

# THE QUARRY

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Joshua

1000 words

Joshua

*static*

-The difference between a man with religion and a man without is that the man with religion spends his life fulfilling a purpose whilst the other spends his life searching for one.

follow this road: rugged and rude/ joshua and adem rattle along. dawn  
brightening to azure day/ falling ochre/ settling to dark waters— spheres glimmering/

in that sky/ that flinches from touch—draining to day/ and back again. sleep/ puffed/  
under eyes that want for rest/ on that familiar sight/ home.

*static*

-And who has the harder path? You may say it belongs to the one without purpose. But how can this be? He can do nothing wrong, for there is nothing right to mark him by. He can make no immoral statements, for there are no moral judges. Such concepts do not exist in a world without purpose.

sun is settling/ ochre chalks the sky/ silhouette landscape/ nigerian border is the horizon/  
three-kilometres of sleeping trucks: waiting for inspection/ waiting to cross/  
joshua parks in line. adem turns the radio up.

*static*

-When he kills a man he does not say, *I have killed one of God's children*, for he does not believe in God. When he sleeps with another man's wife he does not think, *I have tempted Eve*, for he does not know who she is. He lives free, but lacking life.

joshua lurches out/ onto the ramshackle road/ bordered by rusted huts/ with broken frames/  
jutting the sky. charisma of/ safari of red sun/ over red land/ lost to image of/  
safari of slums/ poverty's tread.

*static*

- He may experience the warmth, the flowering and never the fall, but he will always feel the wintery cold— the same freezing that stems from emptiness. Without purpose, what is anything for?

taxis cycle past/ joshua saddles on one. adem/ obsequious/ stays locked behind/  
guarding the wheels from those/ desperate/ to save their hands/ guarding the cargo  
from those/ desperate/ to sell/ guarding the truck from those/ desperate.

*static*

- No, the harder path belongs to the man with religion, for every religion brings purpose. He who wishes to fulfil it must walk a path that is hurdled with bumps and hollowed by potholes. And following not too far behind, is Temptation.

nigerian border/ road settles to dust/ dusk settles to dark. no streetlights/ passing cars are the light of the night. old gum-smacked lady sitting on folding chair/ drinking the moon away/ coaxing a smile.

*static*

- It whispers for us to strike the one who cast the first stone. So we do, and we trip, not seeing the bump. It tells us to steal a glance from another man's wife. So we do, and we fall, not seeing the pothole.

joshua pays taxi/ that curls away/ under blanket of night. he heads along veins/  
away from beating heart/ horns echoing/ fading. huddles between shacks and passers/  
the way gets narrower/ the way becomes darker.

*static*

-And sometimes it is easier to lie face down on that ground, or hide in that hole, rather than to show your face. But, for those who grow tired of being numb—for lying too long on the cold—and sallow—for hiding too long in the darkness—the path does not end. Rather, the struggle to rise begins. And you realise that you are not walking on the path of virtue, for virtue is our purpose, and virtuosity is our end. No. The path is hurdled with bumps and hollowed by potholes. It is the path of Error, and the hardest of all. For though the fall is definite, the rise remains uncertain. The ones who leap, knowing this, are the bravest of all. It is in faith and for faith that we do this. And that is all.

a shack/ no bigger than the others/ but smaller than some/ a broken wall/ serving drinks/ tables perched out front/ he pushes to the counter/ counts his counters/ pays/ sits and drinks. warm neon glow of mosquito light/ melts with moonlighting/ over that hunched frame/ brooding/ a sip for thought from a glass filled with drink/ shy of one-and- two- naughts. zephyr of night/ turns to gale of noise/ voices rise/ glasses clink/ urine flows/ shacks rattle/ all passing/ the hunched and brooding frame. into the dark pool of thought/ he looks/ his eyes have greyed/ his stretched lips/ lamed by weariness/ all that shows/ is a hopeless frown. ladies of the night/ splash their feet/ clean to step in. heels flicked on tables/ rags raised above thighs/ dogs go howling/ market's opened. rensia: pulled- back black hair/ flower dress with ripped petals/ runs her red licked nails/ across joshua's neck/ whose eyes always set/ on that drink/ shy of one-and-two-naughts. she floats away/ to another man/ happy to rub his face in the flowers. revelry recedes/ silence comes again/ joshua in his bubble/ of blue and moonlight/ sinking deeper/ into that drink that's turned/ shallow. visions fall behind drooping eyes/ of past time/ sailing the horizon in truck/ sitting where adem sits/ obeying driver as adem obeys/ staying behind as adem stays/ not knowing where driver goes/ now/ joshua knows/ and he shall go. he slips through puddles/ trips over bottles/ staggers to a shack/ heaving inside/ it is busy/ stumbles to another/ whimpering inside/ it is busy. travelling deeper along/ darker it becomes. plastic lawns/ cracking under heel/ he passes through narrower/ darker/ spaces/ shacks almost touch/ clouding moonlight/ hands against walls/ guiding blind feet/ through hanging

