

# THE QUARRY

**Anna Blackie**

## **The Valley**

Marcus hung on the precipice of the Valley, looking down into the only world he'd ever known. He marvelled at how insignificant it seemed from this height. Turning his focus to what lay above him, Marcus hauled himself through the crack in the sky, the tantalising scent of fresh air luring him out of his comfort zone. Finally, he lurched over the rim of the Valley, scurrying onto a thin ledge and standing shakily, desperately pushing his aching muscles, both terrified and excited by what lay before him.

\*

The air was warm and thick, despite the relentless movement in the Valley. They had long ago realised that fresh air was not easy to come by, all breeze barred by the vast mountains that surrounded the small town. Marcus clung to the tree beside him, his fingernails digging into the soft bark. The ground trembled incessantly, the vibrations growing stronger and stronger with each passing second.

Marcus analysed the movement of the earth, careful to note the way the ground folded and creased as the disturbance played out. The earth continued to shudder violently, those who were unprepared sent soaring through the air. He watched as Mr Roy, the baker, flew past him, the stout man bracing himself for the inevitable impact against the Valley wall. As suddenly as they had begun the tremors ended. Marcus's eyes were drawn to the small crack of light shining through the top of the Valley. He watched closely, waiting for change, some movement, just a flicker of light, anything...

With a deep sigh Marcus released the tree, his fingers unfurling to reveal two large handfuls of dirty bark. He gently released the debris, opening and closing his hands in an attempt to restore the blood-flow.

'Marcus!' Mr Roy called from behind him. Marcus turned to watch the small man make his way back up the hill, his white apron askew, and face bright red from the effort.

'All right there, Mr Roy?' He called back to the baker.

'Yes, yes, this isn't my first disturbance you know.' Mr Roy chided as he reached him, the bakers ruddy face glistening with a layer of sweat.

'But you know how these things are, let your guard down for five minutes and you're soarin' out your kitchen window!' Marcus laughed, life in the Valley certainly did have an element of the unexpected.

'How's that research of yours coming?' Mr Roy asked as the two men walked together through the Valley.

'Oh, you know,' he mumbled in reply, 'No breakthroughs yet.'

'Well you just keep on keeping on, Marcus' Mr Roy said, his jovial tone before suddenly turning serious, 'If anyone can crack the code of this place, it's you.' With that, Mr Roy gave Marcus a firm clap on the back and made his way back into his bakery.

\*

The origin of The Valley had been speculated over for as long as there had been people inhabiting the tiny enclave. The Church of the Palm spoke of a hand that reached down into the Valley and released life onto the land. The non-believers

spouted stories of people falling from the sky, of fish growing legs and emerging from the Valley's deep, stagnant lake. Children were told tales of men sprouting from the ground, like seeds growing from the soil. Marcus seemed to be the only citizen of the Valley unable to stand the ambiguity; even as a boy he remembered questioning the fables their home was built upon, the myths and folklore not enough to satisfy his thirst for the truth. Although, it wasn't until the arrival of disc that Marcus fully began to question the Valley, becoming desperate to know what lay outside the only reality he had ever known.

Marcus followed the outer wall of the Valley home from school, his small fingers running against the smooth barrier that surrounded him. He moved with a bounce in his step, a somewhat unexpected side-effect of the spongy Valley floor. As he grew closer to home he caught the sound of voices, the walls surrounding the town making it almost impossible to have a private conversation outdoors without your dirty laundry echoing throughout the town.

'Do we tell him?' he heard his father ask apprehensively.

'Of course we tell him.' his mother replied, 'don't we?' she added with uncertainty. Marcus stopped and listened to the conversation, sure that his parents were talking about him.

'This is just the sort of thing he'd obsess over...'

'Well, we can't very well hide It.' his mother declared. Curiosity burned through him, and Marcus began to sprint towards his home, the sprung-floor of the Valley bouncing his tiny body higher and farther than he could have managed alone. He rounded the corner and spotted his house.

The small cottage hugged rocky boundary of the Valley, its walls and roof anchored to the side of the cliff. Marcus followed the sound of voices to the small garden outside. His mother and father stood in the centre of the grassed area, his younger sister Jenny hugging their father's legs, her small body not even reaching his knee. Marcus was too excited to focus on his family, his attention immediately drawn to the object. It lay in the corner of the back-yard, squishing half of the vegetable garden. The disc was huge, at least three times the size of their house. Marcus approached it slowly, as if afraid the inanimate silver object would rear up and bite him. His family stayed quiet as they watched him inch closer, sensing the

fervent excitement that lay beneath his hesitation. He walked slowly around the object, amazed by the vast size, taking its metallic sheen and the massive, stern face chiselled into its surface.

