

The MANTELPIECE

Issue 5

Literary Magazine

November 2023





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a surprising history*



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Vera Design's jewellery is sold in 24 stores in Iceland and one in the Faroe Islands and on their website www.veradesign.is from where it is shipped worldwide.



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Winter is Coming

Dark clouds have gathered on the horizon, obscuring the final glimmers of autumn's golden light. The first snow has dusted the peaks of distant mountains, a quiet harbinger of the long, cold winter ahead. Unlike the carefree snowflakes of childhood memories, this first snow brings with it a sense of foreboding. It is as though the mountains themselves are warning us of the impending darkness, casting their icy silence far and wide.

The horizon has become a theater of brooding intensity, where dark clouds have amassed in formidable formations, effectively swallowing the last flickers of autumn's resplendent golden light. These aren't the fluffy, innocuous clouds of brighter days; they're dense and ominous, as if weighted with a message they're yet to deliver. As if to accentuate this unfolding drama, the first snow of the season has begun to settle on the craggy peaks of distant mountains. It arrives not with the playful flurries that elicit childhood glee, but as a solemn, quiet harbinger of the long, harsh winter that lies ahead.

This initial dusting of snow seems far removed from the enchanting flakes that feature in our fondest wintry memories—the ones that prompted gleeful laughter and youthful frolics in a world transformed into a playground. Instead, this snow carries an aura of foreboding, tinged with a cold, austere beauty that is as unsettling as it is mesmerizing. It's as if the mountains themselves have become ancient sentinels, vested with the ominous task of forewarning us. They project their chilling stillness and silence across valleys and towns,

through rivers and forests, to reach us in our homes, enveloped in our modern lives, far removed from their eternal, unyielding majesty. Their icy hush seems to whisper a cautionary tale that extends far beyond the changing weather, hinting at a deeper, more pervasive darkness that looms on the threshold of our collective future.

As I write, a cacophony of warfare, political unrest, and human suffering reverberates around the globe. Once-distant battle cries now echo ominously closer to home, shattering the illusion of our insular lives. The walls of our homes, which used to feel like sanctuaries, now

“Dark clouds and first snows are not mere poetic metaphors but poignant reminders of how the season's desolate beauty mirrors the state of our world.”

tremble with the vibrations of a world that has lost its equilibrium. “Winter is coming,” we mutter, recognizing that the phrase has taken on new layers of meaning in an era of uncertainty.

Dark clouds and first snows are not mere poetic metaphors but poignant reminders of how the season's desolate beauty mirrors the state of our world. Winter has long been the symbol of life's harsh realities—the end of growth, the onset of stagnation, a pause filled not with rest but with struggle. It's difficult to consider the serenity of a snow-covered landscape when that stillness is punctuated by the deafening blasts of

artillery, or the shrill cries for justice and peace that go unheard.

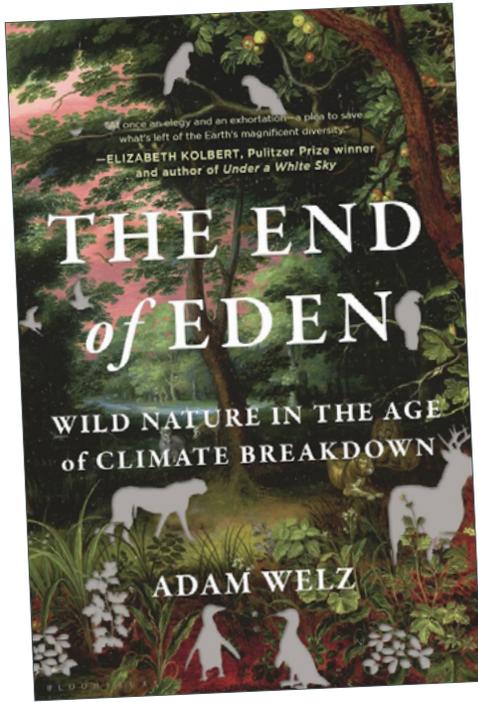
Yet, despite the darkness that hangs over us like an unyielding storm cloud, there is a glimmer of something else—something enduringly human. Amid the relentless thunder of a world at war with itself, there are moments when another kind of silence is palpable. It is the solemn quietude one experiences when gazing at the snow-capped mountains from a distance, or the profound silence of a night sky so vast it seems to swallow sound itself.

In these rare instances, we find a reprieve from the ceaseless clamor that defines our modern existence. Nature, in its stark winter garb, extends an invitation—an opportunity to reclaim a sense of peace that seems increasingly elusive. In the desolate beauty of winter, we are offered a reminder that even within the harshest seasons, there is room for quiet reflection, for solitude, for soul-searching.

As the clouds loom and the snows descend, let us remember to turn away from the screen, from the constant feed of dread, and look to the mountains, the sky, the limitless expanse that reminds us we are but small players on a vast stage. In embracing the solitude that nature offers, we can find the strength to hope, the courage to persevere, and the wisdom to understand that, even in the darkest of winters, the promise of renewal exists.

And so, we face the coming winter not with resignation but with a fragile, tentative hope—knowing that beneath the frozen exterior, life prepares for a new season, quietly awaiting the chance to begin again. *L.H.* □

New Non-Fiction Books



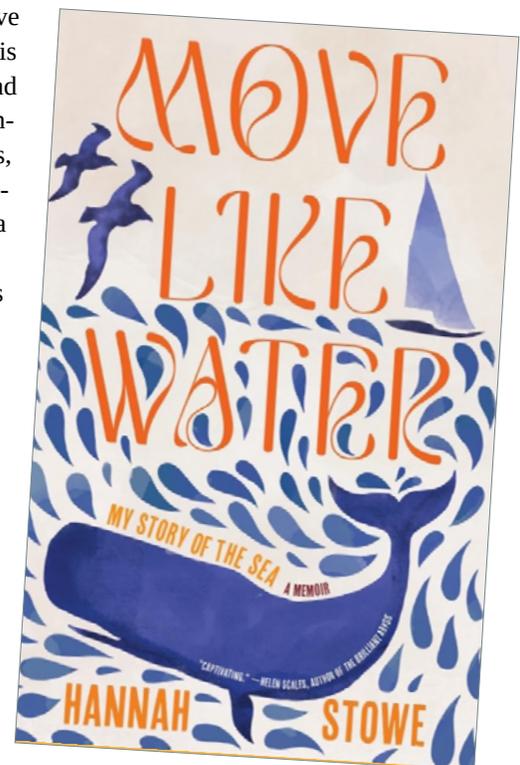
The End of Eden - Wild Nature in the Age of Climate Breakdown by Adam Welz (Bloomsbury Publishing). In Adam Welz’s book, we enter a world on the brink of ecological collapse, where the narrative’s measured and precise tone forgoes outrage in favor of meticulous accuracy. With detachment, Welz guides us through a disheartening panorama of species, biomes, and continents, all caught in impending doom. Human beings take a backseat in this narrative, yielding the stage to other creatures. The central theme emerges: the living world, over millennia, adapted to thrive in harmony with ever-shifting conditions. However, the industrial revolution disrupted this equilibrium. The result is an anarchic world, a squandered gift from evolution. Welz’s argument gains strength from its combination of breadth and depth. Consider the poignant tale of the red knot, a striking wader with a precarious existence. These birds, which breed in the Siberian tundra, have seen their habitat transformed by climate change. The melting snow arrives earlier each year, leaving the young knots without sufficient food. The consequences are dire: malnourished chicks, dwindling numbers, and smaller, weaker birds making the perilous journey to West Africa.

Throughout the book, Welz presents captivating yet disconcerting vignettes. In each instance, the precision of evolution succumbs to the inadvertent brutality of global warming. In a personal reflection near the book’s end, Welz shares the emotional toll of his reporting. Like war correspondents alienated by society’s indifference to conflict, he grapples with the apathy towards urgent climate findings. His narrative challenges readers to confront the disconnect between their daily choices and the environmental crisis. How many, he wonders, will change their ways knowing that even their air conditioning contributes to the birds’ demise? This is a disquieting and pivotal work. Welz dares to hope that, like past global tyrannies, this era of ecological abuse may not endure the century. Yet, it’s more plausible that we must now face the bleak consequences of squandering an unacknowledged blessing. In this book, Welz lays bare the profound cost of our inaction, urging us to awaken to the harsh reality of our environmental legacy. □

Move Like Water - My Story of the Sea by Hannah Stowe (Tin House Books). The ocean’s timeless allure and the captivating lives of its denizens have always beckoned, and in “Move Like Water,” Hannah Stowe’s coming-of-age memoir, she eloquently answers that call. This memoir is a sensorial odyssey, blurring the lines between memoir, journal, and a profound exploration of nature’s mysteries. Each chapter takes its name from a creature Stowe encounters in both the real world and her dreams. Stowe’s roots trace back to Pembrokeshire, Wales, where she was raised by the coast. Her mother, an accomplished artist, nurtured her daughter’s growing passion. “I always knew the sea,” Stowe fondly recalls. “The weather was a constant companion.”

However, the societal expectations that surround her clash with the tempestuous stirrings in her teenage heart. At a “careers week,” where the marines were portrayed as adventurous, her future was distilled into mundane options like “plumber” or “electrician.” Stowe yearned for a different path, one marked by intrepid exploration and boundary-pushing. Yet, as a 17-year-old with earnings from pub shifts, she couldn’t articulate her longing. Told by a “careers officer” that her dreams were unattainable, she left school at 18 and embarked on a job offering wildlife tours of local islands, but it proved toxic. Dehydration and grueling 70-hour workweeks led to a kidney infection. Eventually, Stowe’s journey led her to a research vessel studying bottlenose whales off Newfoundland. It wasn’t all smooth sailing, with waves crashing and icy spray in the rain. But it was the life she had yearned for.

One unforgettable night, amidst freezing fog and exhaustion, she had an unexpected encounter. While on watch, monitoring radar for icebergs, she sensed a profound marine presence and saw a dark shape rising from the sea, almost gelatinous, with a wet breath spraying her face. Laughing into the darkness at her first sighting of a sperm whale, she knew she had found her true calling. □



Unplayable Lie

James Blakey



“No pressure, Honey.” Craig smirks like a middle-schooler who discovered whoopee cushions.

“Quiet!” Allison hovers over the ball. With steady hands worthy of a cardiac surgeon, she draws back the putter in an ideal Euclidean line and—

Ping! The ball zooms across the green, tracing an improbable parabola. Allison contorts herself, hip out, legs bent, psychically imparting body English. Still on target, the white sphere slows to the speed of a snail crossing a glacier. With its last rotation, the ball dies into the cup with a satisfying plunk.

