means not only do Grant and Killer Dave get the balls back, the Micks have to drink three beers rather than just two. Grant looks over, winks at Eileen, and she smiles. Her tongue between her teeth, a flirting smile. Shit.

"Any team with Grant is stacked," I offer. This time she does turn to me, smiling.

"Yeah it is, he's a beer pong wizard," she says, and I laugh because she wants me to.

"Such a supple wrist," I offer. Now she laughs and smiles at me.

Cultural references make up for any holes in my personality. Pathetic general rule of college students. "You're not bad yourself. When you're on, you practically carry Coop." It's true. I'm much better than Coop, but it doesn't matter. "Eh, I like playing with Coop. He's a good guy, and though it takes him a bit to find his shot every game, he's indispensable on the last few cups."

We look over at Coop, who is either drunker than I thought he was or drunker than he thinks he is. He isn't much for pretending, so my guess is that Coop is hammered. He raises his beer and winks at us, and I laugh. Eileen's face doesn't hide her disdain. Coop isn't that much to look at, short, slightly overweight, and when he drinks his face gets a little too red, a little too splotchy and his forehead gets shiny with sweat. He's in a good mood tonight, or maybe he's just working harder at staying on his feet.

It pisses me off that Eileen doesn't care for him, but it doesn't matter either. Grant throws his shot, misses this time, curses aloud and Killer Dave claps him on the back to reassure him. It's meant well, but being a knock from Killer Dave it knocks Grant off his balance, he catches himself before he hits the table by a few inches and Dave laughs before he shoots. Dave misses as well, but they're so far ahead it doesn't matter.

The Micks try to do the classic one-high one-bounce shot, and Spencer makes his high shot. McGregor misses the bounce. I turn my attention back to Eileen, who smiles at me before turning back to the game. "So what's new with you? We don't have any classes together this term, the only time I ever see you is

down here with these bastards,” I say.

“Aren’t these bastards your friends?” she asks without looking at me.

“Yeah, of course. They’re my bastards. I wouldn’t mind tossing Paul out of a window, but otherwise, yes.” I think on that, on charging across the room, throwing a shoulder into Paul and watching him crash through the glass, falling through and seeing where the blood would stain the grass and broken bits of glass would glitter in the light. Eileen’s eyebrows raise the slightest amount and then reset themselves. She didn’t like that last comment. I have to watch it.

“You don’t think they’re bastards? We know our own,” I say and give her a smile, which she politely returns. “Ready? Ready for this shot? Are you sure you’re ready? It’s going to go in, so just relax and get ready. You know, I made this same little speech to your sister once,” Grant says and lets his ball fly. I laugh to myself. It’s funny because Grant’s the kind of guy who would nail your sister, and it isn’t funny for the same reason. Still, I’m laughing. Grant’s shot sinks dead center in the last cup, flecks of foam going over the edge and getting on the shirts of both the Micks. They had been beaten badly, and had to drink all of their beer as well as seven of Grant and Killer Dave’s. I watch Grant and Dave slap their hands and congratulate each other.

After their celebration, Dave leaned into Grant just enough to be personal, said something quietly and of great interest to me I’m sure, and then the Killer and Mick Spencer, forgoing his imbibing responsibilities, head down the hall towards the bathroom. Grant comes over and puts his arm around Eileen, who smiles at him and pulls herself closer in, away from me. I feel my teeth grit momentarily, but quickly smile and shake Grant’s hand. “Good shooting, dude,” I say.

“Thanks.” He pauses a moment. “If anyone wants, Killer Dave has some Aderol chopped and ready to go, he’s in the bathroom.” Grant wants me to leave, tempting me with Killer Dave’s addie so he can have a moment with Eileen. A moment is all he’ll need before she’ll...I say, “Nah, I’m alright.” I don’t go just to spite the bastard, as much as I would like some addie. I wonder how he’ll change tact. “Fair enough. Why don’t you be my partner dude, we’re the two best players here,” he asked me. Fucking brilliant on his part, if he can’t get rid of me, he’ll butter me up. But changing partners, that’s a loaded suggestion. You don’t desert your Beirut partner to make a better team. The only time it’s alright to switch it up was when you’re partner is preoccupied, and even then only temporarily. Socially unacceptable, completely taboo.

