
GEOLOGY

by

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300 words

Slate. Shale. Basalt. They form the essence of this dun-coloured expanse, where the bushes grow stunted in the stillness beyond the booming of the wind, the distant creak of a rusting windmill. The hills echo with the same bleak shades, though they bruise to soft mauve with the addition of distance. Power lines run towards eternity, threading together the horizons with their softly swooping rhythm.

We are here to break open the dry brown landscape, to draw out its bounty by fracking. People hate geologists, calling our work desecration. They have never seen the beauty of rocks, or felt the permanence of stones.

He turns over a slab of slate. It has the striations of watered silk. Acid-etched into its sleekness are fragile fans, lacy veins. 'Fossilised seaweed', he says, tracing the veining with a dust-grained finger. 'A million years ago this was an ocean.' And he grins at me, his teeth too white in his wind-battered face.

Is this why I studied geology?

Yes.

No.

Well, maybe.

There's no sea lace in this emptiness now. Only flaking slate, and the silence of basalt, the last echoes of crumbled tectonic plates. Basalt blocks formed the walls of that cottage where we slept last night, and slate clad its floors beneath our heaving sleeping bags and their guilty secrets.

The sunlight catches the band on the third finger of his left hand. I quiver with memory. Last night, his touch, his tenderness - all have become nothing. They are transient moments lost in time, lingering only in the way I ache. He's not mine, will never be mine, despite those stolen moments in a cottage made of basalt and slate. A cottage between the bruised hills, where regret creaks like a rusting windmill, echoed by the silence of rocks and stones.