

# THE QUARRY

**Aislinn McKenzie**

## **The Old Dog**

A strong breeze was blowing from the ocean, spinning the washing line into a frantic twirl, as if the old bed sheets and t-shirts were some elaborate patchwork skirt. The house groaned and whistled, and occasional pelts of windblown sand or the scraping of branches would rattle the windowpanes. An older woman struggled to attach her washing as the sheets blew over her head, spinning away from her hands so that she had to try and hold onto the line as she bent down for her clothes. Her name was Marie, and she was the resident of the creaky house, and the owner of the very old dog that watched her worriedly from the front porch. The dog's grey peppered head lay wistfully on her front paws, and nothing but her large brown eyes moved as she watched the trees sway in the heavy winds. The woman laughed to herself.

‘Should have been born with feathers, little chicken’ she muttered under her breath, eyeing the dog affectionately.

She was a great dog. The best of company and the strongest thing when she was young. She used to run with such freedom that it made Marie laugh.

‘She’d make a great working dog’, Marie used to tell her husband, ‘she’d have been better on a property, where she had all the space in the world’. Marie’s husband would nod half attentively, fixated on the tv, his eyes shining blue and vacant from the glow of the tv light.

She walked solemnly towards the house, the wind whipping her hair, tangling it into awful knots.

Marie stood with the porch door open, the basket fitting snugly into her hip as she waited for the dog to get up. The dog’s arthritic legs moved her stiffly into a sitting position till she was finally able to slowly walk towards the open door into the house. Placing the basket on top of the washer, Marie picked the dog up and laid her gently on the couch and went to make some tea for herself.

The dog used to be able to jump onto the couch, her favourite little spot, and Marie’s husband would shoo her away, sharply poking her in the ribs. Marie would always let her stay though. It fascinated her that the dog had chosen that little spot for herself, just as if she were a little person.

The wind continued to shriek under the door and between any crack it could find as the pale cloudy sky gradually turned a dark bruised blue. A storm was blowing in across the water. It seemed that those cold breezes just blew right through her these days, rattling her bone. It was akin to the times she had caught a chill when she was younger, except no amount of warmth ever seemed to remedy it now.

‘Just another one of those days’ she said, as she gently warmed her hands against the rising steam of the kettle, her eyes alight with swirling clouds as she gazed out the window.

With a heavy sigh, Marie turned away from the window and walked gingerly to the couch, making sure that when she sat, she was close enough to the dog to feel the warmth of her body against her thigh. She cupped her hand around the mug.

‘See no sound’ she said to the dog, as she tapped her fingers against the ceramic. She didn’t miss the clink of her ring. She had worn that ring for so long, and yet taking it off had not elicited any pangs of sentimentality. There had certainly been some grief after her husband’s passing, but she felt it wasn’t all for him. There had been something else, a greater sense of loss over one’s life that came from the acceptance of mortality. Either way she couldn’t bear the pity that crossed people’s faces when she said she was a widow, their looks of embarrassment and how they reflected how lonely she must feel.

She wasn’t alone, she had her dog.

The loneliness that one feels in an old house with their dog is nothing to the loneliness felt amongst the company of others.

‘Never marry young’ Marie said, pointing her finger at the dog in mock reprimand. Her dog stared bemusedly in her direction, the little eyebrows furrowing before she rolled onto her side and sighed.

Marie stared at the hands holding her mug, her smooth skin had wrinkled to a translucent sheet that could no longer hide the knotted veins beneath. Her legs had similarly mottled and atrophied, and she couldn’t help but remember how plump and strong they used to be. She used to take the dog for long walks, sometimes all afternoon, exploring various caves and crevasses in the nearby mountain. How peaceful it had felt to traverse such expanses of land, like a wandering nomad or shepherd.

‘Let’s run away, just the two of us’ she used to say to the dog.

Maybe she should have, when she’d had the strength to do so. Now both of them were too old and tired to walk any further than the washing line.

Large round droplets began sporadically plonking against the windows, darkening the sand that had encroached upon the once manicured lawn. The dog pricked her ears towards the increasing loudness of the rain but did not raise her head. Briefly Marie glanced at her washing out on the line, but ignored it, choosing instead to rest her head against the dog’s side, listening to the little rattles of breath and the tiny faint heartbeat that still fuelled her body.