

# THE QUARRY

Hannah Baker

## Solid Sand and Broken Water

*i.*

He had soft sage and lavender fingers  
When his mother took him up the estuary  
To his brother's tiny grave. Her first-born,  
She told him, still-born, but still borne.  
For months she carried him, thinking only  
Of his potential, then lost him like a limb.

Suddenly become a second son,  
He doesn't feel like a miracle.  
Unless they're supposed to grow

More insubstantial, year by year.

Now he can't help but hold sensations,  
Keep them pressed into the soft mud of  
His muscles, either side of his stony spine

Like the smell of cold grass, broken and  
Sharp, wound round his little knuckles  
Until he felt the hair-thin roots give.  
He shuddered and stopped tugging  
But those blades bit back and dug  
Their imprint deep into his fingers.

Surely his brother would only be bones,  
And even those pitted in this acidic soil.

Porous surfaces never used to panic him,  
But the stinging sight of honeycomb now  
Swells his tongue back to close his throat.

He tries to run, to only glide over the earth  
And so ward off its patient hollow hunger,  
But gravity forces his feet to knead the ground,  
And long for rest on this grassy headland.

Though his soles are callused they still sweat,  
And the veins show through his instep,  
Blue and green like branches and streams.

Thick clay skin means nothing  
When the cracks threaten to leak  
His beaten blood.

Even the sea breeze bores into him

But the warm honey sun is soothing  
And from this high the sand is as solid  
As anything can be.

Every direction leads, he thinks,  
Not to headstones holding old bones down  
But to ribs exposed like mangrove roots.

*ii.*

Death happens, not easy but often.  
Entropic, all matter is mostly vacuum,  
It would be easy for lethargy to sink into  
Atoms, and for weary rock to turn to sand.  
Observed closely enough, coastlines are infinite,  
And molecular gaps keep anything from ever truly  
Touching. But somehow matter retains, regains,  
Its energy, even advances to animation when  
Bodies meet, or bloody waters break and  
Out of the lather erupts something new.  
Not easy but often, life happens too.

*iii.*

She laughed out sea roses as a child,  
When her father warned her off wanting.  
Still the smell of certain perfumes and the sea  
Clearly recalls to her the sticky softness of  
Petals unfurling and clinging to her tongue  
Before tumbling off the cliff of her lips.

He told her she had been born too early.  
Half-knitted, with fluid in her lungs  
And a film of foam for skin,  
She might have unspooled again.  
But she chose to cough and cry instead.

Surviving with just this, she sometimes still  
Feels like a miracle, and marvels at herself:  
No tiny flame wind's whim could flicker out.

By holding heart-sized stones she learnt to  
Swim in a lake as cold and sharp as glass.  
Her lungs already knew the worth of leaking,  
But gravity needed help to hold her down.

With hands like lace she dried and sewed  
Lilies and larkspur between her petticoats  
And cocooned herself, as if with paperbark

Then paced, finally leaving distinct prints,  
But passing unstung through the bees in the  
Clover, over pine needles and rosemary, into  
The solid embrace of the wind. Sand blows  
Into the old scars of her eyelids, still she reaches  
For the shape into which she wants to grow.

She will expand, year by year, from within,  
And when all her layers chafe she knows  
Her pumice-light bones will keep her afloat.

The bruises that bloom and linger only show  
Where everything else ends and she begins.

Her pulse beats in her lips, drowning out  
The pounding waves. Her heart had been,  
Before her birth, only ghostly filigree:  
Useless, however delicate and complete.

Now she's dense and centrifugal, feet planted

In shifting sands, scoured by salt spray and  
Spitting rain. She can afford to shed a little;  
She's known plenty of loss, but no lack.