“Birdie!” Allison pumps her fist. Strutting like an Oscar winner, she crosses the green and retrieves the ball.

“Nice putt!” Craig channels his inner timeshare salesman.

“Up two strokes.” She makes a “V” with her fingers, but he’s painfully aware of the score.

The couple slides into their cart. Craig presses down on the scorecard, snapping the pencil point. He jams the accelerator like he’s stepping on a scorpion, and the cart lurches forward.

“Take it easy, Dale Jr.” Allison grips the side rail, knuckles as white as their gated community.

“Hang on.” Craig accelerates into the blind curve leading to the twelfth tee.

“Watch out!”

The drink cart, loaded down like one of Hannibal’s elephants, is coming the other way. Craig spins the steering wheel, his cart bouncing off the path. Allison flies out of her seat and ends sprawled on the grass, like an Arizona frat boy after the Duel in the Desert.

“Oh, my gosh! Are you folks okay?” The drink cart girl’s hair is blonde enough to make Craig put on his shades.

“We’re fine.” Craig ignores Allison’s plight and moseys over. “What have you got for beer?”

“Coors Light, Sam Adams, and Bud.” She flashes a smile that must have cost her father at least ten grand. “Mr. McCray, right?”

“Yeah.” Craig squints at her: cotton candy pink polo shirt, curves like the road to Apache Junction, eyes as blue as Lake Mead in July. His face gives away his confusion.

“Melanie Jorgensen. I was in Wally’s class.”

“Oh yeah, Melanie.” This is not the little girl he remembers. “Give me a Sam Adams. How you doing?”

She retrieves a bottle and shrugs. “Home from ASU and selling drinks. How’s Wally?”

“He stayed in Boston for the summer. How do you like State?” The bottle sweats in his hand like a teenager taking the SATs.

“Having a blast. I’m on the golf team, and we won the PAC-Twelve this year.”

“Outstanding! On your day off, we should play a round.”

Melanie shakes her head, the wind fluffing her hair. “Can’t, it’s members only. Staff Day is at the end of the season, but I have to be back in Tempe before then.

“Nonsense. You can play as my guest.”

“Really?” Again with the five-figure smile.

“You bet. How much do I owe you?”

“Seven fifty.”

Craig fishes a twenty from his wallet. Their hands touch longer than necessary. Melanie goes to make change.

He waves her off. “Keep it!”

“Thanks, Mr. McCray.”

“Craig.”

“Craig.” Melanie nods.

“Craig?” Allison waits in their cart, crossed arms, covered in grass stains like a six-year-old in a detergent commercial.

As Melanie motors away, Allison punches him in the arm. “For God’s sake, Craig. She’s Wally’s age.”

He jabs a finger in her face. “I was being friendly. You could use a few pointers.”

On the twelfth tee, Craig slices his drive. The ball disappears to the right, halfway to Utah.

“That’s a shame.” Allison’s glee is uncontainable.

Allison tees up, and Craig’s phone buzzes.

Vicki: MISS YOU

Craig: ME TOO BABY

Vicki: GET TOGETHER TONIGHT?

“Who’s that?” Allison gets in the cart, glaring like a rattlesnake ready to strike.

Craig shoves the phone in his pocket. “Hector. He had a question about the Mossberg account.”

“This is supposed to be our time. Turn that thing off.”

“Already did.” Craig maneuvers the cart down the path. “Where did you land?”

“Middle of the fairway. About two twenty.”

“Don’t worry about the bunker on the left.” Craig practices reverse psychology, drops off Allison, and drives to his ball. It’s ensnared in knee-deep rough, thick as the Amazon rainforest.

Back in the fairway, Allison, hands on hips, watches the group on the green. With a nudge of his shoe, Craig’s ball is now sitting up like a kid in Catholic school. A four iron lands him on the green inside Allison’s circle. He pulls out his phone.

Craig: OLD SWEDES @ 8?

Vicki: SEE YOU THERE

When Craig picks up Allison, she’s eyeing him like a cat watching a mouse hole. “Nice recovery.”

Their match remains tighter than I-10 at rush hour. Craig is down by one as they arrive at the eighteenth hole: par-3, 168 yards. With a six-iron, he drops his ball pin-high in the right-hand bunker.

“Have fun at the beach!” Allison finds the far side of the green, sixty feet from the hole.

Definitely three-putt territory. Maybe four, if Craig can rattle her.

At the green, Craig follows Allison instead of heading to his ball. “I think you’re away.”

“Really, Craig?”

He shrugs. “Strict rules of golf.” He stands close enough to be in her field of vision. As Allison draws back her club,

Craig coughs like a two-pack-a-day smoker.

Her putt races four feet past the cup. Craig needs to get up-and-down in two. He climbs into the trap. The blood drains from his face. The ball is plugged, buried like a World War Two landmine.

Time for more foot magic. He digs into the sand with the toe of his shoe and kicks the ball to the back of the bunker, giving him a chance at the pin.

“Craig?” Allison stands on the lip of the trap, an expression on her face like she heard the president was shot.

She knows.

After twenty-three years of marriage, she knows everything. □



Other People's Problems

Lillian Heimisdottir



Photo: MiraCie72 / Adobe Stock

Anna contacted me when I was working as a house-sitter in Southern France, near Perpignan. A wealthy family had hired me to watch their villa and take care of their expensive breeding dogs, two furry Afghan hounds that needed constant care and attention. They have to be walked every day and their long coat must be groomed regularly in order to keep the hair silky and free

from knots and matting. My job was to look after the dogs and provide a presence at the property, in order to minimise the risk of break-ins and burglary. For this, I got to stay rent-free in this gorgeous house, which I would never have been able to afford otherwise.

I told Anna that she and her partner, George, could come and stay with me for a couple of nights, even though

it was technically forbidden to have guests in the house, and I had signed a contract which specifically prohibited any visitors. But there was something in Anna's voice that made me tell her to come and stay with me, something disturbing that I had never noticed before. She seemed scared and shaken and I knew that something must be seriously wrong in her life.

Anna and George were what you might call digital nomads. They travelled around the world, doing all kinds of jobs on the internet, such as translations and graphic design for people and companies that were located at different places on the planet. They worked for firms in Australia as well as Alaska and Ireland.

Everywhere they went, they recorded their travelling experience with an expensive digital camera and posted the recordings on a major video-sharing platform online. This way, they made enough money to finance their travels and were able to see the world without having to spend months or years at a regular job that would have tied them to one place or rely on money from relatives. It was a dream come true for both of them. They got to travel to exotic countries and George got to realize his dream career of being a film-maker, shooting and editing the videos, which were then viewed by hundreds of thousands of subscribers around the world. He had worked hard for this and in many ways he had by this time reached the peak of his career. This was exactly what he had always wanted out of his life: freedom of movement, unlimited flexibility and artistic independence.

As for Anna, she too had liked this nomadic lifestyle and had embraced the freedom of being able to see the world on a low budget. "You are my muse and my ultimate inspiration," George would tell her as he recorded and photographed her in front of iconic monuments around the world. He took pictures of her posing in front of the Eiffel tower, sitting on the steps of the Taj Mahal, walking along the Great Wall of China and lounging in a hammock at a Yoga centre in Bali. Wherever they went, George made sure to put Anna in the right light and to make her look perfect for every location. They really had this travel documentation going for them.

Anna had liked this lifestyle, and she believed George when he said that she was destined for this life on the road and that they would be able to enjoytravelling the world without having a home of their own, a family with children and the safety and security that comes with those things.

The couple arrived a few days after I had spoken with Anna on the phone. They came on the train from Paris and I picked them up at the station.

"Eleanor!" Anna shouted as she flung into my arms and hugged me as if I were the solution to all her problems and her rescuer in a time of great distress. I was taken aback by her emotional behaviour. I mean, we didn't know each other that well.

"Anna. George. Welcome to Southern France, the land of sunshine and abundance."

"Hello Eleanor," George said and kissed me on the cheek. He too seemed almost relieved to be here.

I took them to the villa and showed them where they could sleep, reminding them to keep a low profile, lest the neighbours might see them and report me to the owners. I prayed that there were no secret cameras in the house – something I had experienced on previous house-sitting assignments.

"This is a great place you've got here," George commented. "And those dogs are really something. They remind me of my aunt Sylvia, she used to wear her hair like this." He started playing with the Afghans, which made them all excited, and I had to send them out into the yard before they would break anything.

"How about some coffee?" I suggested.

We sat down and talked about our travels. They showed me photographs taken at Machu Picchu, in South America, and I told them about my latest gigs, which included seasonal work at a plant nursery in the Netherlands and

a short stint at an Amazon distribution centre in Guadalajara, Spain.

"And now you're staying in this gorgeous villa in the South of France and all you have to do is take care of a couple of dogs," George said. "Now, that's what I call living."

"Yeah, it's a great deal," I admitted.

"How do you get jobs like this?" he asked. "I might be interested in doing something like this once in a while."

I explained the application process, which is quite complicated and involves a lot of paperwork and references from previous employers.

"I see," he said. "So, that means I won't be eligible for the job. I haven't had steady employment for ages now, and the employers I've worked for earlier are not likely to give any references. At least not any positive ones."

We sat there chatting for a while, but as we talked and drank coffee and opened the bottle of wine they had brought me, I sensed that something was off between them. They didn't look at each other and there was clearly some tension in their relationship. Well, couples fight all the time, I told myself, and whatever is going on between them isn't my business. Let them work it out themselves.

"Well, I think I'll hit the sack," George said after a while. "It's been a long day of travel and I long for a shower and a nice bed."

"I'll join you in a bit," Anna said. "I just want to stay down here a while longer and talk to Eleanor."

He took his stuff and went to the room I had prepared for them. "Well, don't stay up too long. I'm sure Eleanor wants to go to sleep soon."

When George was gone, Anna confided in me and informed me that the relationship was in a terrible state.

"Things are really bad," she told me. "After having been together for so long, I feel that our relationship is about to break apart."

"I'm truly sorry to hear that," I said and tried to sound as comforting as I possibly could. She was on the verge of tears and I really didn't know how to console her. "Did something happen? I mean, you guys were so great together."

At this question she finally broke down and started crying.

"I'm pregnant," she said between sobs.

I didn't know how to react. Congratulations were clearly not in order, given her desolate state of mind. So I said nothing for a while, just sat there and let her cry.

"George wants me to get rid of it," she finally said. "He wants me to have an abortion, so that we can go on living the life that he loves so much – a life of travelling and freedom."

"I see," I said after a pause. "And you don't want to do that, I presume?"

Instead of answering, she burst out crying again. She really was inconsolable.