rags/ painting the laundry/ with sweaty face/ clammy palms. a murmur a rustle/ both  
at once/ woman appears/ in doorway/ she nods/ she walks inside/ temptation  
whispers/ he walks inside: one room/ four corners/ bed lies in one/ hatched quilt over  
stained sheets/ woman sitting/ arms stiff/ leaning over/ he sits beside/ spring pokes  
through/ deflated condom by his foot/ silence. she shivers/ thought of night carrying/  
longer she must sell. he rattles/ thought of night losing/ less he'll enjoy. he strips her  
threadbare/ of her threadbare clothes/ she paws for pillow for protection/ lying  
underneath/ neatly wrapped/ she tosses the plastic/ he flinches/ shakes his head/ she  
shakes hers at his/ and he shakes again. she pushes the plastic/ into his hands/ his  
palms are too clammy. condom hits ground/ His face up/ *Je n'ai pas dit*<sup>1</sup> reads across/  
he presses against her/ she pushes away/ deal is off. he rises/ distraught/ disconcerted/  
He spoke/ *Je n'ai pas dit*/ He spoke *Je n'ai pas dit*. he pulls out fists of money/ she  
spreads/ deal is back on. onto the streets/ shirtless/ missing a shoe/ joshua staggers/  
leaning over/ fist anchored in red/ scrunching money/ whining grows distant. through  
and through/ he travels/ slipping/ sliding. from behind a shadow/ which one he does  
not know—perhaps from same one he is standing in—appears four/ three grown/ tall-  
like/ gleaming teeth/ the other/ small- like/ not yet man/ soon to be. surrounding him/  
three umbrella thorns and one bushwillow/ joshua trips. trees bend down/ helping him  
by the hands/ bushwillow brushes his face/ branches rattle/ tempest subsides/ forest  
clears/ joshua lies/ blood wrapped/ hands/ emptied.

### *intermission*

dawn swallows the dark/ smoke chokes the air/ distant horns/ joshua's eyes  
recede/ consciousness catches up/ head goes spinning/ tastes blood/ he fumbles and  
tumbles/ checks his empty pockets. the night is what he remembers it to be/ dark/  
gloomy/ obscure/ a woman sitting on hatched quilt/ he touches groin/ *Je n'ai pas dit*/  
he said no. he crawls his way back to the heart/ with crowds of cars/ and people/  
marching through/ market- stands standing in the way/ of every passer-by/ merchants  
run/ accessories assorted on wooden plates/ marked with prices negotiable/ *Je n'ai  
pas dit*/ why did she say no? he touches groin/ car noise exacerbates/ sight blurs/ three

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<sup>1</sup> 'I said no.'

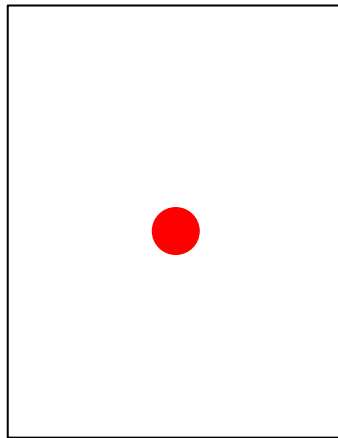
kilometres back he travels/ he reaches that familiar sight/ that's not home/ finds adem  
curled in seat. joshua and adem move forward/ along that rugged and rude road/ adem  
pushes back the sleep/ he sits up/ dashboard is too high for him/ to

see

an

end.

## 1000 words



‘I don’t like the painting. It’s too postmodernist.’

‘It is quite minimalist.’ Francesca tilted her head. ‘But you gain a sense of urgency from *The Artisan*— a cry for recognition.’

Marion crossed her brows. ‘How?’

‘Well, the red is obviously overwhelmed by the white,’ Francesca continued, ‘it’s as if the artist believes he’s insignificant—like a dot— and feels he is floating in the white. Yet, he manages to triumph because we’re always drawn to the red instead.’

‘I don’t know,’ Marion said. ‘It just doesn’t speak to me as suddenly as his others.’