“That’s what I’ve been trying to tell him!” Eileen says, and Grant pretends to look shocked, flirting with her. My teeth again. I’m not enjoying this, fuck it and fuck them. “It’s all right, it’s fair and good the way it is now. Hold the table for a few more rounds, Coop and I’ll take you on.” I feel someone pass behind me, two heavy chicks and some bearded dude I don’t recognize. I try to turn around, but my turn fucks my balance and I have to step and stop to right myself. Looking around, I realize how many people are here that I don’t know. There’s another group of rugby players playing Beirut at a different table, a group of chicks shooting pool and more people just talking, hanging out, scanning the party for whatever they’re scanning for. Friends. Booze. A joint or bowl passing around, whatever, they’re scanning because they’re not getting what they came for, and of course I’m scanning too.

I see McGregor’s girlfriend, a sweetheart named Beth, talking with a chick named Holly. Holly has lost some weight and cut her hair since last spring, and while she has always been pretty, now she’s gorgeous. I shift my focus and shake my head, my head is slow on my neck and my guts pinch and distort.

I walk over to Coop. He has an open and an unopened beer, so I take the unopened from him and lean back against the wall, right where I had been only a few minutes ago.

“Did you see Holly?” I ask. He nods.

“How could I miss her?” he asks.

I look at him. He’s staring at her with sad eyes, and this brings me down, and bringing me down pisses me off, frustrates me. I know he won’t do a damn thing about it. He looks like he would fall over if it wasn’t for his leaning against the wall. “Dude, why don’t you go say hello, ask her how her summer was and shit?” I ask.

He drains half of his beer and shakes his head. “You go talk to her.” Classic Cooper.

I shake my head, I wasn’t the one falling in love here. “Not my type,” I say, and scan the room again, anything to attach my focus to. I begin watching Paul again, still talking to this poor brunette girl...she was talking with a few other people in a circle. Paul’s outside the circle, trying desperately to force conversation on her, but she clearly isn’t interested. I notice for the second time how attractive this unfortunate lady is, having already forgotten the first time. Brown hair a little past her shoulders, pretty face and a short skirt. Fit body. I’m interested, I’m game.

“Dude, will you do me a favor?” I ask.

“Uh, yeah, I guess so,” he says, still shifting his focus from the Beirut game to Holly and back again. “Play a game with Paul instead of me.” Coop closes his eyes as though he was very suddenly in pain. In truth, he might be. “No way dude. First of all, he sucks and we’re going to lose. Second of all, he sucks and I don’t want to give him any reason to think I want to chill with him. Thirdly, he sucks and we’ll have to drink a shitload of beer when we lose to Grant and Dave, and I’ll be drunker than I wanted to be and he’ll just get more annoying. And finally...dude, Paul sucks.” Coop makes a very convincing argument, but I know he’ll play, and he knows he’ll play.

“Coop, as a favor. I want a chance with this girl. I need this.” Coop looks over at Paul and the circle Paul isn’t a part of. Coop raises his eyebrows, he understands what I’m going to do. He wipes his face with his heavy forearm, rolls his eyes and nods.

“Thanks man, I appreciate it.”

“She’d better be worth it. And I got dibs on your firstborn.” I walk over to Paul and the girl, grab Paul’s arm mid-sentence, and say, “Hey man, you’re up. I’m done for now, for the night maybe, I want you to take my place with Coop on the table.”

“But, dude, but,” he said, looking from me, to the girl, to Coop, who waves him to come over.

“But nothing dude. You’re always complaining that you don’t get a chance to play, so go play.” As soon as I feel his body soften and I see in his eyes that he’s interested, I pull him with me, and he goes. It’s true, we never let him play, he’s terrible. Most people only need a few games to learn to play about as well as they’ll play the rest of their lives. Paul has always sucked, and he I’m sure he will into eternity.

I look back, and the girl raises her eyebrows, makes a relieved face and smiles. I wink and smile. Coop welcomes Paul to the table, but gives me the finger where Paul can’t see it. I grin at him. I owe him a case of beer, at least. I walk back to the girl, smile and introduce myself, but she knows me already. She makes room for me in the circle, I make a clever comment about Paul and all is good with the world. Her name is Kelsey. The conversation in the circle concerned all sorts of things about people I didn’t know, most of which centered around sex and relationships. I’m not that interested in the topic, but Kelsey, Kelsey is attractive enough and cool enough to keep me standing there and smiling and laughing at the right times. I

don't laugh too loud, because she has an infectious smile and giggle which turns me on and I don't want to miss it. I hear some yelling from some guys shooting pool.

“Oh! It's in the hole! Game, set, match, bitch!”

