

# Burg and the Bird

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Have you heard about this one guy called Burg? I don't know if you have heard of what happened to him or not. It is pretty uncanny. I'll let the narrator tell you because they know exactly what happened. Plus, the narrator tells it better. But first, let me tell you what Burg looked like. I know because I used to see him at the milk bar after school.

Burg looked like a shark that had eaten a slinky. He had no neck, just shoulders then head! He had a smile that didn't make me feel like smiling, more like running away, like as if he really was a shark. A land shark. And sometimes I would run away because he downright gave me the jitters, as my nan would say. His laugh would echo right behind me as I ran and I could feel cold drops of salty water, like shark spit, snapping at my heels. I would turn around and see Burg rebound back in to his shoes, his head and neck lolling on his shoulders and I would end up drenched in a cold salty sweat.

Burg would sit on the bench outside the milk bar, ripping apart burgers and fries, prying caps off plastic bottles and spitting them on the grass in the park. He really was, as ugly as a toad, as my dad says.

Mr Hogg the lawnmower man said that for such a disgusting man, Burg's house was spotless. Could have eaten off the floor, old Hoggy said. I don't get that at all. He can chuck rubbish all over the park and in the river but, as my teacher says, he goes to great lengths to make sure he doesn't have to live in it. Doesn't make sense. Burg is disgusting!

Anyway, I won't ruin it for you by telling you too much. I will hand over to the narrator now, so listen up, to the story of Burg and the bird.

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One day, there was a man sitting in the park, eating a hamburger. After he had finished, he threw the plastic bag and styrofoam container on to the grass.

A bird, which had been floating along the nearby river, suddenly appeared on the edge of the picnic table.

'Why, dear man are you so wasteful? You will not go to the sky after death because you are not kind to animals, the earth, nor fellow mankind.'

'Of course I will go to to the sky after death. You are a misinformed, bird.'

And what do you expect from the sky after death then, man?'

'The sky, after death, is where I will spend eternity doing the things I enjoy'.

The bird left to feed her young.

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Wait a minute, just wait. Sorry narrator, but - the sky? Don't our bodies decompose in to the ground when we die? Or do you mean heaven? Like, our souls or whatever? Or is it like after someone dies, how we think of them? Like when mum said to me, Ringo has gone to the farm. Because that is his happy place and he was a good dog? Okay, I get it, the sky is some kind of long lasting happy place for after someone dies. Boy, I thought life was confusing!

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When the man died, the bird met him in the sky. White cumulous clouds tossed above the mouth of a sparkling blue river.

'What are you doing here, bird?'

'I choked on the plastic you left behind'.

'Well that was silly, wasn't it bird? Why were you eating the plastic?'

'I didn't mean to. My chick was choking on it and I pulled it from her throat but it became lodged in my own and I died.

The bird swept through the clouds and hopped in to the river. He floated off, the current moving him at a relaxing pace and there he spent his time in the sky, watching the world go by.

The man followed the bird through the clouds. The clouds turned nimbus and were metallic in taste but they smelled like rotting fruit. The man couldn't see past them. The clouds were

heavy on his tongue. A cloud rolled and thundered and boomed in front of him. He waved his hands trying to grab hold of their rubbery texture.

He felt something crunch under his foot - a plastic water bottle. More crunching noises. Crunch - a styrofoam container. Crunch - a plastic ice-cream wrapper. Crunch, crunch, crunch - empty chip packets, soft drink cans, shampoo containers. Then - an orange peel. An apple core, leftover mouldy mince meat, a furry loaf of bread, slimy cheddar cheese and then - a dead rat!

The clouds peeled back like tinted plastic, outdoor restaurant blinds and he realised, that they were in fact tinted plastic, outdoor restaurant blinds.

He turned, aghast and started to back away from the plastic grey clouds. A bottle flicked up under his foot, a ton of straws came tumbling down on top of him, spiking him in the face like cold drops of sticky rain. A plastic bag whipped up towards his shoulder, then on to his face where it lay like a star fish, plastered to his nose covering his eyes and cheeks.

He heard a long scream, aaaagghhh, and realised that it was a sudden wind rasping against the plastic bag on his face - the man's throat began to tighten as he fought for breath - the scream he heard was the wind carrying his muffled cry for help.

Then suddenly, everything stopped. The plastic bag sea-sawed to the ground. The bottles lay quiet, the straws still. The rat still lay dead on the ground.

The man fell down in to the mess and sat amongst the rubbish, his head in his hands. His eyes began to weep sticky tears.

'What have I done?'

A plastic soft drink bottle lay at his feet, its blue plastic lid with even lines dented in stripes around it made him feel angry. He kicked the bottle and it flew up and lodged in between two other bottles, forming a triangle.

