

"damaged goods" by tim winton

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" Damaged Goods" is a collection of three short stories by Tim Winton that includes the stories ' Damaged Goods', ' On Her Knees' and ' Family'. The first story, Damaged goods is narrated by a nameless character that tells the story of her husband Vic's teenage love obsession with a girl called Strawberry Alison who had a crimson birthmark that " covered half her face and neck, like a mask incompletely removed." The narrator knows her husband's story so well because " He told the story so many times that I feel like I was there, that I lived it with him." that she can describe it as though it was her own memory rather than her husbands. She flows effortlessly back and forth between past and present tense and her voice has an edge of sadness to it as if she is upset about the fact that Vic is still in love with this girl with a birthmark. The voice could also have an edge of sadness to it because she is almost left to wonder if Vic considers her to be ' damaged goods' as well, considering that what he seems interested in both with Strawberry and a farm girl with a missing finger. " It's not fun wondering if your Husband's love could be another act of kindness...as if you too qualify as damaged goods"

The title ' Damaged goods' traditionally refers to a person who is regarded as inadequate or impaired in some way whether physical or mental. In that sense Strawberry Alison could be regarded as damaged goods because of her birthmark. There is a frequent image of fire in the short story. Winton frequently uses fire to describe Strawberry's birthmark as well as the campfire at the end of the story. There is a slight suggestion that Strawberry might have been a lesbian around the middle of the story because of a poem she wrote and published in the school magazine about two girls in flames.

Her teachers seem to think the poem reflects the fact that she is not over her birthmark and that she has defined herself because of it. There is also a scene where she looks into some one-way glass that Vic is on the other side of and he notices a look of loneliness in her eyes that seemed to only make him like her more. " she wasn't looking in at all; she just caught sight of herself in the reflective glass and paused a moment in passing. she came closer, right up to the sill, and he was struck by her sadness. She was full of longing..." the suspicion is confirmed closer to the end when there is rumour that she came out while at college. Strawberry's poem seems to become a prediction of her fate when at the end her and her girlfriend are in a car crash and the car had " incinerated them both."

This short story was really well written. As the reader we are given clues to the fact that Strawberry might be lesbian, but it is revealed well before the end that she is which makes you wonder if there is something else going on that Winton isn't letting on about. That suspicion is realised when Strawberry and her Girlfriend die in a car accident at the end which was entirely unpredictable and makes you just that bit more sympathetic for Vic's wife who feels like she must compete with a ghost. ' On Her Knees' is a story about a mother and son who are cleaning a woman's house for the last time because the woman believes that the mother has stolen a pair of her earrings.

The story is narrated from the point of view of the son, Victor, and deals with themes such as pride, honesty and dignity. Victor's mother is a proud woman even though her job is to clean other people's houses believing that " there

was more honour in scrubbing other people's floors than in having strangers scrub your own." Her sense of honour is seen by the fact that she still cleans the house of the woman who accused her of stealing earrings one more time. She is also very independent as she is her own boss and she can support herself and Victor, including his studies, even though her husband is out of the picture. Winton could also be bringing social class to our attention.

Victor and his mother are working class and are cleaning the house of a wealthy woman of a higher class. This woman seems to look down on Victor's mother which annoys Victor because he knows that she is more than what this woman sees her as: a cleaning lady. Victor's annoyance is obvious when he finds the missing earrings discarded on the floor and then he puts them in the cat's litterbox. Not only has Winton provided us with a strong female character but he is also bringing to light the issue of class. Victor's mother does everything to the best of her ability whereas Victor knows that his and his mother's work is not appreciated so he is half-hearted with his cleaning.

The end of the story is also interesting. Despite the earrings being found and despite Victor's wishes to report the matter to the police, Victor's mother knows that she will not be believed by either the police or the woman whose flat she is cleaning. This reinforces the divide in respect for each class. It is also interesting that Victor changes his mind, takes the earrings from the litterbox and places them beside the money that his mother refuses to take. It is as though both Victor and his mother know that they are better than the woman who owns the flat even if she is more well off than them. As they

leave the flat the reader is only too aware that both Victor and his mother are leaving with their heads held high.

'Family' is the final short story in the collection and it is about Frank (Leaper) and his brother Max the same two characters who were in the short story 'sand'. The story is written in third person and has a lovely inclusion of Australian slang like "buggered off" and "servo" is a great touch to enhance the story's imagery and add to the character. Winton effortlessly set the scene for a small coastal Australian town.

In the story Frank flees the controversy over his mid-game quitting of football and returning to his hometown of White Point. He decides to go surfing early in the morning and he finds his brother Max out in the surf. Max seems to have been jealous of Frank ever since they were kids because at school Frank was always picked first for schoolyard football before his older brother. The fact that Frank walked out on a football career has made Max even more mad than he was as a kid because "people dream of havin what you had. It makes em sick to see a spoilt prick like you walk away from what they couldn't have." Leaper justifies himself by saying that he only played for fun and he knew that Max hated him (even more than he hated their mother) for it.

On the surface, it seems like a simple story about the relationship and history between two brothers and how the younger brother fights for the older brother's attention and respect. But unlike most sibling rivalries, Frank and Max's relationship didn't improve as they grew up and their relationship is still very obviously forced when they meet in the surf.