

THE QUARRY

Ramona Hester

Backyard Ink

Your naval medals commemorate
twenty years of undetected crime
that's the salty term
your sun wrecked mates throw 'round
inked like youngsters.

Caught on the web between your thumb and forefinger
a butterfly
in Hong Kong backyard ink
a coloured Emperor
a sailor's *papillon*
seafaring homage to the wing.
In the 70's it flew for your children
with a father's magic
barely resting and so hard to catch.

The rest –
the full seascape – began with Keith
as his health sank
you began to court the blue needle
in an effort to feel your own pain
and perhaps

through the barrel
to suck some away from him

You taught your willing flesh Greek
four lines across the heart:

*greater love
has no man but this
that one should lay down his life
for his friends*

the truth sits warmly beneath your gulf medals

There will be no mistaking you at the morgue
how blue those pictures will be
against porcelain skin
when quiet flesh rests on a bed
of stainless steel, you take a breath
Jesus rises on the cross, chest expanding
nightmare ending

just about where I would place an ECG lead
ancient serpent disappears beneath Greek
burrows into your ribcage
slips between pericardium and chest wall
comes up for air at the fifth rib then,
snaking hipwards
is crudely arrested
by a sword through the head
unnatural iconographic end! – the promise was to crush
swords not preferred ‘til mediaeval rush
of tangled crusade push
and tempered steel
subvert the real
the naked heel of God deemed
insufficient.
surely man’s own implement
could not bring about this promised Word
and yet
every pirate needs a sword.

you told me

gold ring wobbling

on mature cartilage your

earring was commemorative

every sailor who rounds the Cape

has his ear pierced I believed you

then called you a bastard call me

anything you like you said after

twenty full years in the navy I've

heard every swearword going

so I asked you to elaborate

and it was true

you h

a

v

e

you have below your navel

an ellipsis of un-inked flesh

from flank to flank

carrying a different

skillful mark where

,

tattoo postponed ----

a doctor reworked your insides

hid art's Dacron mesh secret