"I'm sorry to bother you with this," she said.

"It's all right. Don't worry. Everything will turn out alright."

More crying.

Eventually, she stopped weeping and I managed to get her to eat some crackers and olives, which seemed to calm her. We sat there, talking for a while longer, until she said that she was tired and wanted to go to bed. I said goodnight to her and stayed behind, tidying up and drinking a glass of wine by myself. Then I let the Afghans back in and fed them.

After a while, I heard sounds coming from Anna and George's room. It was clear that they were arguing about something. George was raising his voice and Anna started crying again.

"You're ruining everything," I heard George scream at her. "We had it good. We had everything we ever dreamed of. Everything we have worked so hard for in these past years. And now you want to throw that all away."

"We can make it work," Anna pleaded. "Please, let's just try. Other people have managed – why shouldn't we?"

"We are not *other people*," George hissed at her. "What we have is unique. We had a life that *other people* only dared to dream about. We had the freedom to do whatever we wanted and to go wherever we liked, without ever having to ask permission or be strained down by mundane obligations. I don't want to give that up."

"What's the use of all this freedom, if we can't share it with a family? With children of our own?" Anna asked in a broken voice.

"Just get rid of it," was his only reply. Anna was crying again.

At this point, I decided to go to bed too so that I wouldn't have to hear any more of their disagreement. I went to my room and closed the door tightly. I slept soundly, although I remember waking up in the middle of the night from the noise of doors slamming and the dogs barking. But the wine deepened my sleep and I didn't bother getting up to see what was going on.

When I came out of my room in the morning, I found Anna sitting alone in the living room.

"He's gone," she said. "George's gone. He left tonight and he made it clear that he isn't coming back. It's over."

I waited for her to start crying again, but she was calm. It was as if she had now come to terms with the unavoidable facts of their relationship.

"I knew he would leave someday. I always felt that I wouldn't be able to hold on to him."

"Yeah, well..." I didn't know what else to say. I just stood there, looking at her and not being able to say anything to comfort her.

"So, what are you going to do now?" I finally managed to ask her.

"I don't know, really," she said in a toneless voice. "Probably go back to

my mother. Try to find a job till the baby comes. And then... I don't know."

"I guess you can stay here for a few more days, but the owners will be back next week, so..."

"It's OK," she hastened to say. "I've already booked a flight home. I'm leaving this afternoon."

"I'll take you to the train station," I said. Then I went to make some coffee and breakfast, of which she ate almost nothing. We didn't talk much, just drank our coffee and stared out the windows at the dogs running in the yard.

Later that afternoon, I drove Anna to the train station in Perpignan. It was an awkward ride since neither of us had much to say. She asked me about my plans and I told her that I hadn't thought about my next move. Which was a lie. I had made plans to go the north of France for the grape-picking season. *La vendange*, as they call it, spans about two months – typically from August to October. During this time, the French countryside is bustling with activity as vintners work to haul in the wine harvest and people come from all over the world to work in the wineries. There is a buzz of excitement in the air and people party long into the night, drinking new wine and eating good food from the farms. But I didn't want to tell this to Anna, knowing how much she had enjoyed these activities the last years she had taken part in them.

At the train station, I walked with Anna to the platform and watched her mount the train. She found a place by the window and shortly after she had taken her seat, the train started moving. I watched it slowly disappear in the distance. I left the station, wondering what would become of Anna now. On my way back to the house I tried not to think of her sad face as she looked at me and waved goodbye as the train began to move and left the station. □

Islands

Tom Brennan



Illustration: ipsitadesigns / Adobe Stock

Because the maid has forgotten to take the book into town with her, again, Greg resigns himself to returning it to the pathetic library in Ciutadella, Menorca's old capital. As he closes up his villa on the headland high above Cap D'Artrutx he pauses a moment and watches the local children playing on the fringe of beach a hundred yards below.

Costumes of red and yellow against bronze skin. Some game that involves running in circles while laughing and

screaming before one of the children has to lie down as if dead. From this height resemble bright quick birds. He can't remember ever being that young.

Greg closes and locks the patio, walks through the echoing villa and sets off for town. The aircon blasts the inside of the Seat Leon with a sharp chemical smell that reminds him of school swimming pools but he focuses instead on the dusty asphalt. With the tattered hardback book on the passenger seat and the setting sun to his left, he

drives north, passing one deserted *urbanización* after another: Son Cabrisses, Son Carrió, Cala Blanca, the resorts' white walls and red roofs facing the sea like dozing tourists.

Now, at the end of the season, most of the foreign visitors have gone home. No more braying English voices to disturb the hot afternoons; no more Dutch or Scandinavian or German families futilely scouring the island for hidden beaches and secret inlets. Soon only the islanders themselves and a few mainland Spanish will disturb the Menorcan winter peace. And Greg.

Reluctant to weave through Ciutadella's narrow streets, he parks on Carrer Domingo Savio and walks into the Old Town past the cramped church which the ambitious locals like to call a *catedral*. Even now, heat weighs down the early evening and Greg feels the book's binding rough against his sweating palm. He walks up Carrer Alaior, past narrow houses whose open doors reveal deep narrow hallways and dark furniture, glimpses of wizened old men smoking or silent black-clad women knitting.

Greg tries to imagine Londoners leaving their houses open like that. The Menorquinas are too trusting.

Off Carrer Roser, an open door next to a small plaque: *English Lending Library*. Inside, the library is no more than a sitting room of warped shelves and mismatched books. Dust motes hang waiting in the still air. A minute or so after Greg presses the bell, footsteps echo from the back of the house. But instead of the stooped old volunteer

librarian he sees a pale blond woman of forty or so, wearing a long white Gypsy skirt and loose blue cotton blouse. She smiles as she said, “Buenos tardes.”

“Buenos tardes. Uh, I was expecting—”

“Dad? He’s in hospital in Mahon.” The woman waits, as if expecting another question that never comes, then holds out her hand. “You’re returning?”

Greg offers her the book. The outline of his palm shows dark and moist against the brown covers.

“Thomas Mann, one of my favorites,” the woman says, turning the pages like a prospective buyer, “especially *The Joker*, *Der Bajazzo*. Did you enjoy it?”

Greg, out of practice with small talk and never one to feign interest, says, “Not really. I mean, I know he’s a good writer, and I know I should, but I just couldn’t get into it.”

Another smile. “That’s all right. It’s not compulsory. Everybody has different tastes.”

Greg, feeling his face start to burn, wonders why a woman at a decade or more his junior feels she can patronize him. It had never happened when he’d worked for the Investment Banks and Hedge Funds. Then again, most of the women there had been secretaries, personal assistants, cleaners, servers.

“Are you taking another book out?” she asks, setting Mann high on a shelf.

“No. I’ve read them all,” Greg says, already at the door. He strides across Carrer Rosa without looking back and heads for the main square. He tries to recall how many books he’s actually borrowed from the pitiful ‘library’ in the past five years. Thirty? Forty? None of them has made much of an impact. Just brief distractions.

Why did the woman pick out that particular short story? *Der Bajazzo*. He tries to remember it but all that comes into his mind is something about a young man wasting his life, a classic wastrel. No way anybody can level that charge against Greg. The woman is obviously misremembering. Confused.

On busy Plaça d’es Born, the main square, a horseshoe of bars face the pale rose façade of the *ajuntament*, the old Town Hall, where a yawning policeman stands guard beneath a row of Moorish arches. Greg crosses the central square of grass and trees hung with lights and leans on the battlement wall overlooking the marina. Below him, yachts and fishing boats line the inlet of the Porta de Ciutadella, their brightwork flashing in the low red sun.

Greg tries to remember the old man’s name but can’t; if he dies, what will happen to all those books? Greg realizes then that he’s unconsciously settled into the habit of visiting the library. Nothing more than a ritual, a reflex. An excuse. Even so he frowns at the thought of change.

At a small bar on the corner, he orders a café solo and brandy and sits at the window. Diagonally opposite, teams of tanned workers are busy erecting fairground rides in the park that runs in a wide strip down between Plaça de Explanada and Plaça des Pins. On the scrubby grass stand machines of metal and gaudy plastic, livid murals, flashing lights. Another fiesta to celebrate a saint or a local hero or some dubious turning point in history. Any excuse.

At the moment, only a few old women in regulation black use the park’s benches, probably swapping gossip and ailments, but Greg can imagine it later when everyone comes out for the nightly *paseo*. Entire families leaving their overheated houses and parading through the streets, sometimes three generations side by side. After all those years together, maybe even living on top of each other in a cramped house, they still chatter away among themselves.

But what the hell could they possibly have to talk about? Surely they’d long ago tired of each other? Greg drains his brandy in one gulp.

While evening turns to night, he walks through the Contramurada, the street encircling the old town where the

original thick walls stood. Inside this cordon lies a maze of winding alleys with Arabic and Roman names, and the dusty, faded shopping arcades of the *Ses Voltes* that always remind him of Mexico.

He wonders again why he chose Ciutadella. Most of his team had taken their bonuses, contract buy-outs and early pensions to France or Florida, tax-efficient Switzerland or the Isle of Man. A couple of the braver – or greedier – had invested in Croatian and Bulgarian property, a big mistake in Greg’s opinion since the market was in flux, partly due to organized crime and good old-fashioned incompetence. They’d learn.

So why Ciutadella? He pauses at a junction of steep streets whose rough caramel walls radiate the day’s heat. He remembers a vacation here thirty years before, with his life mapped out in discrete, ordered stages of work, marriage, children, promotion. Sometimes, especially on hot sleepless nights, that isolated point feels like yesterday, almost as if he can reach out and touch pivotal moments as easily as he runs his hand along this wall’s crumbling surface. But the past is as immutable as the warm stone.

He drinks another brandy in the cramped working men’s bar hidden behind Carrer Elvissa. High in the corner, a *Real Madrid* match plays while teenagers hammer the table football beneath the TV until the bar owner chases them out. Staring unseeing at the screen, Greg reminds himself of how much money he’s earned by buying in at the right moment, just as Madrid’s austerity measures had bitten their deepest; his villa worth four times the original price, a healthy addition to his portfolio and pension. He earns more in a day, without moving a muscle, than the sallow, sweating men in this bar earn in a month. Two months.

Yes, that’s why he’d chosen Ciutadella: good economic sense. Nothing more.

Glass in hand, he weighs up where to eat. Usually he visits the local restaurants in strict rotation, occasionally traveling across the island to Mahon or Mercadal when the local waiters here begin to recognize him and act too familiar. The Menorquinas eat dinner late, ten or eleven, but he wants to be back at the villa before the fiesta starts.

