

THE QUARRY

Rosamund Kenay

This Pebble

I put this cool white pebble in your hand,
when we were together – the last time.
Burnished smooth by the Findhorn river,
made of granite from the Cairngorms.
Its structure like your mind, is a matrix of microscopic crystals – forced together,
by the volcanic force of intellect.
Invisible to the naked eye –
felt by your family.

You always insisted on Peter,
Petros, rock in Greek - how apt.
For a boy captivated by languages,
etched in the stones, of ancient Greece and Rome.
They took you away from your millstone-grit childhood – spent by the black Mersey.
To the glowing, golden, sandstone of Oxford.

This pebble,
is smooth under my fingers,
like piano keys were under yours.
Your music followed us, through the open windows of our house,
out into the garden,

where we played with flints and fossils mined from a motionless Cretaceous seabed,
which – *before the common era*, was carved,
into the abstraction of a white horse.

We found treasure on long walks in damp beech hangers,
scattered on the dazzling chalk escarpment,
where we stood –
where *you told us* to stand –
in the eye of that white horse.
And the wind blew my long hair into my mouth.

I washed endless shards of Roman pottery for you with a purple toothbrush.
As I watched you dig for inspiration in the heavy grey clay,
of a Buckinghamshire field.
I was allowed a fragment of the pot,
with a Roman thumb print on it.
I keep it with this pebble.
I was always allowed to keep fragments,
of your intellect.

You see my mind isn't adamant like yours.
I revelled in the names of the flowers, as we walked the Chilterns – always distracted,
by the transient and the vascular –
dog's mercury, cuckooflower,
enchanter's nightshade,
whitebeam and juniper,
eyebright and candytuft
I never looked for the foundation of things,
the rocks, language is built on.
You wanted me to see the patterns in your music, not the pathos.
Unable to follow your stone path,
I wandered off,
on more erratic feet.

Dad, did you know –for your gravestone,
we chose Catullus,
and white granite,
from a quarry near Rome?
*Ave, atque vale*¹

A Short Song²

I

Our child plays on the beach
and as I sit here
on the edge of the known world
she plays

In a pristine shore break.

And the blue

and the green and the blue

and the blue

and the impossible green

of clear water
washes over her.

II

On other beaches children do not play
they are guillotined down
by *sea-green incorruptible*
waves
of foreign policy
of poison gas

And the blue smoke

and the green and the blue

and the blue

and the blood red

and the impossible green

of bitter salt water
of jealous old men
of the colours of history
wash over them.

¹ 'hail and farewell.'

Catullus 101 (Green) University of California Press, 2007

² 'The song is a short one, and may perhaps serve to qualify our judgment of the sea-green incorruptible.'
Carlyle, T. *The History of French Revolution* – 1837. Written of - Maximilien François Marie Isidore de Robespierre 6 May 1758 – 28 July 1794