

**The Circuit Breaker:  
Finding Focus at Woodford**

# The Circuit Breaker: Finding Focus at Woodford

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BASA-Q acknowledges the Jinibara People as the Traditional Custodians of the land around Woodford and surrounding Country referenced in this story. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and recognise the enduring connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to land, water, and culture across Queensland.

*For students who know what chaos feels like — and are  
ready to see another way.*

# Chapter One

## The Static

The lights were screaming again.

To anyone else, the overhead fluorescent tubes in the police watch house were just tired, flickering strips of light. Old. Cheap. Annoying, maybe. But to Brandon, they were alive. They screamed at a pitch no one else seemed to hear—a sharp, electric whine that drilled straight through his skull and lodged behind his eyes.

He sat on the edge of the cold steel bench, shoulders hunched, hands clamped hard over his ears. It didn't help. The noise wasn't coming from the air. It never did. It came from the room itself—off the walls, the floor, the metal door vibrating with every distant slam.

Fifty hertz. That was what it felt like. A jagged, relentless hum that made his skin crawl, like his body didn't quite fit right anymore.

“Oi. Sit still.”

The voice cracked through the reinforced window, sharp and impatient. Brandon flinched anyway. His leg bounced harder, heel tapping against the concrete in a fast, uneven rhythm. Tap. Tap-tap. Tap. He couldn't stop it. Stopping meant thinking, and thinking meant the static got louder.

This was the old way.

The watch house was built to hold bodies, not minds. The walls were painted a flat institutional grey, the kind that sucked the warmth out of everything it touched. No windows. No soft edges. Every sound bounced and multiplied—the clang of a door down the corridor, the echo of boots, the distant crackle of a radio. Each noise stacked on top of the last until Brandon’s chest felt tight, like he was being crushed from the inside.

He squeezed his eyes shut.

Too bright. Too loud. Too close.

He slipped into the Red Zone without even noticing it happen.

In his neighbourhood, the Red Zone was where you survived. It meant moving fast, talking louder, hitting first if you had to. It meant not thinking too hard about consequences because thinking took time, and time got you hurt.

But here, in the watch house, there was nowhere to move.

The bench was bolted to the floor. The door was locked. The walls didn’t give.

Brandon dragged his hands down his face, nails biting into his palms. His breathing came short and sharp, like he’d just sprinted even though he hadn’t moved an inch.

He wasn’t dangerous. He wasn’t violent. But the paperwork didn’t care about that.

Serious repeat offender, it said.

A problem that needed containing.

To Brandon, he was just a kid trying to make the buzzing stop.

A memory flickered through his mind—standing outside his old unit block late at night, sirens cutting through the dark, voices shouting, someone laughing too loud. The smell of hot bitumen and exhaust. The constant tension in the air, like everyone was waiting for something bad to happen because eventually it always did.

He'd grown up in a place where people were almost always unhappy. Not sad—angry. Tired. On edge. That kind of unhappiness stuck to you. It soaked in.

A heavy door slammed somewhere down the corridor.

Brandon's breath hitched. His hands flew back to his ears.

“Keep it down in there!” someone shouted.

He couldn't answer. Words didn't work in the Red Zone. Language fell apart into noise, just like everything else. His brain wasn't built for this kind of place. It never had been.

A shadow crossed the small reinforced window.

“Brandon?”

The voice was different. Not sharp. Not barking.

“My name's Sarah. I'm from Youth Justice.”

He didn't look up. The static roared.

"I know it's loud in here," she continued. She spoke slowly, like she understood that rushing made things worse. "The lights. The echoes. It's not a good space."

Her words cut through the noise just enough to register.

"Things are changing, Brandon," she said. "There's a new law now. You've probably heard it. Adult crime, adult time."

His stomach dropped.

He'd heard it. Everyone had. The words had been thrown around on the news, on phones, on the street. A warning. A threat.

"It means you're heading to detention," Sarah went on. "But it's not going to be like this."

Brandon let out a sharp, humourless breath. He'd heard that before too. Every time he got caught, someone promised a way out. A program. A chance. A reset.

It always ended the same way.

Sarah told him about a place called Woodford. She talked about green spaces. About quiet rooms. About learning hubs and vocational programs. She used words like therapeutic and support and focus.

Brandon barely listened.

Detention was detention. A different cage was still a cage.

But as she spoke, something shifted. Just a fraction.

“There’s a different model out there,” Sarah said. “One that understands how brains like yours work. We’re not just trying to lock you up, Brandon. We’re trying to stop you coming back.”