He walks down to the marina and chooses the last restaurant along the quay, an expensive place with a handful of tables, its dining room a cave cut back into and under the town's foundations. Six feet away is a yacht with the name *Desdemona* in a peeling gilt horseshoe on the stern. In the summer, moored yachts' owners like to eat dinner yards away from the packed restaurant tables, but Greg has the quay and restaurant almost to himself. The owner sits at the bar while a single tanned tourist sits reading her paperback book with its German title.

As Greg eats prawns, swordfish, then flan, and drinks most of a bottle of flowery white *Torres Viña Esmeralda*, he contemplates the pros and cons of buying a yacht, something sleek like the high-season craft that dock here. He can afford it but he doesn't know how to sail, which means employing a crew, which means living close to people for days or even weeks.

He could always learn to sail. It's an idea.

He glances back, wondering if the German woman is from one of the moored boats, but her chair is empty, her table cleared. Greg can't remember seeing her leave.

By the time he pays, and finishes his coffee, the sky is ink swimming with stars. From the walls high above the marina come the beat of music and a backwash of flickering light that makes Greg frown. The fiesta is starting early. Perhaps he can skirt the edge of it by climbing the steep Cami de Baix?

But the winding back road delivers him next to the *ajuntament* and right into the fiesta, whose edges are now swollen

with open striped tents: the ubiquitous table football, stalls selling churros and hot chocolate, games of (supposed) chance where you hit targets with blunt darts or weighted balls or too-small hoops. For prizes, stuffed furry animals, teddy bears and pandas and ten types of plastic crap. The stallholders chat to each other in rapid bursts, saving their voices for later crowds. Now only a few young families and teenagers wander about.

The brandies, the wine, the flashing lights and the blaring music combine to disorient Greg. Smells wash over him: greasy cooking oil, chocolate, sweat, hot metal. He pushes past the tents, searching for a way out, but finds more stalls, more games, more rides. Right behind him, a machine starts up with an electronic scream and the grinding of gears. He pushes on, sweating hard now, sees the edge of the grassy park ahead and squeezes through the last of the fiesta.

He slumps onto one of the concrete benches edging the park's central path, takes a deep breath and holds it, pushing the sounds and smells out of his mind. When he opens his eyes, he sees a football rolling toward his feet. Black and white hexagons, just like the footballs from childhood. The ball veers a little on the uneven grass but eventually stops inches from his right foot.

And a few yards behind the ball stands a child of three or four in jeans and striped blue tee shirt. The boy runs up and then suddenly stops as if hauled back on a line. He stands watching Greg, his unblinking eyes wide and dark.

The young parents, arm in arm, watch smiling from the edge of the grass.

Greg hesitates a moment, then picks up the football and holds it out to the boy.

The boy, still watching him, doesn't move.

"It's all right," Greg says. "It's okay. ¡Está bien!"

The boy glances back to his parents,

who nod encouragement, before he takes a step forward.

Greg holds the football out as far as he can and forces a smile.

Like a scared animal, the boy darts forward, grabs the ball and then runs back to his parents. The father raises a hand in thanks and rests the other on the boy's shoulder as the family make for the temporary fair.

As Greg watches them leave, something small and sharp and cold contracts in his chest, tightens until he winces.

He knows he has no right to jealousy, no right at all. And how can he complain? Soon he'll return to a fine villa overlooking the sea and maybe have another brandy or two, then wake to another day of almost perfect weather. He'll check his market feeds and emails, then swim and eat lunch by the pool. Even now, there were millions of people who would swap their lives for his in a second.

Millions.

In a second.

They wouldn't even hesitate.

As the young family slips between the stalls and disappear, Greg heads for his car. Maybe it was time to move on to another island, move even farther out towards the edge of the Eurozone. Property in Madeira looked promising and the island so far refused to allow the cheaper airlines to land. Less people meant more privacy. He could buy a secluded *finca* overlooking Funchal, listen to the birds and smell the Eucalyptus, without anybody to bother him. That sounds good.

Now, before he climbs into his car, he opens the doors wide to release the accumulated heat. He stands beside the driver's seat and listens to the music echoing through the old town. Yes, a quiet island where each perfect, ordered day could be made so like the next that the illusion of time didn't exist, neither future nor past. Only present.

Peace, quiet, wine and warmth: that's all you need.

Nothing more. □

Edible Nostalgia

Aubergines – Not Just a Vegetable but Memories

Alicia Colson



Photo: pilippphoto / Adobe Stock

All of us probably have one or more fruits and vegetables that we'd call 'our' favourites if asked. Our lists, whether long or short, are probably connected memories, which might be fleeting or an integral part of ourselves. The memories we cherish of eating them and what these memories remind us of, or how they were, can be combined with other ingredients... be it ogling them in those stunning colour photos in heavy cookbooks destined for the coffee table, as thick and well-thumbed books or even now, depicted on Instagram. Its message – 'delicious' - Why? We 'eat' first with our eyes, we

need that connection. Or it's connected to some memory.

I think of the aubergine, usually with a deep purple skin, and I'm reminded of cooking it with my Catalan Godmother in her kitchen in what my Godparents called 'deepest darkest Swaythling', a drab neighbourhood in Southampton, a sizable port city on England's south coast. I was living with my Godparents, as my parents were working in Portugal. It was my third year in high school (or secondary school as it's called in England). It was October, but I learned how to cook many dishes including Escalivada where the aubergine 'sits',

'folded' side by side each one on a plate in a line.

She was determined that I learned to speak French properly, not the stuff taught in school. So, she taught me to cook in French. She was Catalan but she'd learn French in Perpignan when her family had walked over the mountains from Catalunya, escaping Franco. Escalivada was one of the first dishes of many that she taught me in French as she firmly believed, according to my Anglo-German Godfather, that the food taught in my school's cooking classes, wasn't 'food'. She'd even informed my cooking teacher, at the parent-teacher

meeting the previous week, of her views. I heard about it from Godfather as he drove me to school and said that it wasn't surprising. They'd attended this meeting, instead of my parents. Her comments, he told me, had gone down like a lead balloon with the Home Economics teacher. I knew my Godmother's views on cooking...so anything I cooked at school wasn't long for this world.

The day that the fish pie that I'd made under the eye of that small, round stout Home Economics teacher had a 'different ending'. On my arrival back home, my Godmother firmly informed me that the fish pie wasn't to be eaten. The 'pie' had, as my Godfather had predicted earlier as he drove home from school, been deemed inedible! It was, I remember, a large white stodgy sludge containing white fish (shudder) cooked in a white floury sauce made from margarine, some flour, lots of salt and pepper in a glass bowl lined with mashed potato. I knew that it was bland, tasteless. It lacked garlic, a fundamental ingredient from my Godmother's perspective. Visually it wasn't appealing, just a bulbous mass of white. So, the idea of cooking Escalivada instead was utterly appealing as I love aubergines!

So, I've admitted it. Aubergines in whatever shape, a member of the nightshade family, Solanaceae, are one of my favourite vegetables. I like it cooked with peppers of various types, and sometimes tomatoes, but not always. Tomatoes, their relative, have a terrible tendency in my view, to overwhelm, swamp, the delicate taste of aubergine.

Even just saying the word 'aubergine' or 'eggplant' depending on your English, makes me think of those deep purple globe shaped vegetables...and then my mind wanders as I remember that its skin colour ranges from strong white, various shades of purple, deep green, sunshine yellow, pale purple, and white thin stripes along the length of its body. Its skin encases a cream-coloured, spongy flesh speckled with small, edible black seeds and varies in shape from egg-shaped, fat globe shaped, teardrop and those long skinny cucumber-like varieties. Yes, yes, I know each has its own

name and each is useful for slightly different dishes. I say this as I always use a different shape of aubergine for a different dish...so for those skinny deep purple ones which remind me of dark blue skinny jeans (please don't ask me why) which are called 'nasu' or 'Asian aubergines' in the store, I'll use these for my attempt at dishes from parts of Asia. I'd have to say that I'm not so good at dishes from this part of the world but I probably need more practice and familiarity.

As I list each type, I can see each in my mind's eye. - I remember how I've eaten it, how it was cooked each time I ate it, and with whom I was with at the time.....be it cooked whether in stews, sautéed, stir-fried, roasted, breaded, and fried, baked, pickled, stuffed and over a grill. I say over the grill, as I wish that I knew the name of a grilled aubergine dish which was just 'divine'. Well, what that means is relative, but it was delicious. I've a vivid recollection of it which starts my memories of the smell. The dish arrived as one of many dishes as part of the main course, during a supper with friends sitting on an upstairs patio in the middle of Gulou, one of the Beijing's older neighbourhoods. That morning, we'd visited the Forbidden Palace, the National Museum in Tiananmen Square, and experienced a tea ceremony. It was May and it was one of those days when the temperature was 24 -25C but the temperature was dropping.

I remember the heat of that May spring day dissipating as the night was coming, the type of noise changed in the streets below. We sat outside on an upstairs veranda overlooking, one of the hutongs, old alleyways, smelling what I thought was probably chillies, garlic, and coriander. Such a divine triad of ingredients. The aubergine dish was one of many ordered by a Chinese colleague. She did all the ordering and had just asked what everyone 'didn't like'. She knew and had worked with one of my colleagues. Everyone, except for two of us were archaeobotanists, they studied the origins of food.

I remember the dish itself being brought to the rectangular table we sat

around. It wasn't a fancy table, just with chopsticks, and glasses filled with either beer or water. The aubergine arrived on a metal grill dish with a wooden base. You could tell that dish had just been cooked, steam rose from it. The aubergine was sliced lengthways, and it had cooked, for so long, that one could pluck the flesh of the vegetable in strips using one's chopsticks. It was placed in the centre of the table with every other dish, but it took pride of place in my view. Rob who knew the Chinese colleague who ordered the food, took a gouge out of it...and you could almost hear everyone sigh as it was the first of several main dishes. We ate with our chopsticks and ripped up the flesh so that it was shared out and nothing was left on the dish but bits of garlic and chillis. It was delicious. I don't remember anything else that we ate but I do remember that we didn't eat dessert. I would have eaten more aubergine; it was so good.