Hmmm, he thought. What have we here?

The man began picking up all of the food waste and tipped it in to an old wine barrel he had found. The dead rat went in too.

Then he started piling up all of the plastic water bottles together. He did the same with the styrofoam cups and containers. The plastic bags either got folded and put in to a pile or they were used to carry other pieces of garbage to their designated piles.

He started stacking the bottles in to cubes and rectangles and tying them together with nylon rope that he had found. Then the man stacked them all together to form four walls and covered them in plastic bags. He then used the tinted plastic outdoor restaurant blinds to make a roof. The man had built himself a house made from rubbish.

A few thousand years later in the sky, the man looked around at the town he had built out of rubbish with his own two hands. There was a house for him to live in, a bench to sit on while he rested, and even roads and walkways that led to other buildings he had created out of rubbish. As a final touch, he planted a plastic tree next to the bench, made from old soft-drink cans and plastic coat hangers.

The man sat on the bench and thought about how proud he was of his efforts. He looked around, expecting someone to share this moment with him, but there was no one. Not even the bird.

The man felt anger rise in his throat and he suddenly started stomping hard on the newspaper floor; but, instead of hearing a crunch - there was a huge splash. He fell straight through the newspaper and landed in a river.

The man splashed through the water's surface like a maniac. He ripped back the newspaper and plastic rubbish to expose more of the river. The same river that the bird had taken through the white clouds in the sky, perhaps?

The man got straight to work and made a boat out of large plastic water and oil containers, so that it would float. He covered it with various empty chip packets for decoration and lined the inside with old bits of linoleum. The man found an old plastic tarp and ripped them in to sails. He used rubber thongs from the pile he had collected, to rim the outside of the boat. He even found an old plastic figurine, a doll, and placed her on the bow of his boat.

Finally, the man was ready to launch the boat. He would set out to find the bird and share his success with him. He would then be worthy of floating forever on the river and watching the world go by, as the bird could, and hopefully he would come across a new land with people in it to talk to. Maybe even a hamburger and fries, or a milkshake.

There was one thing that still bothered the man though. He had used the bottles to create his small town. The tarps and linoleum for his boat. He used the empty chip packets to decorate, the nylon rope to tie the plastic bottles together. The plastic bags were used to make flags and to help him carry and sort the rubbish. But, there was nothing he could do with the styrofoam. Oh well, he thought. That is not my problem. He left the styrofoam stacked in a pile by the corner of the wharf building he had constructed. The man then set out to find the bird and a new land, where he could talk to people. A hamburger. Fries. A milkshake. The wind blew strong for his departure.

Five million years later, when the man returned, the plastic town still looked the same. Save for a few plastic bags that had been forced upon the plastic shore. The pile of styrofoam was still sitting in the corner.

The man moored his boat against the wharf he had made from tires and old trampoline beds. He coughed hard as he stumbled on to land, as a windswept sailor does. He scratched his temple in worry, flicking dirty skin in to the water. He hadn't found the bird. He hadn't found anyone on the river. In fact, it hadn't been a river, it had been an ocean with constant stormy seas, lightning, thunder. Sharks, giant squid, a sea of turmoil and he had become lost. The man had even cried at sea. He coughed again, hard this time, and specks of red splattered his palm.

The man decided he needed to do something with the styrofoam.

He packed it all on to his sturdy boat and unmoored her from the tire post.

The man floated down the river past the city of plastic that he had built with his own two hands. His own two red speckled hands.

The river remained a river this time and he searched for millions of years for somewhere that he could find a use for the styrofoam, but nothing ever appeared.

One day as he was floating down the river, he passed the bird.

'I'm sorry bird'.

'I'm happy that you understand now. I saw your city of plastic. It is part of you now.'

The man coughed and a flake of red plastic flung out of his mouth and on to his palm. He tried to flick the plastic and a fingernail snapped off.

'I am like the plastic. I am eroding so slowly over millions of years but I don't know where I will go. I will remain sprinkled amongst the land along with my city and my regret.'

'Good luck man'.

The bird floated off down the river.

The man saw the bird every five million years or so. They would nod at each other as they passed each other on the river in the sky. The man continued to float around in circles on this river with his pile of styrofoam, searching for a use for it.

Then one day, the bird was floating down the river and he saw the boat approaching him. He peered at the deck. He couldn't see the man. He could only see the pile of styrofoam.

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See! I told you the narrator tells the story of Burg well, didn't I? I mean, if I hadn't been sitting at the park that day eating my hamburger and fries and drinking my milkshake, I never would have even met the narrator and never would have heard what had happened to Burg! But I'm glad I did because, as my mum always says, if you never go, you will never know.