

# THE QUARRY

## When Adam Found God Under the Kitchen Sink

**Toby Wools-Cobb**

From certain books in the cathedral, came the idea of the boy. The old man walked to and from each of the bookcases that circled the room and withdrew books, flicked through the pages, thought through the words, and then returned them to their place. He then sat at his table, took his pen and began to write.

He placed his character, the boy, somewhere quiet and alone, a place unto himself for the duration of his use - his own bedroom in an apartment complex. The old man then bestowed the bedroom with a bed, a closet, a door and a window arranged into a pleasing manner.

The boy found himself on his knees, beside a pale wall, running a blue crayon along a rippled crack in its surface. Tears ran down his hot cheeks and he hiccupped between sobs.

He did not remember why he was crying, or what had happened before entering his bedroom, or what had happened the day before or the day before that, or his name. He suddenly knew he had a mother. And a father. A sister too but only for a moment and then she was gone, as though caught in a riptide and swept away. He cried.

The crayon slid into a hole in the wall and the tip broke. Shavings crumbled to the floor. The hole glowed at his elbow, no bigger than his thumb. Light sunk into it like a puddle in a notch. The boy lay down on his stomach and peeked through. On the other side, he saw a thicket of twigs and thorns like a tiny, fierce forest. A deer stepped into the clearing and began to nibble a berry from an overhanging branch. He watched her soft, elegant legs pace around as she broke off more berries and ate them. His tears dried and he let out a shuddering breath. It startled the deer and she looked up at the hole, watched for a minute, and slowly stepped closer until the boy could only see her hooves and the tawny fur of her legs. She lowered her head down to lap the stream trickling from the hole.

That evening, he drew the scene with crayons - the sky a crumbled blue - and showed his mother, who hugged him to her breast and told him what a wonderful son he was. 'Thomas,' she called him. She was a lean woman, her cheek-bones cradling her eyes, the smell of lavender in her skin. His father walked into the kitchen, a letter crunched in his diesel-streaked hands. His mother showed his father the drawing and his father showed her the three day pay notice.

Days passed and the boy watched the little deer eat and rest under an overhanging thorn. To his delight, he had found another world; a crack in the wall that, when peered through, he saw a balcony overlooking a garden of violets, gillyflowers and lavenders circling myrtles. The garden glowed like coral in the moonlight, and a dark-skinned man would appear from behind a reed trellis, dressed as a prince in a turban and silk shirts, leading a sabino horse by the reins. He called out in beautiful Arabic, and a princess came to the balcony, a green satin gown cascading from beneath her floral brocade, flowing between the balusters and down the balcony like mandevilla vines to touch her lover's fingertips.

The boy's sister, written into the family at some time, mistook him - clutching his hands around the sides of his eyes and staring into the wall - as though counting for a game of hide-and-seek. She would hide, and later cry because he didn't play with her anymore, but he could not remember ever having played with her before.

The boy found more and more openings in the walls. A hole in his parent's bedroom revealed a maiden galleon capsizing into the Baltic Sea, its harbour visible on the horizon.

Through a splintering in the kitchen floor the boy watched an eagle soar amidst clouds over a city of white marble far below them. Through a hole under the sink stretched the nave of a cathedral with the pews removed. Bookcases mounted the walls and culminated in the dome of the apse so that the occasional book slipped from the ceiling and fell like a nesting dove that had been struck down. At the far end, in the middle of the sanctuary, an old bedraggled man in a grey gown paced around a desk. He coaxed dust-covered books from shelves at either end of the room, leafed through them for a minute only to return them a moment later, muttering louder each time.

The boy tried speaking to the deer, but scared her away. And his shouts alerted the palace guards who arrested the Arab prince. So when he came to the old man in the cathedral he only whispered, 'Hello?'

The old man looked up from behind his desk. He frowned and, easing from his chair, walked down the aisle and knelt to the floor so his face was level with the hole.

'Thomas?' The old man did not speak to the boy but seemed to look past him. 'Why do you disturb me?'

'Why are you under the sink?'