‘What do you think it is?’ he asked his parents who had silently moved to stand behind him. Marcus’s mind was reeling with possibilities of the disc’s origin, each more unlikely than the last.

‘They used to tell us stories about silver discs in school. Myths of these objects falling from the sky and crushing whole houses.’ His father told him quietly, ‘I always thought they were just fairy-tales, scary stories...’

‘Where did it come from?’ Marcus asked as he crouched down to touch the object, caressing its cold, hard surface. ‘How did it get here?’

‘It arrived while you were at school,’ Jenny announced from behind Marcus, making him jump slightly as he had been so involved in the object that he’d forgotten she was there.

‘I was lying in the garden looking up at the sky,’ she gestured to the sliver of light shining through the roof of the Valley, ‘then suddenly it got really bright, and that *thing*,’ she gestured to the mysterious silver disc, now glistening in the dim light, ‘started to fall towards me. I jumped up and moved, it would have squished me flat if I hadn’t.’ Jenny finished her story, beaming from ear to ear. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity, the moment Marcus had been waiting for. Of course it was Jenny who saw it all go down.

‘It came from the sky?’ Marcus repeated, running the words through his head, trying to make sense of the senseless.

‘That’s what I said.’ Jenny replied, clearly miffed at Marcus’s lack of appreciation of her near-death experience. Marcus plunked himself down next to disc, not willing to give his younger sister the satisfaction of appreciating her story. Despite his overwhelming jealousy, Marcus knew he had to find out the origins of the disc.

\*

The disappearance of the disc was as surprising as its arrival. Each morning Marcus had ventured out into the garden to perform his daily tests. First he measured it, struggling to reach his tape measure over the diameter of an object so much larger than himself. He often dreamed about the disc growing through the

night. He would run into the garden the next morning, disappointed to discover nothing had changed. After he'd taken his measurements he would sketch the object, careful to include every detail. When the disc had first arrived Marcus left gifts of food next to it morning and evening, at least until his father had found out and stopped him, unwilling to waste the food on an inanimate object that had crushed half of their vegetable garden. Unable to provoke a reaction from the disc any other way, Marcus had begun to speak to it. He would tell it his dreams as he performed his tests, then inform it of his day at school in the afternoons. Despite the disc's obvious inanimate nature, Marcus had become quite fond of the object and the plethora of secrets he imagined it held.

Marcus had fallen behind on his testing schedule on the morning of the disc's disappearance. He'd been unwilling to enter the conscious realm, his dreams filled with silver objects raining from the sky, the faces etched on the discs filling his ears with stories of the world beyond the Valley. When he finally awoke and made his way outside he was greeted with a sight much more spectacular than that of his dream. An enormous hand emerged through the crack in the sky. The hand was more massive than anything Marcus had ever imagined, thousands of times bigger than the disc. The light emanating from the crack in the sky caught the hand's gargantuan surface, illuminating its full scope while darkening the valley below. Each finger was alarmingly thick, the giant fingernails grubby with dirt. Marcus stole a look at his own hand and marvelled at the similarities, unable to form a coherent thought about what was unfolding before him. A thick wrist covered in dense black hair came into Marcus's view, lowering the hand closer and closer to the disc. The fingers flexed towards the object, reaching to capture it in its grasp. Marcus scurried to the side of his garden, sketching the scene transpiring before him, a voice in his head screaming to him, telling him this is what he had been waiting for. The hand plucked up the disc, lifting it as if it was no more than a piece of paper. Marcus watched in awe as the hand rose higher. The wrist disappeared through the crack pulling the hand and disc along with it.

Speculation as to the origin of the disc and hand ran rampant throughout the Valley. The Church of the Palm experienced an influx in their patronage, the towns' people believing that God had finally begun to take an interest in their home, the

hope being that this Almighty force may be receptive to the prayers of the people. Those of religious orientation began to pray day and night, waiting for a hand big enough to destroy them to reach down and grant their wishes. Others were less optimistic, believing the hand and the disc were signs of the apocalypse, and thus began to prepare themselves accordingly. However, as the weeks past with no sign of the hand, disc or anything else out of the ordinary (despite the regular tremors, which the people of the town had long since accepted as a fact of everyday life) the people began to forget, and soon questions of the unknown were put aside and people moved on with the mundane flow of life. All, that is, except for Marcus. The appearance of the coin had sparked something within him, a deep, searing curiosity that consumed his every waking moment. For the next five years the coin, the hand and the origin of the Valley were all he thought about.

