

# THE QUARRY

**Alix Rochaix**

## **Crossroads**

**I**

What is it about the small hours?  
Those between say, 2.00 am and 4.00 am?

‘These hours are as small as a human heart  
— with no hope left in it.’

No. Too tragic.

‘These are the hours in which  
to unleash a dam burst of  
... creative agony.’

Worse.

I (for one)

rap out thousands of words

in these wee

small

hours

my face surreal in a monitor light.

(But you will never read them)

I hold schizophrenic dialogue with myself.

I may mutter.

Take my own pulse

— peevishly.

I examine my mad eyes in the mirror.

You know.

You have been here too

— in these same small hours.

What is it about the crossroads?  
In these hours I can hear every sleeping scream  
slamming door  
and all the bottles  
that have ever been hit  
strike the pavement.

## II

If we care at all about image  
— as we doubtless do.  
I would prefer to be seen as mad rather than bad.  
You to be seen as crazy rather than stupid.  
I've heard you smugly identify yourself  
as a bastard  
— even a cunt.  
Because that to you, derivations aside,  
implies power.  
I think you have felt very powerless.  
A bit like I do now in fact.

We know that misinterpreted power corrupts.  
I know that it reduces the function  
of a human heart.

## III

I am alone in the room.  
The room is sparse and loveless.  
An oversized Asian washroom  
— white tiles, cold surfaces.  
No tell-tale signs of emotion here  
— for you have sponged them from your life.  
Everything on wheels.  
As you decreed.  
My heart shrinks and shrivels.  
Outside it's hot, heavy, acrid.

Fires in faraway mountains, but not here.  
Here there is only the haze  
and I have stumbled about in it.  
The air is as heavy and polluted  
as this 'love affair'.  
I can't go out there.  
The smells, the smoke, your silence  
— are all strangling me.

I have thrashed about on blistered feet  
trying to find a place to belong.  
My scream is like Kahlo's,

Diego!

I am alone.

IV

I stand outside the terminal.  
You are waking to find me gone.  
And all things shining and stationary  
on their wheels.  
I'm *such* a klutz.  
I can't do anything effectively  
A stranger lights my cigarette  
— face full of tender concern.  
Can I get you anything?  
What? A paramedic?  
They don't have an antidote  
for disappointment.

This is the crossroads.  
This is where worlds collide  
and shove and push all things on wheels  
— toting their collective baggage.

I must be a sight.  
Tall blonde woman with tear-bloated face.  
I inspire pity.  
I have cut across the global rush

and served as a small reminder.  
Stare if you dare  
— or if your culture permits it.  
Gabble about me assured  
that I don't understand  
— because I really don't.  
Confusion is as much in the admixture  
of my tears  
as catharsis.

V

My last-minute escape flight  
my adrenalin flung flight  
— cancelled.  
Grounded.  
Thwarted.  
This is no dramatic exit.  
I make my displeasure known  
to the blank face  
beyond the counter.  
I'm powerless, he says.  
I may have ranted.  
I did call a state of emergency.  
You're at the top  
of the wait-list  
he lies.  
We'll call you.  
What to do  
in this wasteland between  
imprisonment and flight.

I check through the leather bag  
bought at Bvlgari.  
You thought it would make me happy.  
It didn't.  
Now I'm inspecting it meticulously  
— to ensure there's no mysteriously materialised  
shreds of marijuana.  
Now that would be a thwarted exit!  
Arrested  
at Changi Airport.

For the tiny scumblings  
of the marijuana I smoked  
to make me happy.  
The irony of that  
makes me laugh out loud.  
People's heads pivot.  
The thought then  
of an immense space-age auditorium  
this terminal  
full of heads pivoting  
at the sight of a tall alien  
scraping her nails through  
a Bvlgari bag,  
feeling the surge  
of hilarity hysteria  
sometimes brings.  
And this thought too  
is hysterical.  
Strange person  
who stands alone

laughing.

I buy cigarettes.

VI

I stand outside the terminal.  
Smoking and sniveling.  
Yes. Yes.  
I am a spectacle.  
I've had a bereavement  
a breakup  
a breakdown.  
Thank you.  
Nothing to see here.  
Move on.  
Only the kind stranger stopped  
at the sight of she  
who scrabbled about in a  
flashy bag muttering.  
I'm *such* a klutz.  
cigarette clamped

between her teeth.

I buy cigarettes.  
But no lighter.

However,  
being a spectacle pays sometimes.

For I am called.

## VII

In the sky I splash my face  
paint my lips a pink called Pashin'.  
Take my seat and see  
the blue that has stretched  
gloriously above untainted  
by the haze.  
I had nearly forgotten it.  
Eyes wide, clear now  
as *this* sky.  
— it must have been the smoke.

I can laugh out loud  
at a stupid movie,  
finish a forgotten novel buried deep  
in the grinning gape  
of a Bvlgari bag.

## VIII

When you say,  
What the *hell*?  
We could have talked.  
I say we could have.  
But we didn't.  
And it was the silence  
you see.  
I need words and laughter.

You need your sad guitar  
and silence.  
And without words  
I shrivel to a smudge  
on the tiles  
of Singapore  
smoking and toting  
a burdensome bag-full  
of shredded dreams.

IX

So I stay awake  
in the small hours  
rewriting words.  
But I can only start  
at the ending.

This is a little story  
— a flight, some sleepless hours,  
a few words.  
I thought, at least,  
I should address it to someone,  
rather than leave all that  
folded up in the dark.

What is it about the crossroads?  
There's always small hours  
of grief and madness ...

Aren't there?