So what can I say? In my view the variety of ways that I've eaten it possibly reflect its popularity. But one might argue that it's a popular vegetable in many places whether in a chutney with other vegetables or one of the myriad of ways such as in one of those many little Indian curry houses in Brick Lane, London, or where I'd eaten it sliced lengthways and dipped in beaten egg and fried in bubbling olive oil after being made by Tere, my friend in Madrid. Poor man's meat she called it or as 'baba ghanoush' made by an Iranian colleague when we were graduate students in the middle of a Montreal winter after having ploughed through that city's legendary never-ending snow, or as the homemade Parmigiana di Melanzane where it's possible to taste the tinges of garlic which was rubbed on to the cut surface (with olive oil) made by Sophia - her 'signature dish' according to her Father. or even found pickled in jars from Turkey, in my corner store! Or how my Godmother taught me how to cook it - as Escalivada where the aubergine 'sits', 'folded' side by side each one on a plate in a line. Now, when I cook aubergines, well Escalivada, I think of my Godmother and I laugh about the fish pie! □

Pied Ballad

Linda Ann Strang

The plague came to town a Pied Piper
This isn't an asteroid, it's a pancake.
and we all ran after it dancing,

This isn't a fig leaf, it's a cure-all.
wearing masks – a festival Venice.
This isn't a bedspring, it's a rock star.

We thought we were birds, exotic,
This isn't a pip, it's a landslide.
with long tails of opal and rainbow

This isn't a torment, it's a catwalk.
and beaks of chased silver, beat gold.
This isn't a pair of tweezers, it's a stop sign.

We dressed in our velvet and best
This isn't a gill net, it's galangal.
with ruffs of Brussels lace and pomanders.

This isn't a Munch, it's a pompom.
On our feet were slippers of cut glass.
This isn't a hanging garden, it's a high five.

The wealthiest wore specimen amber.
This isn't a big top, it's a spade card.
And everyone sang this pied ballad

This isn't a strapline, it's a popgun.
while we drowned in the ocean with nosegays.
This isn't a dress pattern, it's starlight.

And we were rats, or perhaps only children.

The Hardships of Hashtagging

Erik N. Patel

In the endlessly buzzing corridors of contemporary fame—those virtual spaces suffused with the gleam of LED ring lights and adorned with the glitter of the latest merchandise—there exists a particular group of heroes who remain largely unrecognized for their tireless contributions to the zeitgeist. These brave souls, ensconced in studios designed to mimic sunlit lofts or rustic farmhouses, invest their waking hours and even their sleepless nights into the meticulous construction of what can only be termed as “aspirational living.” They are our modern-day myth-makers, these arbiters of taste and style; they are the puppeteers of popular culture, deftly manipulating the strings of what we should want, should have, and should be.

Ah yes, here I speak of none other than the overworked, often underestimated influencers—the Spartans of social media, the courageous champions of #ad and #sponsored content. Donning armor crafted from a curated selection of athleisure and vintage fashion finds, they embark daily on Herculean quests for the perfect shot, contending with challenges that the average person might balk at—like finding the exact lighting that flatters without betraying the hard lines of reality, or nailing the balance between relatable captions and unattainable glamour. Make no mistake, their lives are a labyrinthine struggle, made to look far more effortless than they are by the deceitful sorcery of Valencia, Amaro, and other such Instagram filters.

To begin with, let us consider the unique occupational hazards of the influencer. While the uninitiated might scoff at the idea of Instagramming one’s brunch as a form of labor, the savvy among us understand that arranging avocado slices in the pattern of Van Gogh’s “Starry Night” is no simple feat. The physical exhaus-

tion wrought from holding one’s arm outstretched to capture the perfect selfie angle is the modern-day equivalent of Sisyphus pushing his boulder, except this time, the boulder is a rose gold iPhone Pro Max.

What’s more, the influencer must always stay ahead of the trends—a relentless treadmill of TikTok challenges and viral phenomena that demand constant vigilance. No sooner has one mastered the art of whipping up Dalgona coffee than the zeitgeist unfeelingly shifts to homemade sourdough. Imagine the emotional toll of having a closet full of skinny jeans when



the algorithm declares that wide-leg pants are the new rage!

But perhaps the greatest burden borne by influencers is the constant threat of cancellation. In a world where one misplaced emoji or a poorly-received collab can tarnish years of brand building, the influencer walks a tightrope of public opinion, forever one step away from social media oblivion. Their lives are lived under the harsh scrutiny of the ‘haters,’ that monstrous cabal of online critics who can spot a Photoshopped thigh gap from a mile away.

The cost of such a demanding life can be dire. Studies that I have not bothered to look up but am pretty sure exist show that influencers suffer from a unique malaise: the absence of leisurely brunches. Once a sacred ritual among influencers, brunch—a mythical feast of acai bowls and mimosas—has been replaced by hurried gulps of detox smoothies between photo shoots. A moment of silence for these forsaken eggs benedict.

These influencers navigate a labyrinthine landscape of their own making, where every post, every story, every fleeting moment captured on camera becomes a part of a meticulously crafted narrative, designed to convince us of its spontaneous generation. As they straddle this precarious line between the real and the orchestrated, one cannot help but wonder: is there anything more paradoxically authentic than this crafted inauthenticity? In their very quest to depict a genuine existence, they unwittingly lay bare the most human of conditions—the innate desire to be seen as we wish to be, rather than as we truly are.

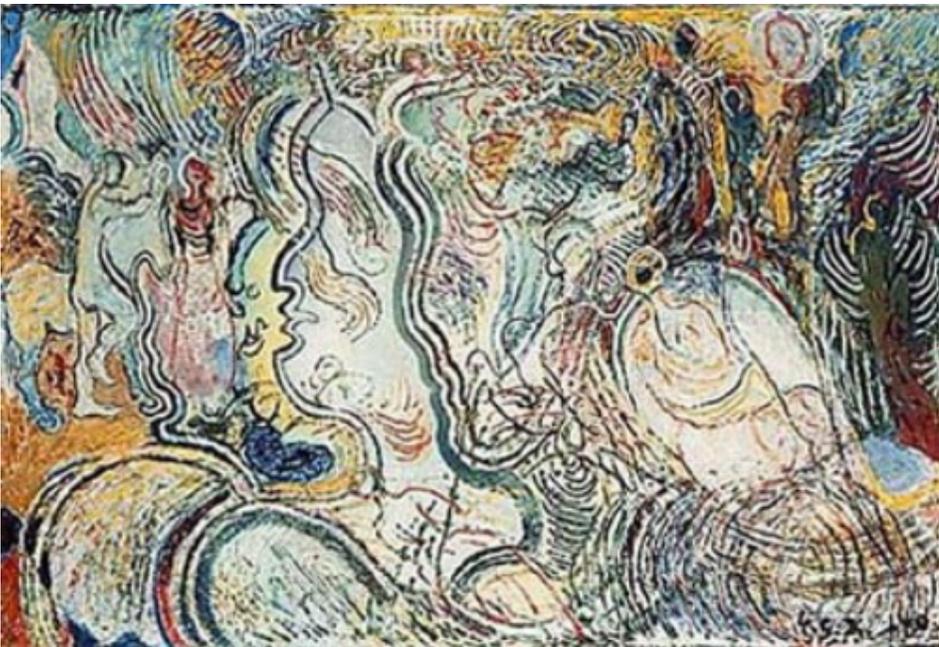
So let us acknowledge the heavy burden shouldered by these architects of modern desire. Let us spare a thought for the influencer, feverishly toggling between Clarendon and Gingham, agonizing over the precise number of emojis that express enthusiasm without seeming desperate. Yes, their faces may be chiseled by Face-tune, and their sunsets might be the work of Adobe Lightroom, but their struggle—oh, their struggle—is as real as your aunt’s Facebook rants.

The next time you scroll past an influencer’s post, pausing to scoff at their seemingly frivolous life, remember: someone had to drink that overpriced latte for the good of us all. And that, dear reader, is the plight of the overworked influencer. □

Jóhannes S. Kjarval

Exploring the Mystical Landscapes and Visionary Artistry of an Icelandic Master

Heimir Steinarsson



Jóhannes S. Kjarval: Fantasia, 1940 - National Gallery of Iceland.

In the world of art, there are painters, and then there are visionaries—artists whose work transcends the canvas, connecting with the soul of a place and its people. Jóhannes Sveinsson Kjarval, often simply known as Kjarval, was undoubtedly one of these visionaries, a luminary figure in the pantheon of Icelandic art whose work continues to captivate and inspire.

Born in the remote village of Selárdalur in 1885, Kjarval's early life was marked by the stark beauty of Iceland's Westfjords. Raised on a modest farm, he displayed an early affinity for art, a talent that would eventually lead him to Reykjavik to pur-

sue formal artistic training at the Reykjavik College of Art. Little did the world know that this young artist would become a trailblazer, forever altering the course of Icelandic art.

A Brush with the Mystical

Jóhannes Sveinsson Kjarval's artistic style can be described as a captivating and multifaceted fusion of diverse influences, each contributing to the rich tapestry of his creative vision. Rooted in the soil of his Icelandic heritage, Kjarval's artistic journey began with an early exposure to the

enchanting world of Icelandic folklore and mythology. These stories, filled with mystical beings, epic sagas, and the haunting beauty of the Icelandic landscape, served as a wellspring of inspiration for the budding artist. It was within the pages of these ancient tales that Kjarval found a profound connection to the mystical, which would later infuse his work with an otherworldly quality, a sense of wonder and enchantment that beckoned viewers to explore the hidden depths of his canvases.

Yet, Kjarval's artistic exploration did not stop at the shores of Iceland. He was a voracious student of European modernism, a movement that would come to play a pivotal role in shaping his distinctive style. Among the European modernist movements, Kjarval found particular resonance with the Post-Impressionists and Fauvists. The Post-Impressionists, with their emphasis on vibrant color and emotional depth, left an indelible mark on his artistry. He adopted their bold use of color as a means of conveying not just the visual aspects of his subjects but also the emotional and spiritual dimensions that lay beneath the surface.

The Fauvists, known for their audacious and non-naturalistic use of color, provided Kjarval with a new lens through which to interpret the world. Their free and expressive approach to color allowed him to break away from conventional artistic norms and explore uncharted territories of artistic expression. It was from these European modernist movements that Kjarval drew

the tools to translate the ethereal qualities of Icelandic landscapes into a vivid and emotive visual language. The result was a body of work that resonated with viewers on multiple levels, inviting them to delve into the layers of meaning and emotion that dwelled within his canvases.

In essence, Kjarval's artistic journey was a harmonious marriage of his Icelandic heritage, with its mystical folklore and profound connection to nature, and the avant-garde spirit of European modernism, with its daring use of color and emotion. This alchemical blend of influences created an artistic legacy that continues to captivate and inspire, reminding us that the true power of art lies in its ability to bridge worlds, both real and imagined, ancient and contemporary.