“That doesn't count, that was a Masse shot.”

“What the fuck dude, you never said no Masse shots. The shot counts.”

“When have we ever allowed them? It's an unspoken rule!”

“We went over the rules at the beginning, and you said nothing about putting some English on the ball!” The one contesting that it wasn't a fair shot lifted his cue like a weapon. I want them to fight.

I want to see that stick break across the other kids face. Or the other way around. Both strangers anyway.

“Fuck you dude. Fuck you. That was an unfair shot.” If there is noise from the rest of the party, I don't hear it, I'm lost in waiting for a fight, a chance to rush in and wreck.

“You lost. Deal with it.” Now words with intentional and obvious patience, they stare at each other. I can feel, I can fucking feel the blood in my body quicken, my face flush, on my toes, my hands are fists and my eyes are darting between the two. With any luck, this will turn into an all out brawl. I'm grinning from ear to ear. Silence in the building. All eyes on the two. They are still, so quiet, so still...the first kid throws his cue stick on the floor, curses the other one out some more and leaves the party.

Kelsey says something, but I don't understand a word of it, I don't care, I'm still lost in it. After a moment, I turn back to her, unclench my fist and jaw, try to relax my muscles. “What?” “That was interesting, I said.” “Yeah, I'm a little disappointed.” I look over at Coop and McGregor. Both of their hands are in fists, both of their eyes are flashing. They smile at me, shrug their shoulders. Maybe next time. I smile back, raise my eyebrows. They turn back to their game, I turn back to Kelsey.

“You play rugby, right? And aren't you in my American Literature class?” she asks, smiling and stepping a little closer to me. I nod, because I believe that I am. She starts talking about the teacher's idiosyncrasies and habits, and I laugh along with her incredible, infectious giggle. I thought I heard it before, I'd heard it in class. One of her friends, a girl I knew named Caroline, comes from behind and pulls on her sleeve. Kelsey leans into her, and Caroline stares at me as she whispers to Kelsey. Caroline wears too much makeup and I hate makeup. Makeup is a lie. Kelsey pushed her away, and then steps back towards me, closer than she had been before, and I'm happy. “What was that?” I ask. She shakes her head, smiles and says, “Nothing, she just thinks she's everyone's mother when she's drinking. So, do you want to sit down?” she asks me. I smile, because I'm in.

Half an hour later, we're sitting, a few more drinks, her arm around me and my hand on her ass as we make out on the sofa. I hear a few of my friends giving me shit from across the room, drunk, drunk as they are, so I give them the finger. Drunk, making out, I'm exactly where I am. It's always looking, trying to find the next moment to latch on to, really feel the moment rather than the endless otherwise of talking about, hoping for future moments and remembering those past, and now, I've got one and won't let it go. Or something. I'm drunk. Coops whiskey must have been more than I thought. And that's why I want Kelsey. Anyone really. But now, right now, her. She puts a hand on my groin, she must feel my hard-on, and then her arm is back up and around me, and then on my chest, and now she pushes me away. I pull her back to me, kiss her again and she responds and falls into me for a moment, but she pushes me away again, harder this time. We come apart.

“What? What is it?” I ask.

“I’m sorry,” she gasps, “but I don’t want this, not now. It’s not that I’m not attracted to you but I have to go, look, I’m sorry, my boyfriend and I had a fight and I shouldn’t have...”

“You have a boyfriend?” I say, louder than necessary, too loud. My eyes open wide and I nearly stand upright, and my pulse quickens again, and I’m not happy now. I don’t give a shit if I look angry. I don’t give a shit if I scare her.

“I’m sorry,” she says, quickly, upset, her hand reaches out to touch my face, I push it away. I get up and walk away, I hear her starting to cry behind me. I punch my hand through a wall as I go and scream from the twist in my guts to the roof of my mouth, I know I scream because I feel it but I don’t hear it. I don’t even look at the wall as I pass, just lash out at where I know it is and I like the feeling as my fist goes through. I don’t care to see it, I don’t care, I don’t fucking care at all, not at all...I go to the fridge, grab a beer and come back out.

Kelsey is still sitting, still crying. One of her friends is comforting her, and I see my friends at one of the tables watching the whole ordeal. I look back at the hole I had put in the wall. Fucking cheap drywall, what the hell do they expect? Kelsey looks at me, and I see a tear slip down her face, oh boo fucking hoo. She bites her lip and looks like she’s going to try to apologize, but her friend grabs her and pulls her away. They’ll go and have a big beautiful boo hoo together. Fuck them and their estrogen festival. I sit down with Grant, Killer Dave and Coop. Apparently Eileen kept Grant at bay, or he already finished with her and had come back downstairs. My friends stare at me.