‘What’s wrong with a bit of a tease?’ Francesca sipped from her glass, sticking a scarlet kiss on the rim, ‘I like my men with a bit of mystery. Though, they can’t be too enigmatic—I still like to have some sort of a hold on them.’

‘Paintings and men are completely different.’

‘The only difference between the two is one is stroked by the brush and the other can’t stop stroking their own, and both have the equal capability of amazing or disappointing.’

‘They always disappoint past first inspection.’ Marion sighed and lifted herself to laughter with Francesca.

The empty floor catered to the high heels and polished shoes that sauntered across the room; women, choked in tight dresses, and men pressed in suits had gathered to pamper and praise The Artisan's paintings along the walls. However, The Artisan himself was nowhere to be found.

'Speaking of which,' Marion searched for a signature on the painting, 'where is he, and why does he never sign?'

'You know how artists are; always wanting to avoid the spotlight because they think it will *fade* the colour of the paint.' Francesca fidgeted with her cleavage bursting from her dress. 'I'd be surprised if he actually showed up to this demonstration.'

'He never does show up to any of them, does he?' Marion gazed obstinately across the room. 'I'm never going to understand this *male*.'

A man, wearing frames without glass, overheard and squeezed himself between the pair.

'From what I've heard,' he muttered in his glass, 'he's homosexual.'

'And what makes you say that?' Marion drew tight eyes at the unwelcome company.

'Well, why else would *The Artisan* be so shy of public eyes? He's scared of being berated for his sexuality.' He turned to Marion, clumsily twirling his wine. 'There's nothing wrong with being homosexual, dear. But *they* have to make a big deal out of it and, judging from the rumours, there's not even *much* to make a deal about.'

'I don't care if he's homosexual,' Marion snapped.

'Oh, my.' The man beat his palm to his chest. 'It seems that we have a bit of an obsession. There's nothing to blush about, dear. Everyone is bound to fall in love with The Artisan sooner or later. And who wouldn't! Just look at the paintings. This one is my favourite. I think it captures the true essence of his sexuality and frustration of being unable to speak out.'

Impressing herself upon people was an unshakeable desire of Francesca's—sometimes she even managed to impress herself—and she replied in a tone that was not too far sounding from ostentatious,



‘The dot represents his loneliness in the world and its centring would show that he holds his sexuality as a core value, but he’s afraid to speak out, because once he does, his value might not remain at his core; he’s afraid of losing his sexuality.’

The man clapped his hands, smashing the glass and splashing the wine,

‘An artist too afraid to lose his homosexuality, why, he’s a proud Tchaikovsky! And you, my dear,’ he lost his footing and held onto Francesca, ‘are magnificent. If only you could peer into my soul, the things you could tell me that I don’t even know.’ And the drunken socialite tearfully tore himself away in search for another glass.

‘They should keep a tab on how many drinks people can have.’ Marion watched the drunken man cradle a stranger in his arm before beginning to sing.

‘No one would turn up to these, then.’ Francesca laughed wiping wine from her arms. ‘And it’s nice to have some character in this room, especially when the artworks lack it. They’re all just colours, shapeless characters; different hues of boredom.’ Francesca took Marion’s sniffing as an obvious expression of the question she wanted to ask, and answered, ‘Just because a painting has meaning, doesn’t make it interesting. It might be interesting to find out what it is implying, but the actual work itself mightn’t be anything fantastic. I could hang this painting on the white wall at home, and the only difference you’d notice was a perfectly rounded, tiny, red stain. No matter what cleaner you used it would never wipe off, and it’d annoy you for being so pretentiously rounded; an irksome red against the white.’

And it suddenly occurred to Marion that the artist did not paint the work for recognition, or to express his sexuality, but rather to become unrecognised. Even though he had layered himself in mysticism, avoiding the public lights, he could not remove his name—The Artisan—the core sentiment of identity. No matter how small a being he made himself, his name had marked him a noticeable red.

Marion relaxed to a look of content. ‘Whether there is anything to look at or not, this painting is still interesting. I like it.’

‘Like what you will, but that doesn’t affect my opinion— I’d prefer a much more interesting stain on my wall,’ Francesca replied.

The front doors opened. A combed man, smelling of lavender, walked in wearing a dress of leather shoes, white collared shirt, black blazer and pants. All eyes were agape; all mouths closed. His hands were timidly crossed in front, but he smiled warmly. After clearing his throat of some uncomfortable phlegm, he opened it to speak.

Francesca leaned over to Marion and whispered, ‘That suit doesn’t match his character at all.’

1000 words.