Landscapes as Poetry

Throughout his illustrious career, Kjarval embarked on artistic journeys across a diverse range of subjects, but it was his masterful portrayal of the Icelandic landscape that undeniably distinguished his body of work. With an artistic palette that seemed to defy convention, Kjarval's paintings were infused with an extraordinary array of vibrant and surprising colors. These hues, meticulously selected, not only reflected his artistic prowess but also served as a conduit for expressing a profound sense of reverence for the Icelandic terrain.

In Kjarval's capable hands, the Icelandic landscape ceased to be a mere subject; it metamorphosed into a living, breathing entity, an ethereal realm where the boundaries between myth and reality effortlessly dissolved. His artistic vision beckoned viewers into an immersive experience, where the rugged contours of Iceland's terrain seemed to come to life, whispering stories of ancient sagas and untamed wilderness. Kjarval's landscapes possessed the power to transport audiences to a realm where time stood still, and the spirit of the land intertwined harmoniously with the artist's interpretation.

The landscapes he crafted, whether capturing the windswept majesty of the Westfjords, the mystical dance of the northern

lights, or the haunting solitude of the highlands, were not just scenes frozen in paint. They were portals into the very essence of Iceland, a land characterized by its enigmatic beauty and profound connection to the cultural heritage of its people. In each brushstroke, Kjarval conveyed an intangible, yet palpable, sense of the spiritual and emotional depth that permeates the Icelandic landscape, inviting viewers to embark on their own odyssey of discovery.

Spiritual Connection

The exceptional quality that set Kjarval's landscapes apart from mere representation was their profound capacity to transcend the boundaries of traditional artistry. In his works, the Icelandic terrain ceased to be a static depiction on canvas; it transformed into a living, breathing entity that spoke to the very heart and soul of Iceland. Kjarval's brushstroke mastery allowed him to capture not just the physical attributes of the landscape but also its intangible spiritual essence, an essence that had been woven into the nation's identity for centuries.

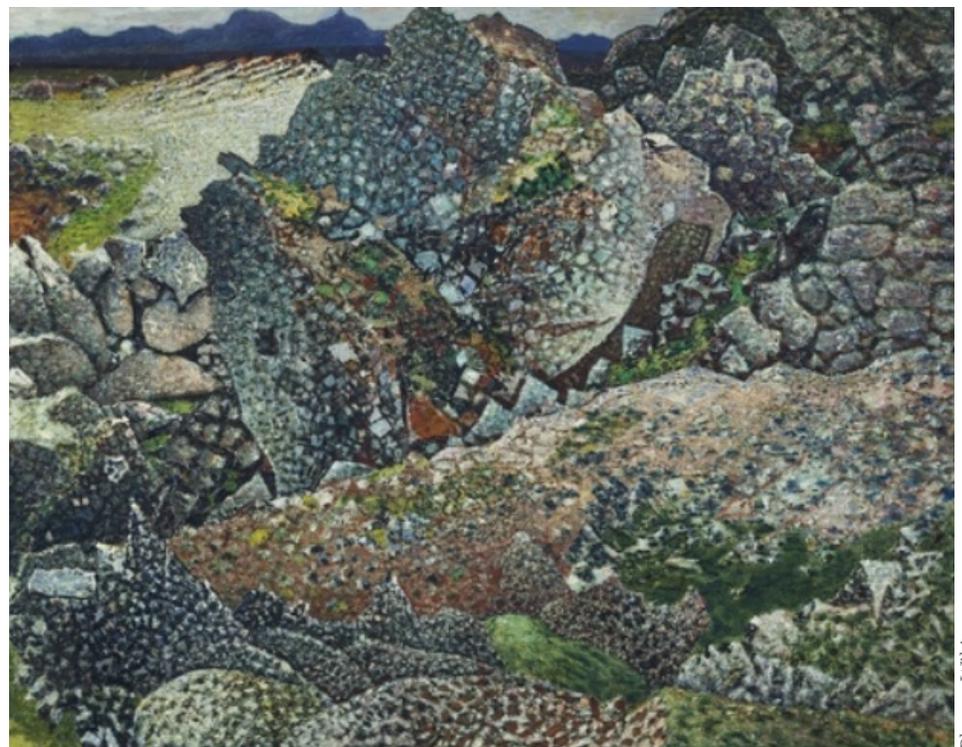
Iceland, with its untamed beauty and raw, unspoiled landscapes, is a land of

myth and majesty. Its terrain, often characterized by craggy cliffs, meandering fjords, and expanses of untouched wilderness, has long been a source of inspiration for artists. Kjarval, however, went beyond the surface. His paintings delved into the hidden recesses of the Icelandic psyche, revealing a profound and spiritual connection to the land.

Whether he was portraying the jagged, windswept cliffs of the Westfjords, where ancient tales whispered in the wind, or capturing the ethereal dance of the northern lights across the Arctic sky, Kjarval's landscapes transcended the visual. They became windows into the very soul of Iceland—a land where myth, folklore, and the relentless forces of nature converged.

In Kjarval's depictions of the stark solitude of the highlands, viewers could feel the pulse of the land, its ancient heartbeat echoing through the ages. Each brushstroke was a reverent homage to the resilience of a nation shaped by the unforgiving terrain, where beauty and harshness coexisted in perfect harmony.

It was this profound connection to the heart and spirit of Iceland that resonated with viewers on a level beyond the visual. Kjarval's landscapes spoke to the collec-



Jóhannes S. Kjarval: *Lava at Bessastadir*, 1954 - National Gallery of Iceland.

Photos: Wikiart.org



A Girl named Sigrún - 1960. Painting by Jóhannes Sveinsson Kjarval in his characteristic Expressionism style. Private Collection

tive memory of a nation, evoking a sense of nostalgia and wonder that transcended time and place. They allowed viewers to step into a world where the boundaries between the seen and the unseen, the real and the mythical, were blurred—a world where the very essence of Iceland was laid bare for all to behold.

A Global Visionary

Jóhannes S. Kjarval's artistic brilliance transcended the geographical confines of his homeland, casting a wide net that drew the attention and admiration of art enthusiasts across the globe. While his

roots were deeply embedded in the Icelandic soil, his artistic vision and unique blend of Icelandic mysticism and European modernism had a resounding impact on an international scale, earning him recognition, acclaim, and a lasting legacy that continues to inspire audiences worldwide.

Kjarval's journey from the remote landscapes of Iceland to the international art stage was nothing short of remarkable. His art traversed the seas, finding its way to prestigious galleries and exhibitions in both Europe and the United States. His works were showcased in major art centers, where they elicited a sense of wonder and fascination among viewers who had

never before experienced the captivating allure of Iceland's landscapes through the eyes of an artist who possessed such a profound connection to his homeland.

What set Kjarval's art apart on the international stage was its unique synthesis of Icelandic mysticism and European modernism. His paintings, often characterized by vibrant and unexpected use of color, not only resonated with audiences but also served as a bridge between the ancient and the contemporary. His ability to infuse his art with the spiritual essence of Iceland while embracing the bold, avant-garde spirit of European modernism was a testament to his artistic genius. It was a fusion

that not only captivated but also challenged viewers, inviting them to explore the nuanced layers of meaning and emotion embedded in his canvases.

In Europe, where Kjarval's work found a receptive audience, his exhibitions were met with critical acclaim. Art connoisseurs and critics alike marveled at his ability to capture the essence of Icelandic landscapes in such a vibrant and emotionally resonant manner. His paintings, whether portraying the rugged beauty of the Westfjords or the transcendent glow of the northern lights, left an indelible mark on the European art scene.

Across the Atlantic, in the United States, Kjarval's art also found a warm reception. American audiences were equally enthralled by the evocative power of his landscapes, which transported them to the far reaches of Iceland's natural wonders. The universality of Kjarval's themes—nature's grandeur, the mystical allure of the land, and the eternal interplay of light and shadow—struck a chord with viewers from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

As Kjarval's art crisscrossed continents and transcended borders, it left an enduring legacy that continues to inspire and captivate art enthusiasts around the world. His ability to capture the very essence of Iceland while simultaneously embracing the broader currents of European modernism showcases the universal language of art—a language that speaks to the heart and soul of humanity, transcending the boundaries of time, place, and nationality. Today, his work serves as a testament to the power of art to connect people across oceans and generations, reminding us that the beauty of the world is a source of inspiration that knows no bounds.

Legacy in Living Color

Today, Jóhannes Sveinsson Kjarval's profound and enduring legacy continues to thrive, not only as a source of inspiration for art enthusiasts worldwide but also as a wellspring of creative influence for a new generation of contemporary Icelandic artists. His remarkable contribution to the world of art remains palpable, serving as a guiding light that illuminates



Jóhannes S. Kjarval: *Amazon Woman of the Mountain*, 1961- National Gallery of Iceland.

the artistic path of those who follow in his footsteps.

At the heart of Kjarval's lasting influence is the Kjarvalsstaðir museum, an institution nestled within the vibrant cultural landscape of Reykjavik, Iceland's capital city. A jewel within the crown of the Reykjavik Art Museum, the Kjarvalsstaðir museum stands as a testament to the enduring impact of Kjarval's artistry, and it has become a sanctuary where his spirit resides.

Within the walls of this venerable institution, visitors embark on a journey through the vast and diverse body of work that Kjarval left behind. The museum's galleries house a treasure trove of his masterpieces, each canvas bearing witness to his unerring ability to capture the essence of Iceland with every brushstroke. Viewers can witness the evolution of his artistic style, from his early explorations of Icelandic folklore and mysticism to his embrace of European modernism, all woven together into a rich tapestry of creativity.

Kjarval's paintings, drawings, and sculptures, meticulously curated within these hallowed halls, offer a profound insight into his artistic process and the evolution of his unique vision. They invite visitors to delve deeper into his world, to trace the development of his themes and techniques, and to understand how he transformed the Icelandic landscape into

a living, breathing entity that transcended the boundaries of mere representation.

As visitors meander through the museum's exhibition spaces, they not only witness Kjarval's art but also embark on a multi-sensory journey through the heart and soul of Iceland. The rugged landscapes, the shimmering auroras, and the intimate glimpses of everyday life in the country all beckon viewers to explore the profound connection between the artist and his homeland.

Yet, the impact of Kjarval's legacy extends far beyond the confines of the museum's walls. His influence courses through the veins of contemporary Icelandic artists who find inspiration in his bold use of color, his emotional depth, and his ability to convey the intangible spirit of the land. In the studios of these modern-day visionaries, one can discern traces of Kjarval's artistic lineage, as they too strive to capture the ever-evolving essence of Iceland in their work.