Impatiently the old man said, "'Why" is the prelude to "what is" and does not need explaining - why trouble a man who writes with questions of why he writes? Is it not satisfactory enough that which is, is written?' With a sudden smile the old man claimed, 'You may as well be Adam and ask why he was created?'

'I'm under the sink in the kitchen, in my apartment. Apartment number twenty-two. Where are you?'

The old man's eyes flicked to the boy's. 'Apartment you say?'

'Yes, number twenty-two.'

'And there's a hole under the sink?'

'Yes. But this isn't the only one, there's lots. There's a deer and a bird, and a boat on the water!'

'Ah!' The old man's face wrinkled with a smile. 'Yes, they would be mine as well.'

He chuckled and with a sly grin he asked, 'Did you enjoy the deer?'

'Yes, very much.'

The old man bellowed with laughter. 'What nonsense! Like an ape commenting on the refinery of the Sistine Chapel! Or a child admiring the remarkable spark in a mother's womb! Thank you, Thomas, most amusing.' He returned to his feet with a huff and walked back to his desk.

‘Hello?’ The boy said. ‘Hello? Hello? Hello?’

The old man took a deep breath and exclaimed, ‘Be silent! Be silent!’ He murmured to himself and crumpled a piece of paper in his hands as he approached the hole. ‘Like a rat in the wall with its squeaking – it will squeak! And squeak! And squeak until it is gone for good! Conversation with you is as productive as remembering a dream!’ With that, he plunged the paper into the hole like a plug.

The next day, huddled in front of the heater in the lounge room, the boy sat between his mother’s legs while she combed his hair. It was raining outside, pouring musical notes onto the bitumen. His mother said his name, ‘Adam’. ‘It’s always been your name silly,’ she cooed.

The front door opened and a cold breeze unfurled inside and rippled over the boy’s shoulder before being sucked into the wall’s cracks. He heard his father’s rustic coughing and the curses he threw down the hallway. His mother joined his father in the kitchen and the boy listened as his father talked about the rent, coughing hoarsely between each sentence. He heard a sudden thud as his father collapsed to the floor.

His father kept to his bed with a sickness. His chest sunk into itself and his skin draped over his ribs. His blood-shot eyes rolled in their sockets, abandoned, and his speech became the murmuring of dreams. When the boy asked his mother where his sister was, she gave him a faint smile and said, ‘Maybe someday, when your father gets better.’ During the nights the boy listened to his mother crying in the next room, or the delirium of his father, and crept from his bed. He would fall asleep on the floor, curled beside the hole, to the sound of the deer pawing the earth.

When it seemed the boy’s father would die, he crawled under the sink and pulled the grubby paper from the hole and said, ‘Hello? Help! Please, you must help me!’

‘Hello? Help! Please, you must help me!’

The old man looked up from his chair. He sat to the right side of the nave, in front of a make-shift hearth of plywood. An orange glow was brewing, consuming paperbacks piled together. He tossed in the book was holding and came to the hole.

‘My father is sick! My mother is tired! I don’t know where my sister has gone, and the landlord sent us a letter -’

‘And yet you remain!’ The old man paused. A look of resignation came to his eyes. He turned his face to sanctuary and wailed, ‘What must be done to destroy an idea from the mind? I could destroy the world with a flood - but this Noah, this Manu, this Gilgamesh

would survive! Were he bound to a book I could burn him to ash but the smell would forever stain the walls!’

‘Please, I just want my family to be better. I’ll never bother you again!’

The old man caught his breath and he grabbed the wall as though to grab the boy.

‘Yes! A bargain. Adam? I promise you your family will be complete once more. You may do what you like; choose your own path, but I need you do one thing for me in return.’

‘I promise.’

‘I want to never hear you, see you, or dream of you again. I want you expunged from my mind?’

‘Okay, I won’t -’

‘What is the landlord’s name? In charge of your apartment. Does he have a name?’

‘I – I don’t know. He lives in the room downstairs.’

