

THE QUARRY

Georgia Buley

The Answer To That, Sir, Is Nothing

There's a matchbook, in case I want to set myself alight.
It didn't happen yesterday, nor the day before—
My cheeks were wet so the sparks can't catch—
But one day. Maybe.

But there is no lighter.
It's the only bright light in this sea of addictions;
I've never sought to taste death on my lips
And blow it back through my teeth.
I'd celebrate if I could breathe deeply enough on my own.
I can't blame the catch on smoke.

There's a tiny little turtle that snaps and begs at my skin
And reminds me with frozen beats that I'm not who I say I am—

Not who I write I am.
I take the turtle out and paint him gold
But it always rubs off in the light.

There are pins and needles in my fingers
Where the feeling's gone and the cold creeps in.
It doesn't get past my knuckles or up into my wrists—
My heart beats too strongly with that warm warm blood—
But one day. Maybe.

There's a whistle that screams brightly into the night.
Sometimes I think it's broken—
Last time I tried to use it, it didn't work—
It deafened me as it shrieked
But not a soul came running. (Someone told me since that I probably should have
shouted 'Fire'.)
I like to hope that lightning can't strike twice, but it could happen.
One day. Maybe.

There's a model of a train
For no reason other than I like to turn the tiny wheels with my fingers
To keep them from flying around another's neck.

There is a chess piece with its tiny head torn off
With sword and shield prepared for the battle that doesn't come
With soulful hands carved in prayer to the unfeeling marble.
He comes from the battle of Troy. He comes from the losing team—
A pawn in a game gone way over his little head.
(Wherever it's gone.)

There are some coins—
Not enough for anything worth buying, mind.
A ten cent piece coated in grime
A silver dollar with an American eagle

A twenty that had been run over by a train
Dali's clock-shaped, her Majesty's great visage melted in a gory rendition of *The Wizard of Oz*.

I like to think my insecurities take the form of hedgehogs
Who prickle and growl and stick out their tongues
And hobble along in their own little way.
They snuffle at the skin of my thighs from inside.
I keep them on hand at all times, ready to bring to the light at a moment's notice.
It doesn't do to ignore them for so long: they can go feral—
At least this way I've got them under rein.
Maybe.

There's a heart all wrapped up in butcher's paper.
It's leaking out the sides, some thin warm thing that still beats angrily on my thighs.
I touch it sometimes, but it's too hot to hold;
I can feel it beat against my skin like oceans.

There is a pen. There is always a pen. I find it harder to write on paper.
(Maybe there's an element of sadism in that.)
The ease of keys under fingertips dulls my sense of the page
I crumple more sheets than I can afford to buy
Notebooks fall into the trash filled with meaningless scribbles across the margins
(And sometimes I ask myself, aren't they all meaningless scribbles?)
But there's something of value to them if I demand there to be.

I type my thoughts out into an online void, and I'm applauded by one hundred
greyed-out faces.
None of them know anything of me. There's no joy in this capitulation.
And it's certain, now, that there's almost nothing to the thoughts that run rampaging
rhino through my mind.
But I write them down anyway, with little scraps I keep handy
And the pen.

Somewhere in there, there's a ticket stub or five
Train tickets and musical tickets, coffee cards with four holes left to punch—
There's no real regency in a temporary life.
Tissues long since turned to scraps, tumbled through time
And a vibrant scrap of fabric that once might have belonged to something beautiful—
Or someone.

There are scars and chips and wrinkles all across my hands
Some are from accidents—
And some not.
If pure recklessness causes accidents, then perhaps it might tip the balance back
But it's clear I'm not as clumsy as I appear.

There's a few photographs, too.
Not of anyone I know;
I find them in garage sales and fold up so tiny they fit onto one fingertip—
Creasing them makes them feel somehow more authentic—
So I remind myself that when I'm gone I'll be more than aged sepia.
I'll be almost more than that, at least.
Maybe.

I draw my hands out and find them empty
Clutching at the banknote-crisp air like if by the reaching I could will it to appear.
And what?
Oh. Something. Anything.

Someone once asked me what I keep in there
And I feign ignorance with those big ol' baby blues flutterin' like butterflies
'What could you mean?' I say.
'What could you possibly mean?'