Jóhannes S. Kjarval's legacy is a living testament to the enduring power of art to transcend time and place. Through the Kjarvalsstaðir museum and the inspiration he continues to provide to contemporary Icelandic artists, Kjarval's artistic spirit remains vibrantly alive, ensuring that his profound connection to the essence of Iceland will continue to be celebrated and cherished for generations to come. □

Journey to the End of the Night

Jana Putrle Srdić

I thought it would come in the form of
grief or loss
or a sharp continuous pain

but nothing is long on the
journey to the end
stale urine smell
no blood visible
torso an eggshell,
half-boiled febrile
slime within.

The body's final glow
is a yoke-yellow sun
in the eye of her restless dog,
in her own eye – this woman
clung frantic to the bed-rail
shouting into the night.

Such was her past –
already lone
the aloneness of trains
that no longer steam
no longer chug
but cross and part
on silent electric tracks.

No pain,
just wearisome waits in a clinic's
endless corridors that snake
in the cold strip-lit night
and the desperate scratch
of a bitch as she seeks escape
in the half-dark of dog-cataracts,
running round in circles

till the calm hour,
dawn's dead-to-the-world hour
when, worn out, head rolled against
the rail, the woman dreams
of a mass of luminous grasses,
how they sway before sunset
shushing, their sound
a global drone

how, woman and bitch, you'd tunnel a way
through the long grass and tree-trunks
how the air's scent
how cheek how sun-kiss how
it embraced you, this path
like a cow's long tongue
stretching out –
this life.

*Co-translated from the
Slovene by Sue Vickerman*

Forest Found

Virginia Boudreau

“Be present in the moment.” It’s a catchphrase of our time, and there is no need to wonder why. We live in a realm so far removed from itself that we’re forced to rely on new-age gurus touting the “power of now” to keep us on track. Instruction in meditative arts is available in some of the most isolated areas on our planet. Revered tomes by the likes of the Dalai Lama, Deepak Chopra, and Eckhart Tolle impart age-old wisdom, showing us the path to discovery. My question would be: “Is this type of guided awareness remarkable for its heart-breaking necessity or its impeccable forward-thinking?”

In my grandmother’s time, people were too busy surviving to worry about unfocused notions and nebulous concepts like happiness. The reigning perception suggested those with such fixations were self-absorbed and, maybe, a teensy bit high-strung. The “just get on with it” approach prevailed, and if any glimmer of joy surfaced, it was an unexpected bonus. I wish I could count myself among the ranks of those pragmatic and stoic warriors. But the truth is, I was probably entirely too introspective and overly invested in the other end of the spectrum.

Looking back, I’d say I was in a perpetually aggrieved state as to whether I was actually happy or not. This became particularly evident after the devastating loss of my mother when I was in my twenties. Life could be short, and I reasoned, “What’s the point if you can’t be happy while you’re here?” The great irony was the more I consciously searched, the more I became distanced from what mattered.

You know the saying, “... can’t find the forest through the trees?” Well, that was me. My quest to find something deeper took the form of restlessness and attempted escape from what was in front of me all along. It was exhausting! I learned this the hard way: you simply can’t run away from yourself. It’s hard to believe such a basic insight presented as no less than a full-blown epiphany when I finally allowed myself to be open to it. I’ve come a formidable distance on this journey, and though I’m still very much a

work in progress; the light no longer seems impossibly elusive.

My new perspective allows me to re-evaluate a profound memory from thirty years ago. The fact that it’s so easily accessed today speaks to the influence of mindfulness. In hindsight, I’m able to appreciate it for what it actually was: a very ordinary Saturday in the life of a young mom. A domestic scenario (so unremarkable as to be downright boring) shed its tedium and shone. It occurred only because I was gifted with being truly, if unpredictably, present in a snippet of time.



The kids were doing what kids do when they hang out at home. You know: mundane things. My son was playing with his Lego on the kitchen floor while his sister riffled through her markers at the table. She was trying to find the perfect hue for the princess dress on the coloring page. Library books, woolen scarves, and action figures littered the window seat. Mike the hamster raced on his wheel and the counters were a landscape of family detritus. Soup simmered, apples baked, there was condensation on the windows and a cold winter rain slid down the panes.

Boots tumbled in a muddled pile by the door and soggy mittens graced the counter. Kili-Cat curled in the wicker rocking chair and her warm black bulk shivered as she slept. Occasionally she cocked a green eye to lazily survey the mess. In addition to the cartoons blaring from the television in the other room, the radio was on. The blended

cacophony of voices and ditties, jingles and songs should have been mind-boggling, but somehow it wasn’t.

“If it says, ‘sky blue,’ does that mean you should only color skies with it?” My daughter looked puzzled as she held the marker out for my examination. She was genuinely concerned about things like this. I was telling her the world is an open slate when the kitchen door blew open on a draft of wind. Her dad stumbled in, stomping the slush off his boots and rubbing his bare hands together. “Holy, it’s wicked out there!” He removed his red parka and draped it over the back of a wooden chair.

I was ironing at the time, a task I despised. The awkward, clunky ironing board I’d inherited from my mother’s house was set up, and the wicker basket at my feet overflowed with Oxford work shirts, pillowcases, and countless pairs of dreaded chinos. The table held stacks of folded garments. Every chair back, except the one with the dripping jacket, was adorned with plaid, striped, or plain button-downs waiting to be hung.

I stood there in my fuzzy slippers, the iron belching steam, when the aroma of fresh coffee filled the room. It mingled with the pungency of thyme, garlic, and clean, starched cotton. I was handed my favorite pottery mug filled with the brew, perfectly creamed. “Time to take a break, Sweet Pea!” A warm feeling bloomed deep in my chest. How lucky was I to be doing something I hated in a drafty, cluttered kitchen on a beastly winter day? I felt in that moment completely content and filled with something akin to joy.

Happiness is, indeed, found in the mundane and everyday. It waits in those infinite, exquisite, innumerable moments that sift through our fingers when we’re too engrossed in living to be focused on actually finding it. Bliss seeks us out; it sneaks up when we aren’t looking, and if we’re really lucky, we pause long enough to recognize it for what it is before delighting in the startling clarity of remembrance three decades later. I like to think the Dalai Lama would nod in silent affirmation, a twinkle in his eye. □

Pass the Kleenex, there's a Hog-Nosed Shrew Rat

Carmen G. Farrell



The author's jungle home in Bali, surrounded by acacia and breadfruit trees.

Photo: Carmen G. Farrell

Biologists in Indonesia have recently discovered an entirely new species of carnivorous rat. Reading this news story today makes me shudder, but does not surprise me at all. The hog-nosed shrew rat. I have no doubt I lived with this research subject's ancestor twenty years ago in our Balinese house as my husband and I prepared for our wedding.

Three weeks until our ceremony, but this bloody rat fills my brain instead. Yuk. Gross. Maybe we should leave? Except here it's beautiful and idyllic. And peaceful, as long as no one's rodent hunting. Plus, I haven't *seen* the rat. There's only some possible evidence from my fiancé's circumstantial reports. Maybe there isn't a rat? From inside our little villa for two on this Indonesian island we're calling

home for a couple of months, I do not see rodents. I only see lotus blossoms floating in a reflecting pool by the front door, green jungle acacia and breadfruit trees, trailing vines of scented ylang ylang flowers, and large teak decks overlooking pristine lush, variegated laurel and west Indian jasmine. This oasis perches just past the rice paddies where coconut palms stand sentinel along a dirt path before it descends over the lip

of a ravine to our house nestled over the edge in the jungle greenery. Arriving at the house, the sound of a stream somewhere far below greets the visitor. Sunlight filters through the Burma lancewood tree canopy, keeping the house comfortably cool in the concentrated, scented tropical air.

Inside our small abode, cool white tile floors shine thanks to a staff of two young men included in the modest monthly rental fee. Pillars of indigenous teak hold up glass panels two stories high. These open on all sides, allowing the breeze to curl around the teak furniture and ruffle the petals of frangipani and champaca tucked into the arms of serene Hindu deity statues watching over the space. The house comprises one large room with unbroken views in every direction. No human-made structure or evidence of human life is visible. Off the main room, nestled against the forested ravine wall, an adjacent open-air bathroom's design hides its porcelain functionality from view. Through the glass doors, one sees only stone walls and floors with bamboo arcing from the jungle over the tops of the bathroom's walls.

Inside, I can rest on the bed draped in practical yet romantic mosquito netting, stare up at the teak-beamed ceiling and feel the moving air from languid ceiling fans. Or, on the enormous terrazzo-tiled veranda, I can flop on the antique teak divan by the reflecting pool amongst the vibrant green, orange, red, and purple *ikat* cotton cushions. I can hang over one of several deck railings in the warm sunshine and marvel at all the life that buzzes, crawls and flits amongst the leaves within arm's reach.

In short, it's a perfect place to prepare for our wedding and remain for our honeymoon, and I'm not relinquishing it to a rat! If this means I have to put up with linear arrays of ants marching across our immaculate floors towards my kitchen sink, which they think is theirs, or bees the size of walnuts buzzing around my head when I sit on one of several decks, or wolf spiders the size of my fist who wait for me every morning in my bathroom sink, then fine. If, on our little moped, I have to dodge the odd viper snake on the dirt track as I navigate between the town of Ubud and our abode, oh well. If forced to flick a black-spotted rock frog off my bed's mosquito netting in the middle of the night, I can do that with equanimity. And if I have to think the native

fruit bats that flit under the house's eaves in the evening aren't creepy at all, well, I am capable of that too.

I'm tougher than all these things. I am bigger than them. I'm living in their world. I can be respectful of their space; I am the visitor. Since the bathroom's ceiling is blue sky and jungle, it's reasonable that spiders live in the sink. Raised on summer camping holidays, I'm accustomed to ants, bees and other small-ish insects. It's the size of the flora and fauna that's challenging. It's a big Jurassic Park jungle. Even the shrubbery and trees – little tropical plants North Americans like me nurture in pots on our countertops... are the forest.

What could this mean for the size of rodents? I can barely tolerate the thought, but it's possible this rat's a different kind of adversary. Based on the size of insects in the Balinese jungle, it may be the size of a loaf of sandwich bread with teeth as long as corncobs. Not some cute mouse. I've been able to tolerate the rat as a possibility because I haven't actually seen it. Thankfully, I have no first-hand knowledge of this rat. Therefore, with a degree of stubbornness *and* delusion, I remain with my beloved in our jungle retreat. But this rat is not a being whose space I'm inclined to respect and allow to roam free in *my* space. So if I'm confronted with real evidence of a rat in the house, it's the rat or me. We will not coexist.