“What?” I ask. “You might like to know that Paul saw you with the girl he’d been talking to and got all pissed off. He left a minute later,” Coop says. I think I want to chuckle, but I feel sick to my stomach. To hell with Paul. “Yeah, well, whatever. Did everyone else leave?” I look around. There was a couple making out in the other room, which you could see from here, but that was it. The large crowds that had been here disappeared as quickly as they had come, and I had been too busy to say goodbye to a lot of my friends. “Yes. McGregor left with Beth, and a couple of people got sick at the same time, so they were walked home by friends. You know how it is after that, when one group of people leaves, it isn’t long before another one does,” Killer Dave says. Coop finishes his beer, throws the can against the wall. I see some frustration on his face that I hadn’t seen earlier. It makes me forget my own for a moment and concentrate on my friends face. Everyone is silent for a moment, and I realize everyone is looking at me. Finally, Grant clears his voice and says,

“What happened with her dude? That was a pretty fucked up scene.” I tell them she has a boyfriend, but apparently she didn’t think it was important to tell me till now. “Wait, so she’s the one who feels bad about cheating on her boyfriend, but you’re the one who punches a hole in the wall? Why not just enjoy while you can?” Grant asks. I stare at him for a long moment. “I wanted her to be better than that,” I finally say quietly. They study over me. “Better?” Coop asks. “Better than going to hook up with a guy like me when she’s arguing with her boyfriend. Whatever, it’s nothing, I don’t care,” I say. Killer Dave looks back at the hole I’d punched in the wall, and back at me with a frown. “What? What the fuck is that look, dude?” I ask. “Lot of anger over what you call nothing,” he says. I stare at him. “Calm down,

William. You look like you’re about to attack me,” Dave says. I try to focus on his face, and realize for what feels like the first time, but could be and must not be, that I’m sloppy drunk. His face moves up and down, I blink hard the heat behind my eyes trying to fix it. It doesn’t work. Another wave of anger goes over my face, the heat of it brings sweat to my forehead and a pain in my skull...but it passes softly. Killer Dave was right. I was ready to fight him. Anyone, really.

Coop and I wander across the paths to our dorm, both of us piss ass drunk.

“You know, you’re going to be reported for that hole.” “I’ll pay for it.” “Was it worth it?” “Yes. Absolutely.” “Well, that’s good.” “I first produced my pistol, for she’d stolen away me rapier, but the girl I could not shoot so a prisoner I was taken, ness a ring daba doo daba da, whack fol de daddy-o! whack fol de daddy-o, there’s whiskey in the jar!” We stumble our way through drinking songs, stumble our way through campus.

“Did you see Holly tonight dude?” Coop asks. I turn to face him, but I trip myself and face-plant on the pavement. Coop busts out laughing. There’s blood on my mouth, bittersweet on my lips, I touch it as I stand. I’d split my lower lip, I’m too drunk to feel it much. “Shit, man,” Coop says. I laugh and we get on our way again. I had seen Holly. She looked pretty. Not my type, but pretty all the same.

“You know, my father wants me to be a lawyer,” Coop says. I laugh. “Same. Or a professor. Or a businessman. Yeah.” “Always saying my grades need to stay high and shit.” He pauses for a moment, stopping in his step to sway a bit, and then resumes walking. “We drink too much,” he says. I think a minute and say, “Nah. Well...yeah, but nah,” I say, drunk, amazed at fucked how drunk, at how sober I could sound.

I stop to pee on a wall once, and I fall down a few times. We pass a few people on the walk home and insult all of them, yelling and laughing. Coop sings dirty limericks.

Coop isn’t as shitty as I am so he opens my door for me and puts me in my bed. He takes my shoes off. I hear my door close and his door open down the hall. I’m ready to pass out, but before I can I see my books and my tiny room and my laundry waiting to be done. I have an urge to throw it all against the wall of this tiny room and trash the place. I don’t, but I get up, pull my shoes back on, steady myself and walk out the door, because fuck to staying there tonight. Sometimes being sober is just a matter of willpower.

Not yet. The night isn’t over, not yet. I look at the clock, it says two A.M. It’s Saturday. It’s another day already.