‘Adam,’ the old man eyes darted in worry, ‘you must never open the door to the landlord’s apartment, I never got around to creating him. Do you understand? It’s a hole I never filled.’

‘Yes.’

‘What mustn’t you do?’

‘Open the apartment downstairs. Apartment number twenty-one.’

The old man’s eyes searched the boy’s. ‘Good.’

The next morning the boy found his father in the kitchen, his chest filling out his work clothes, his eyes bright, and his jaw cleanly shaven. His father kissed his mother on the cheek and left for work. When the boy tried to ask his mother what had happened, and tried to describe his father shackled to his own corroded body, his sister skipped into the room and giggled, ‘Adam’s having dreams again! I heard him talk in his sleep!’ At the sight of his sister, the boy broke down in tears and grabbed hold of her by the shoulders and shook her, screaming into her face that she was not here, she was not here. His mother scolded him and then held him to her breast and hushed him. ‘You’ll grow out of such nightmares sweetie. Don’t you worry.’

Later that day his sister wanted to play hide-and-seek and so the boy ran to the cracked wall with the sinking galleon and stared into the fissure between the flaps of the white wallpaper and saw only the minute grains and splinters ending in a dark, closed line. He ran from room to room, checking every crack and hole in the walls. He took a torch from the kitchen and drove the light through the floorboards. His sister toddled from her room and

cried that he wasn't playing. His mother scolded him but he ran to his room, collapsed to his knees and pressed his eyes to the hole with the deer. She too was gone, along with her forest of thorns.

Days passed, and then weeks, or months, it all seemed the same day to the boy. He would wake up in the morning and find his father in the kitchen, kissing his mother goodbye and leaving for work. His sister would skip into the kitchen and demand a game of hide-and-seek. He played the first few times but then stopped trying. Each day he would wake up in the morning and find his father in the kitchen, kissing his mother goodbye and leaving for work. His sister would skip into the kitchen and demand a game of hide-and-seek. He eventually came to rest his head against the wall but rather than count, he wept.

He tried piercing holes in the walls with pencils, or a nail loosened from a floorboard, or kitchen knives or forks, but when his mother found out she hid anything sharp and had his father repair every hole or crack in the apartment. 'Lest the landlord make an inspection.'

On the passing of the month, the boy found himself standing on the landing outside apartment twenty-one. He was not sure why he felt he needed to open the door. He only knew he needed to see something unknown to him, something different, and apartment twenty-one had grown the magical allure of any latched chest or arcane door that is forbidden.

Inside the landlord's apartment was the cathedral, the nave broadening out from the doorway. On the other end of the room, in the sanctuary, steam rose from a white mug beside a stack of crisp blank papers. A breeze brushed past the boy's legs and sailed across the nave, carried by the ripples in the marble floor. It broke into itself against the leg of the desk and unfurled upwards, plucking the papers one by one into the air like feathers.

The old man appeared through an archway on the left side, wrapped in his gown, his jaw unshaven, towelling his wet hair. When he reached his desk he looked at the papers rising into the apse, then towards the door, resting on Adam's face for quite some time and then finally watching, in sudden horror, Adam's feet as he stepped into the room and walked towards him.

The old man was frozen; his eyes wide, unblinking; his mouth agape; his breath trembling; his hand pressed against his thudding heart as the boy stood before him and stretched out his fingers. He touched the old man's hand.

'Are you okay?'

In a deathly whisper, the old man announced, 'It would be no more of a shock to me to learn that I did not father the child that I have loved so dearly,' and fell to his chair. On seeing his tired eyes, the boy fell to the old man's lap and began to cry into his gown.

The old man watched as the books trembled from their shelves and the shelves collapsed into a bed of bricks and dissolved mortar. He watched them drift away. He watched the door and nave fade as though he was becoming blind, and watched his desk sink into the brick floor. He watched the last remaining books, suspended amongst the apse, as though spun together, go their separate ways one by one, and then he watched the apse be withdrawn as though by an invisible hand.

He placed his hand on the boy's head, smiled meekly down at him and said, 'I am sorry, Thomas, I have been such a fool.'