In order to endure the large roommates that I *do* have first-hand knowledge of, I keep practicing my breathing, learned at the local yoga treetop studio and rely on the expertise of the amazing staff who show up every morning. Primarily, and almost exclusively this consists of a young man named Rai, who introduced himself as our "houseboy" during our halting language-challenged introductions when we arrived. Not that I'm looking, but Rai would make the best house husband. Every day he cleans, does errands, puts flowers on the divine being statues, and irons the bed sheets. Rai is a most diligent person: I had to stop him from ironing the terry cloth bath towels. Plus, he carries regional knowledge of getting ants out of kitchens. My fiancé and I have come to depend on him.

With two weeks to go before the wedding, Rai's dependability would be tested severely. I had spent part of the

morning reading about Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall's breakup. Of interest to me, because they too married in Bali—his lawyers now arguing they never legally married! Determined our own marriage will be legal, complex arrangements (because neither of us speaks any Indonesian) proceed for civil *and* religious ceremonies. A civil ceremony by itself is deemed illegal in Bali. No romantic just-us-on-the-beach wedding for us. We joined a local Baptist-style church, attended mandatory pre-marital counselling sessions with the pastor and a young man from Edmonton who volunteers as interpreter, and attended several Sunday morning sermons where we understood not one word. The experience overall an odd combination of hilarious and complicated.

Tiring of these thoughts, for lunch I attempt my own version of nasi goreng at the kitchen hotplate, and work hard at *not* thinking about spiders, bees, snakes or bats. Glancing around while stirring the rice, I notice some out-of-place items on the open shelves at eye level. A box of crackers not where we'd been keeping it, with several nearby food containers knocked over. Not the work of my fiancé. Nor Rai. Ants? No. Not me... Who? Reality emerged bit by bit... the possibility dawning that here lay the truth of the rat's existence. Kind of impossible to talk myself out of. With tentative, timid searching – the kind that didn't actually want to find the truth – I notice a durable thick plastic container of peanuts gnawed at the corners. Uh oh... I realize some hard-to-find rationed or hoarded (depending on your point of view) North American style cookies might be in jeopardy! And the rat's existence is now undeniable.

After disposing the unsecured food and re-securing precious items like the rare and expensive cookies, we enlisted Rai's expertise. We had complete faith in his indisputable passion for cleanliness plus his ant genocide track record spoke for itself. We felt confident when he set the rat trap with smelly dried blue anchovies from Ubud's open-air market that his efforts would meet with success. In Rai's view, they're a rat delicacy. We had no reason to doubt his plan and go to sleep.

A rat-dream infested night passes. In the dawning light, I pad barefoot to the kitchen, ears straining for and yet afraid of rat sounds. My feet slap on the tiles,

geckos click on the exterior walls, rice field frogs that prefer our verandah's reflecting pond peep at each other. Behind this, the high-pitched hum of jungle cicadas. But no rat sounds and no rat in the trap. It looks exactly as it did last night!

Rai attends to the trap day after day, nestling delicious (if you're a rat) anchovies in its interior. They smell almost as bad as the edible durian fruit that grows wild in forests over the island and which, when ripe and cut open, spreads its aroma up to a kilometer away. I am grateful our kitchen exists as a separate small structure adjacent to our living quarters: I cannot smell the trap. To our great consternation, the rat avoids its trap night after night. But after the first night, it starts leaving defecation calling cards on the same tile of the kitchen floor. Not different tiles; the same exact spot every single night. A rat version of "Bite me!"

After about a week of this, my fiancé begins to lose faith in Rai and becomes engaged himself. Now the odds stack two men against one rat. I am choosing not to involve myself. I am Switzerland, I tell myself. I am neutral. I am the calm, understanding and reassuring territory they can return to after their rat battle disappointments. My husband-to-be loves peanut butter. One might even say my betrothed has an unnatural relationship with peanut butter; his greatest contribution to the campaign involves smearing the little fishes with his Precious.

He places the trap on the floor by the rat's usual bathroom. No takers. Except now the ants return in force because they *love* the peanut butter and construct a supply line across the floor to enjoy as much of it as they can. Poor Rai... he'll have to engage in more destruction. Meanwhile I continue to offer only encouragement. Male pride seems to be involved.

My poor future mate has been ready since the first day for the trap to be successful. He's ready for rat murder. Unlike most North American traps, Balinese rat traps contain their prey in a wire cage about the size of a Kleenex box. Once disturbed, a central spring-loaded bait platform causes the trap door at the end of the Kleenex box to slam shut. But to get rid of the rat the Balinese way, the mesh cage with the rat inside has to be submerged. Where, you ask? Where does my fiancé propose to have our rat meet

his Maker? Will he borrow a machete and hack his way down the steep slopes of our ravine to the river below? No way. He plans to drown the rat in our tranquil meditation pond with the floating lotus blossoms! NO! Oh my gosh... the lotus blossoms, the vines of scented flowers... are they in reality a shroud for other drowned rats? Are those waters a rat graveyard? I can't believe it. This stupid rat tramples my inner peace and ruins any notions of future contemplations by our reflecting pool.

Another week passes and now, against my better judgement, three of us combine efforts to outsmart this rat. I've been recruited to make trips into town to find *special* food that might entice the rat into the cage because collective wisdom suggests the rat might be vegetarian – it hasn't taken fish, chicken, or beef. No one has asked, but I'm NOT putting a cookie in the trap. Last night they put the trap on the counter instead of the floor and today I found it in the middle of the kitchen floor, shut, with nothing but the bait inside. Is this rat James Bond? This rat vs. human contest feels personal. It's hard not to think it found the trap in the night, knocked it onto the floor to mock us, made his floor deposit, wandered around spreading his gross rat germs and left.

And while the rat still roams free, the wedding gets closer. The pastor will marry us. For a small fee, a government official will also officiate our wedding on the grounds of our friend's hotel. We will be married twice. The confusing myriad of paperwork involving the Canadian embassy, the local government, the church, and documents faxed and emailed from Canada seems untangled. Also, after a wee bit of controversy, we finish writing our vows. With these usual wedding arrangements completed my bridal stress should be decreasing.

But it does the opposite. I'm not sleeping. Nor is my beloved. Why? He admits he's seen the rat and reports its nocturnal activities vary beyond rat-trap-avoidance maneuvers. Nor does it restrict itself to the kitchen. While it ignores the trap in the kitchen completely, it goes elsewhere in the house. It chews the Kleenex box and a napkin on bedside tables beside our sleeping heads. Another night it stole the hand soap, gnawed on the corner of a pad of paper, and chewed through an eyeglasses

strap. On a different night, I found teeth marks on my pencil, also at the bedside. I am reduced to tears thinking about the rat crawling around us. It continues to thumb its nose at the trap *and* at the addition of a different trap. The new trap's design involves a small envelope-sized sticky platform with a central spot for bait: the rat walks on the sticky stuff and gets trapped.

One night, amongst all the nights of the trap being undisturbed, Rai put the wire trap under a table without realizing the door couldn't shut. The rat figured this out and took the bait! The only night out of about fourteen that the bait disappeared! Unbelievable. The next night we moved the trap one inch from that location so the door could close. We used the same bait. Wanting to be thorough, we also put out the sticky platform with different, yet delicious, bait from the other trap. In the morning, the trap box remained untouched, but the banana on the sticky platform trap vanished!

I—Give—Up.

In fact, on the eve of the wedding, we're admitting loss and packing up. Even Rai has a defeated air as he goes about his daily ironing routines. After our wedding night, we won't be coming back. We will honeymoon around the island, and the rat will be on its own in the empty house. Which is just as well, because the night before the wedding, a tremendous lightning storm knocked out Ubud's transformer, and we've been without power ever since.

On the morning of our wedding, I hop onto the moped with my wedding dress flung over my shoulder. I am off to our friend's hotel to get ready... and to leave our beautiful jungle home to the rat. But with us gone, it will have to forage for itself. No more people-food! That thought gives me scant comfort, as I navigate through the rice field with a dress flapping behind me.

It's a saving grace I never saw the rat. Indonesia's hog-nosed shrew rat, the article notes, is one and a half feet long and weighs half a pound. It's cat-sized. Would a cat fit in our Kleenex-box-sized trap? Evidence points to no. The author notes the rodent's large ears, long pointed teeth, unusually long urogenital hairs, and strong marsupial-like hind legs for jumping. But the researchers lack knowledge of the mammal's capacity to evade Balinese traps and ruin peace of mind. □

The Joy of Painting

Heimir Steinarsson

*We don't make mistakes.
We just have happy accidents*

Bob Ross

We'll take a touch of magic white,
and a little bit of brown,
and with our trusty two-inch brush
we'll pull it gently down.

This piece of canvas is your world
and you're allowed to do
whatever you think is pretty and
whatever seems right to you.

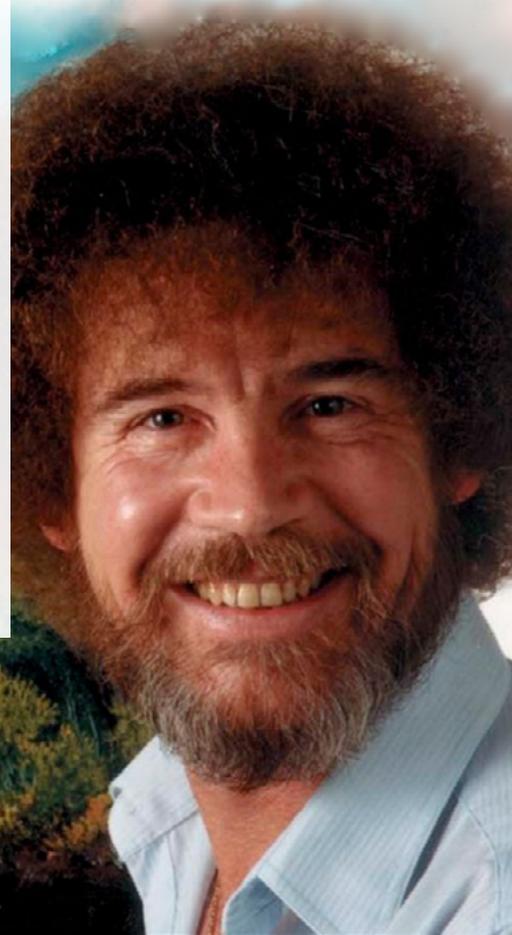
Perhaps we'll put a mountain
where everybody can see,
and here in the outer corner
lives a happy little tree.

But before we can continue
we must rinse our brush a bit
with cleaning fluid and then we beat
the devil out of it.

The art of painting will offer you
repose from your daily strife
and perhaps it can even help you
to recover the joy of life.

Open your eyes, and you will see
that beauty is everywhere.
Just turn your imagination loose
and put some colors out there.

Illustration: www.papercraft.com





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