

# THE QUARRY

Christine Ireland

## Six poems

This set of six poems observes various types of relationship: intimate, collegial, family, cultural, and relationship to self.

### 1. Burn Thickness

The man we knew was hooded and smoothed,  
walked as a panther through hospital wards,  
secret, sleek & springing off the balls of his feet.

Now his eyes pace, pale-irised and clever

- the only part of him unburnt

in a face ever bald-surprised and marbled.

And instead of hands, blurred knobs of flesh,

pinker than my rhododendrons.

His meal arrives, a shell-fish pasta tangle

I cringe & look away - what will he do?

But he talks of vineyards vats and politicians

and we listen on as time slides loose,

the problem of the knife & fork unnoticed

as he grows jungle-lithe and olive-skinned again.

## **2. Farmer Wants a Wife**

That shamble bear cheeky grinned

Kings schooled shearer man

of the thousand acres (more).

What a hunk, hunkered down

alone & out of town

with work as all.

Welcome to my parlour (really) my old homestead

what a party – all that landed gentry stuff

'cept he was red eyed, drinking rum.

Farmer wants a wife!

He joked. A woman warm, with wit,  
with sparkling eyes and independent means!

Three years on, my spirit cold in dying light  
it's hold your tongue you cow you're all the same  
& I'm dizzy-dulled and shackled, numb and not-me.

And now I know farmer wants a wife  
breathing barely, buried in the ground in a box beneath his feet  
for always.

### **3. Usual Small Things**

I had an Uncle John,  
the only uncle I have known.  
He was old when I was young  
& I thought of him as strange  
because he was so plain and mild and kind.  
Invariably behind the scenes  
he'd hum around the house  
as he pottered determinedly,  
I never knew at what really

except he'd water plants by hand;  
with hose he'd stand at garden shrubs  
for what seemed like an age.  
He had a patience and a peace  
quite alien to me.  
Most nights he'd sit alone  
with his transistor radio  
listening to Beethoven or Brahms.  
Aunty would talk and smoke and watch TV  
she rarely ventured out  
while Uncle John would fetch or do  
what needed to be done.  
Theirs seemed to be a happy home  
voices never raised  
it was simple and so restful  
and I felt no undertows.  
How I wished I could be theirs for good  
not just at holidays.  
Years later I was in Wales  
when I learned that Uncle John had passed away.  
He'd been on his daily bushland walk:  
his heart had burst at the last  
just doing one of his usual small things.

#### 4. Crystal

I may still chip

but softly

or crack

not deeply

perhaps a surface scratch, band-aided.

I have filled.

Stabilised.

Blunted.

Gone are the days as a girl

when, with a twirl & a polished smile

I'd slice a man to the bone.

Countless shards I've left lodged in careless hearts

if I was pressured, poorly packed or tagged

too loosely held.

A flick-ping crystal edge

innocently open, transparently

waiting, watching for that clumsy move,

your scars mere proof

I had to self-protect.

## 5. My Cosy Sunday

A flutter fuss, a sparrow's cry & I look up - page gone -  
through panes of lead framed glass  
a tussle in my tulip tree, now whip wet black & bare.  
This September snow lets spring buds know  
it's not quite safe – but soon.

That's when I see a sudden sun  
strolling bright past my front yard  
a woman, black-skinned, dressed in flames  
which leap and flare with every roll  
of graceful hip & long-legged glide  
her queenly head dressed high, all hail,  
her beauty warms our frigid town.

I want to tell her welcome & I'm sorry it's so cold,  
that so many here are fearful but it's really very safe,  
the only danger, strangely,  
a people's disconnect from soul.

## 6. Reflect-less

She was  
clear eyed shining twenty:twenty  
her own level  
believed and bevelled  
perfectly bedroomed.

So when exactly did she fall  
from the cutting edge  
fell hook line and  
stupidly cut and bled.  
Her view opaqued and slowed  
She blurred with grey spot and blotch  
belied, blank-eyed,  
unseen  
while evolving  
some third eye  
to an inner vision (another poem).

Now just for appearances she hangs  
above fire between bookshelves  
in 3D glass blocks angled  
fly-eyed  
mosaic-ed madly.