

THE QUARRY

Alix Rochaix

Mama (by Pascale Amelie Lemaire)

Mama, Mama,
oh Mama.
These are the words I will use
to begin your eulogy.

No longer forbidden to utter
the M-word.
Call me Cole, you decreed.
Like everybody else.

Nicole Elodie Lemaire.
That was you. And I was just one
of everybody else.

Only my lover could tell me
that when I writhed in the shadows of a dream one night,
I squeaked out the question,
Mama?
Then louder, as if escaping a great
and weighty grief–

Mama!

This ICU isn't blinding white.
Someone has thought to paste a mural
of a cheerful coastal panorama
across the rear wall.
And there
is your smashed and intubated face,

superimposed upon it.

That once exquisite face.
One of your eyes gone, I've been told.
Sea-green iris
and all.
All of your perfect teeth
taken.
Apart from a jagged white fragment
a vestige, still visible
in the black blood cavern
of that once lovely mouth.

All this a swathe of bandage,
splash of disinfectant brown,
scramble of tubes,
pipes with square junctures.

Your spiralling hair shorn up
from the temple, a bolt
driven in...

Oh, Mama.

Monitors on your vital signs.
Just a reedy bip bip,
tiny beads of expanding,
then dying light.

I have been told again today,
to expect the worst.

You would have thought
this *is* the worst.

You often assured me,
sought to inform me, saying,
You don't want *that*.
About whatever it was your street-smarts,
your wisdom,
would thrust aside.

I know
you would not want *this*.

Your much younger lover,
uninjured driver,
the last to ride with you, still so alive.
Still the livewire.
The last to hear your laughter.

He sits across from me, beyond the white cases over
your broken bones.

Stares at his phone and the ceiling.
He doesn't say much.
I hadn't heard his name before.
Later,
I won't remember it.

After two days, when the questions are over,
he vanishes.

When they said that there were still signs
of brain life, I surprised them
by blurting out,
That'd be right!
A raised eyebrow.
A note scrawled.

While this brain life rails against the dimming of its light,
I know.
With my fingertips on your thready pulse,
this is no option for you,
as you were,
in the fullness and flush of your senses.
For me to be talking about teaching you,
perhaps,
to talk again.

I lean towards your unbandaged ear
and whisper,
Go.
Who could witness that?
Apart from the panorama and all
that keeps you hovering,
tethered by a fluorescent
filament of a heartbeat.
Or you, or what's called your soul
maybe,
as it levitates above me.

So I speak it,
into your still warm
so soft ear.

Let go.

In this rare lull in the bustle,
I look to the ceiling with a level eye, and tell you
with calm conviction,

that your best path does not begin
down here in this ICU.
Stitched, wired, plated together—
perhaps.

No.
Not *you*,
Nicole Elodie Lemaire.

Go.

I am your daughter. And I am given
to flippant comments, emotional detachment.
Capable of commanding a fractured spectre of a mother
to let go of her life.
Not pretend
that your physical presence
is more valuable in near death, than it was to me
in your big bold life.

And if a hidden camera
and your hovering soul,
record all this,

So be it.