He opened his eyes a sliver. The lights still burned, but her face was calm. Steady.

“You won’t hear the lights screaming there,” she added quietly.

That caught his attention.

“You’ll still be held accountable,” she said. “The law doesn’t disappear. But you’ll have space. Quiet. A chance to learn how to break the circuit before it overloads.”

Break the circuit.

The words lodged somewhere deep.

When the transport van finally arrived, Brandon stood on shaky legs and let the officers guide him out. As the heavy door closed behind him, sealing in the noise and the concrete and the echoes, he felt something unfamiliar flicker in his chest.

It wasn’t hope. Not yet.

It was smaller than that.

A question.

What if the quiet is real?

# Chapter Two

## The Verdict

The courtroom was quiet in a way that made Brandon uneasy.

It wasn't the calm, padded quiet he would later come to recognise at Woodford. This was a hard quiet—polished timber, high ceilings, and the kind of silence that pressed down on you instead of letting you breathe. Every sound felt amplified by the stillness: the scrape of a chair, the rustle of paper, the soft click of a pen.

Brandon stood in the dock, hands clasped in front of him, shoulders tight. He could feel the eyes on him—people he couldn't see but could sense. Adults. Authority. Judgment.

The fluorescent lights here weren't as vicious as the watch house, but they still hummed. A lower voltage, maybe, but enough to keep the static simmering behind his eyes.

He fixed his gaze on his shoes.

The words adult crime, adult time echoed in his head, not as a slogan but as a weight. He didn't fully understand the law—only that it had changed, and that change had landed squarely on him. He'd crossed some invisible line. One offence too many. One chance already spent.

The magistrate spoke, her voice measured and formal.

She talked about community safety. About impact. About responsibility.

Brandon caught fragments, not whole sentences. His brain snagged on certain words and let the rest slide past in a blur.

Repeat offender.

Escalation.

Deterrence.

Each one landed like a stamp being pressed onto his file.

He knew he'd done the wrong thing. He wasn't pretending otherwise. The joyride hadn't felt like a crime in the moment—just movement, speed, escape. But he remembered the owner's face now, pale and shaking, the way her voice cracked when she realised the car was gone.

That memory stung worse than the handcuffs.

Still, as the magistrate spoke about accountability, Brandon felt the familiar fuzz creeping in. His thoughts started to scatter. The room felt too big, the air too thin.

A flash of fear cut through the static.

Adult prison.

He pictured concrete yards, razor wire, men who didn't care how old you were or why you were there. He'd heard stories. Everyone had. Stories where kids went in and came out harder, angrier—or didn't come out the same at all.

His chest tightened.

“However,” the magistrate said.

Brandon's head snapped up before he could stop himself.

“Detention is not imposed simply to punish,” she continued. “The purpose of this sentence is to reduce the likelihood of further offending and to address the underlying causes of your behaviour.”

Underlying causes.

No one had ever said that before.

“You are being remanded to the Youth Detention Centre at Woodford.”

She described it clinically at first—secure facility, structured environment—but then the language shifted. She spoke about therapeutic care. About education and vocational pathways. About mental health support embedded into daily routine.

Brandon struggled to reconcile the words with what detention had always meant to him.

“We expect accountability,” the magistrate said, meeting his eyes directly now. “But we are also investing in you. This state has committed significant resources to ensuring young people leave detention with skills, qualifications, and the capacity to live productively in the community.”

Investing in you.

The phrase felt strange. Almost uncomfortable.

From the gallery, Brandon saw Sarah give him a small nod. Not encouragement exactly—more like confirmation. This was real. This was happening.

The magistrate leaned forward slightly.

“This is not a free pass, Brandon. It is a final one. What you do with it is up to you.”

The words settled heavily.

When the handcuffs were placed back on his wrists, Brandon didn't resist. The metal felt cold but familiar. As he was led from the courtroom, he caught one last glimpse of the space—the order, the rules, the adults who believed structure could fix what chaos had shaped.

He didn't know if they were right.

The transport van rumbled to life outside. Brandon climbed in and took a seat by the small reinforced window. As the city slid past, concrete giving way to trees, then to open stretches of green, his thoughts slowed.

For the first time since the watch house, the static dipped.

He rested his forehead against the glass and watched Brisbane fall away behind him.

Whatever Woodford was, it was far from the streets he knew.

And whether it turned out to be another cage or something else entirely, Brandon understood one thing with uncomfortable clarity:

There were no more chances after this.