

## SAFE TRAVELS

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### 1. WIND AND SEED

In Arabic, there are maybe a dozen words for love. One of them is *hawa*, which translates to the beginning of love. In Hindi, *hawa* means air, or wind. *There's something in the air*. Another one is *hubb*, meaning seed, meaning something that could burst open and bloom. So many words for love: language helps us find ways to forge new futures. When they come to burn it all, maybe one of the dozen words would escape, fly away like a seed carried by the wind.

The seed flew from the Arabian Desert to Antarctica, where it dropped with a *plop* on an iceberg, and slept for a thousand years. It was the seed of an orchid, the size of a mote of dust, a smithereen of glass, made up mostly of air and a very tiny embryo. The weight of meaning lifted by the lightness of form. A flash of time travelling across the world like a long-distance love letter that arrives in a worn envelope but when opened, contains that particular immediacy of longing.

A group of travellers in bright orange jackets clicked past in a zodiac, unaware of the planetary scale of events that had taken place before them. They splashed forward towards the squealing seals.

The frozen seed was a rainforest in waiting. When it woke, it found itself on Deception Island, an ashen beach formed from a volcano, shaped like an ensō, warm with geothermal currents. Clouds of steam rose from the shore. The icebergs had dissolved and the glaciers had melted. Furrows of meltwater suddenly thrumming. An epiphyte, the orchid only needed humidity to grow. Dropping anchor by floating. Its roots grew fleshy with a layer of white cells. The spongy velamen absorbed water, transpiring through the nodes of the stem and yawning into the anther. Its rhizomatous structure meant that it never thought upwards or downwards, as if that long slumber had made its very temperament one of permanent horizontality.

It felt familial towards the other inhabitants of the island. On occasion, it wondered how it got there, but it also wondered how everything else got there: this rock, those stars, that pair of bifocals. It was often visited by a parrot whose ancestors had been brought over by Wilhelmine, the whaler's wife. Maybe some epigenetic memory of tropicality brought them together.

Once, its spongy tentacles entwined with the fishing nets drifting in the ocean: even there, out there in Antarctica, *terra nullius*, there were loopholes, the minute enmeshed with the monumental, the synthetic and the decaying, forming strange hybrid creatures that morphed, bulbous and de-bodied.

The word *alaga* is a clinging kind of love, a passionate attachment, a symbiotic care or a parasitical slurping. (In Hindi, *ilaga* means a zone, a territory, a radius of one's own). Conflating the two, love becomes spatial. The orchid chose to disregard the gnawing sensation that it was another embellishment of The Hotel Lobby and return the net's call for fealty.

The final stage of love, at the edge of insanity, is called *huyum*. It arrives at the end of language, after science. The end of reason seemed to the orchid the beginning of a life in which it might never have to justify where it belongs in the scale of things. Imagining that cell by cell, it might have osmosed with an iceberg, and somewhere in the past, was an orchid with petals that looked like sastrugi, ice varnished by the wind. That this horizon-line between seed and berg could be an unreasonable love affair: its body may feel a strange force of attraction, not to the light but to the brief gusts of icy wind, for which there is no measure, névé crystals forming and melting in the same breath, making a sound like *hu yum*.

### 2. DISTANCE

A perpetual advancing, retreating.

Distance takes on the characteristics of a caretaker – the body that mediates feelings of proximity, intimacy, relevance, urgency. How is it that across vast distances, the melting of glaciers rocks us like a tide, changing the rhythm of flow in our bloodstreams, as it pumps in and out of our hearts.

### 3. WATER AND ASH

Glaciers help us hold cycles that cannot be contained by our bodies alone.

The water that falls down into our atmosphere may have once held a glacier's ice, once *been* its ice. The transmutation of a glacier's form speaks volumes about what it means to change states, to accumulate time, to dissolve completely. We have needed glaciers. Having to conjure them posthumously as their bodies melt into floodplains and ocean waves is a process our bodies try to understand.

Is it fact or myth that water never leaves the atmosphere. Are there ever venturing molecules that go someplace else. Or does the water from thousands of years ago truly keep cycling in its vaporous migration and comprise the liquid matter we ingest, we weep, we pray to.

We occupy a liminal space where we cannot fully celebrate the thriving of life, nor fully mourn its departure. Our task becomes something of a *being with being with* a life that is hopelessly enmeshed with our own.

We were on a cliff by the sea when we threw ashes into the ocean. We watched the vessel containing them float and get tossed in the waves. We imagined how, in many years the vessel would be ground into grains of sand, shards of pottery picked up by a passerby; perceived as something special: calcium, iron, sulfur, cells. Maybe ashes will become sand, the kind that holds sunlight; that builds castles which rise and fall with the washing of tides.

There are sand dunes that were left in the wake of retreating ice sheets. Maybe sand dunes are the ashes of glaciers.

When we talk about ice we are also talking about Other geographies. Ice has long been viewed as a desolate material, devoid of the kind of life one sees in the boreal rainforests, the jungles of the Amazon, in the colour green. However, glaciers write and rewrite the history of the ground, burying prior movement with each advance, revealing new masses of earth with each retreat. Kettle lakes are born from depressions of earth that fill with meltwater, often becoming bogs and hosting forms of life that had no prior existence. Glaciers are movers of the minute and the magnified, communicating through space, time and bodies. As the climate warms and the archives of ice thaw, thousand-year-old hemlocks with their roots intact are

revealed and awakened from centuries of gestation. Glaciers are our elders choosing what to reveal and conceal in time.

What futures are yet to be written by ice.

At the end, glaciers melt into the horizon-line of the sea, into our bodies. There are no more monuments. They collapse, meeting the edge of insanity, evaporating into air.