\*

Marcus had worked tirelessly to prepare himself for what lay beyond his home. He had developed strong, muscular shoulders from spelunking and climbing throughout the Valley. He had also grown to match his father's height. At 16, Marcus was already a head taller than all the citizens of the Valley and showed no signs of a decline in his growth. As he continued to grow, he found his climbing exploits became gradually easier. His length allowed him to reach further and pull himself higher along the enclosed walls of the Valley. One day he found himself further up than he had ever been before. The view was magnificent, Marcus could see the entirety of the Valley stretched out before him, his friends and family ambling along beneath him. From this vantage he could see the overhang of the crack in the sky, like a rock shelf, certainly one that Marcus could hoist himself onto. He had no idea what would be on the other side, but he was sure that it was the key to the mystery of his home.

‘Climb *out?*’ She repeated incredulously, ‘How do you even know there is an *out?* For all we know you could get to the top and fall into nothing.’ His parents sat across the table from him; his mother ringing her hands as she spoke, while his father remained stoic and silent, apparently deep in thought.

‘There has to be something more out there, Mum’ he pleaded with her, ‘the hand,

the disc, they had to have come from somewhere.'

'But Marcus-' she started, struggling explanation to placate her sons curiosities.

'No Mum, we both know it's true. There has to be more than *this*...'

'He needs to go,' his father announced.

'What! How can you support this Jeremy?'

'If we don't let him go now he's just going to find a way to do it eventually anyway, right Marcus?'

'Yes,' Marcus answered, avoiding his parents gaze.

'But if he goes now and we help him prepare, then, maybe, he'll have a better chance.' Marcus's mother listened incredulously, unable to accept the idea of releasing her only son into the unknown.

'I need to know what's out there Mum,' Marcus told her, gripping both her hands in his, 'If I don't figure this out it will eat me alive.' Tears cascaded down her face as she took a deep, shuddering breath and nodded.

\*

He hung on the precipice of the Valley, looking down into the only world he'd ever known. Marcus reached out to haul himself through the hole in the sky, his aching muscles screaming in protest as he heaved his long body through the crevice and out into the open air. The sky Marcus saw as he emerged from the crack was more spectacular than he could have dreamed, the light so bright he was forced to cover his eyes. The weak rays of light that had shone down into the Valley were nothing in comparison to the huge, burning ball of bright heat that hovering miraculously on the skyline, causing Marcus's eyes to water as he peaked at it from behind his hand. Marcus's vision began to adjust as he took in the breathtaking view before him. He had done it. Finally, gloriously, he had done it.

Eventually he tore his eyes away from the marvel before him and looked back down towards the Valley. He could now see that his home was a deep crevice, carved into the side of what appeared to be a colossal mountain. As Marcus craned his neck backwards to take in the scope of the mountain, a deafening sound ruptured through the silence, followed by a vicious rumbling underfoot. Marcus grabbed hold of the closest ridge and clung for dear life. The disturbance outside the Valley far

more violent than he could have anticipated. Around him he saw a flurry of movements. The hand appeared, Marcus watched as a long arm protruded out from behind it. A desperate excitement inside him screaming that the truth was almost known. Marcus could see now that the arm was attached to the mountain. His brain exploded with millions of attempted explanations, struggling to comprehend what he was transpiring around him. Before he had time to digest this breakthrough, he felt the shuddering increase. A sound louder than anything Marcus had ever heard broke through the air around him- a barking cough amplified to the highest extent. The violent tremor of the mountain was unrelenting. Marcus's grip faltered and he slipped down the ledge, grappling wildly in an attempt to grab hold of the cracked opening of the Valley. Before his hands could make purchase, Marcus was flung from the mountain. Sheer terror flooded through him as he felt himself freefalling away from everything he had ever know and the answers to the mystery which he had devoted his life. As he fell backwards he looked up towards the mountain, his perspective and the shock of his imminent death allowing him to take in the enormity of what stood above him, and process what he saw him with no scepticism or fear.

A huge man, the scale of which beyond anything that Marcus could have possibly imagined stood before him, draped in the mountain that Marcus now realised to be a huge overcoat. Marcus continued to fall, the air pushing past him at a phenomenal speed, but he no longer cared. It was a man, no mountain or Valley, but the biggest man Marcus had or would ever see. A sudden wave of tranquillity washed over him as his minuscule body hurdled to the ground.