

ICELAND IS

MELTING

AND

SO ARE YOU



ICELAND IS MELTING AND SO ARE YOU

TALYA RUBIN

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DEAD ICE

THE SNOW QUEEN

What if a shard of tainted glass alighted
in your eye and the world went white—

a fouled lullaby

And the girl of your dreams turned out
to be the Snow Queen

And you got caught in rose brambles
trying to make things right

And one drop of blood began a litany
of blood and the rivers ran red

And the petals off peonies fell to land
weeping in defeat

And you called this a regular day on earth
because now the great undoing had begun

And desperate thieves failed to stuff diamonds
back into the shifting ground

And the thunder of collapse was so deafening
it overtook the traffic, like the crackle

of bushfire ripping through pine plantations
screaming through ancient stands of forest

And the tumble of glaciers and ice floes
went unnoticed, except their distant rumble

was everywhere in our veins
And the highways that criss-crossed LA

like snakes, stood still, their
twisted bodies a monument to

a chrysanthemum's deadheaded gaze

And buses shuttled empty, their ghost passengers
staring out ghost windows onto ghost streets

at the world we made and unmade, made and unmade
until it made us, finally made us, into who we are

ICELAND

Broody-lipped bathers
sip air in April four below zero
soak in forty-degree pools
geothermal.

Viking ships sail the brain
the stillbirth of the past
every face the same
porcelain impossible to crack.

The church in the centre
looms over the entire town
stone grey without any icon.

Silent centuries
sealed shut like
cement over bone.

And the sea, the sea
the dull, still sea
one long line stares
singular and steadfast.

Deep unavenged darkness
broods behind steel eyes—
an Icelandic fury
that translates as muted grief

for all the women thrown overboard
the men and children swallowed
where councils sat in dark
caverns to break and break

bones and bread
doors red, poured down
rivers rushing into a future
that weave through fingers
like a loom.

DISARTICULATION

The Ok glacier embeds fracture scars, downwasting
of a long dead volcano, its bitter furrow
a welt in the path of extinction.

Meltwater reveals sediment of gravel, sand, mud
dark mountain face bald and avenged
of grief—is all that remains.

Remnants drift in retreat, the barren zone now
stagnation. The terminus a plaque commemorating
loss of permafrost.

What was permanent? We are changing every day
growing older and melting, chatter marks
across our skin.

Imprints of where we have been and what we overlooked.
Frozen ripples of studded terrain
give way under foot.

In Iceland, they hold a funeral for the Ok glacier, resurrect
the dead awhile, breathe in unnoticed air
the trimline a boundary between

now and no turning back.
Our bodies against the wind
the only stirring

in this valley. The surge
of glaciers heaving into
pit pond

depositing their rock dust
icefall forever
suspended and gone

in a blink.

ROAD TRIP

Rather than pay for a tour
we follow the bus headed
for the northern lights—
so unlikely to glimpse
them, we chase
other people's dreams
down Icelandic highways.

The night is overcast
our small child asleep
in his car seat in the back
the entire countryside hushed
by fog and steam.

I can barely see out
the night-frosted windows
but imagine primordial
events all around us.

We lose the bus at a turnoff
and head back to Reykjavik
past volcanic landscapes
that hiss and explode
spurt and exhale
like shooting stars against
the black sketch of hills.

Here topography is more
than being human—
the land has lungs
that breathe us.

We are chasing the
northern lights, bathing in
hot springs, getting closer
to loving better, one road stop
at a time.

Doing sweet things humans
do in the dead centre of their lives
when this road is all that matters
and loneliness is at least
a good arm's length away.

In the daytime you have to pay
to see the geysers, unleash.
They reach up from the centre
and we know for a moment
what lies beneath.

A souvenir ticket with a jet stream
printed in Technicolor
clutched in our hands. A stuffed elk
in the gift shop preserved
for all time.

I won't forget this—
the way the planet tilts and sways
with us still on it
the way the road dipped
the lights that led us home.

ICELAND IS MELTING AND SO ARE YOU

In Corner Brook, Newfoundland
snow falls so thick and fast it
looks like my childhood.

I stand in the strange
green porch light of the
hotel. Listening to the silence.

The everlasting crunch
of boots on packed snow.

I was warned not to go east
in late January. Told I would
never fly out again. Trapped
like a mountain climber under ice
preserved forever
or, at least, until spring.

Earlier that day, I went for a slow drive
along the shore. I could not bear
to breathe the air, so cold
for more than an instant
as the grey blue and white hues
of eroded hillsides drifted around me.

There is a portrait of a fisherman
in my hotel room. He stares
at me in double—
once on the wall and
then again in the mirror.
I can't escape his gaze
even when I am sleeping.

Fish shed after fish shed
shut down.
Too much fishing, too little fish.
Too late now.

My dinner host drives up.
The hum of the radio
resonates through shut windows.
That comforting lilt of
the CBC delivering the
news in neutral tones.

But her little boy
is weeping in the back seat.
He is eleven and his small
body shuddering makes me
want to reach back and hold him.

My limbs are cold and frozen in place
my gloved hands instead stay
cupped in my lap.

“We heard a report that Iceland
is rising as the ice is melting. It’s worse
than they thought. When you drill
a hole in the ice shelf, it’s empty.”

This young boy, his body
nearly collapsing
from the grief.

Feeling what we can’t feel
feeling what we can’t feel
feeling what we all feel
for us.

DEAD ICE

this is no longer
Holocene
hologram
a hollow
a hole

for what was
once
there
now vanished

ice retreats slow
as a river that
seems
not to flow

our eyes
cannot
see in
mountain time

our tongues do
not
speak in
polar ice
sheets

in this interglacial
period

we scratch and scour
rocks

drill ice
cores

read frozen
matter
like
rings of trees

each year a story
of what we did
or did not
do

since 1961 we
have
lost
10.6 trillion tons

of snow and ice
mountain
time
is

quicken
like the heart
accelerates in a

heightened
state of fear

wake to find a pooling
on your bedroom
floor

the weep of glaciers

a raven for the darkening
a dove for the lightening
the opposites

now flap
palpable
in our ears

thunderous
as collapse