

*Bodies at Rest*

VAALBARA: Coil into the last common ancestor, a stain on a bisection of a sheet of shale. Smallest of bacterium, oldest of worlds. This land was once and only, warm and leafless. Let it shatter you into islands. Become its first fossil. A greenstone belt on the edge of unconformity.

You should know that the distance between New York City and Reykjavík is precisely 2,610 miles, and the regulations of Icelandair allow this passenger plane five hours and forty minutes to traverse it. Our flight boards punctually enough. Among the passengers are a number of ruddy-cheeked Scandinavians, starched-suited executive types with receding hairlines, and hiking-boot-clad, travel-blogger couples. I'm sitting in the middle seat and you're by the window. To my left, perched on the edge of his aisle seat: a man I don't know—youngish, wearing plaid pajama pants, his leg shaking, shaking, shaking.

His knee vibrates across the narrow gap between us, shuddering up against the side of my thigh. "Oh, sorry," he mumbles, shifting his weight to the left.

I smile, overcompensating my unsaid *It's all good* with a crinkle of my eyes, and tune in halfway through your one-sided conversation with me. "When I was a kid, I thought airplanes flew like birds, in V-formations," you're saying. You've already linked the neck cushion you bought at the Hudson News over your shoulders and begun to shift your slides off your feet. "And sometimes I really do think about those Canada geese that were chopped up in Sully's engines. Nobody ever talks about their stories. It's all about the people, and their near-death experiences, and the heroics of the water landing. Nobody talks about the geese."

I think about this seriously, in the way I only ever do when you pose a hypothetical that requires beyond-human thinking. I've been working as your editorial assistant at our textbook publisher's division of Earth and Geosciences for just over four months, but I feel like since then you've done everything in your power to close the gap of professional relationality between us. You're *the* Harper

Fogg: managing editor, twenty-eight, only four years older than me, and even though I'm not the only EA under your wing, I'm the only one who knows about the conversations you have with your therapist, your doctors, your mother, about your evolving lists of diagnoses, your ADHD, parasomnia, IBS. I'm the only one you invited on this business expense-covered trip to Iceland.

So, I think seriously about the geese and their un-honked stories, and say, "You're right, nobody talks about the geese. But . . . I think it might be bad form, you know, to discuss near-death near-crashes just before takeoff. Might make people uneasy."

The man to my left is sweating.

"What's bad form," you say, staring out the window, "is that people don't understand statistics. There is a statistical unlikelihood of any one commercial plane going down, least of all of my talking about it coinciding with engine failure. There is, however, a statistical likelihood that if we were to crash into a flock of birds, that tens of thousands of geese would be captured and gassed, and their eggs smothered in oil, by city officials in some empty gesture of retribution. But I'm not talking about that, Mags. I'm talking about Canada geese and how they mate for life and have seen more of the world than the average American ever will."

Are you? I want to say. Are you really talking about any of that? I try to search your eyes for the metaphor of us, but you are looking, fiercely, at your phone.

The armrest quakes under my elbow as the man stirs. He opens and closes the tray below his seatback screen. Then opens and closes and opens again. I want to touch his hand, to impart some stillness into his knuckles.

"When we're that far west," I say to you, "we'll have one-upped the geese. They've only been as far as Canada, right?"

"East," you correct. You push up the shade of your window, and a scythe of sunlight cuts diagonally across your face. I can see two tiny hairs highlighted in your nostril. "Iceland is northeast of us."

"Sorry, I'm shit with directions."

"You're probably dyscalculic."

"Dyslexic? I'm not."

"No, dyscalculic. You have trouble remembering phone numbers, addresses? Judging distances? Reading analog clocks? Telling

your left from your right, your east from your west? You have no homing instincts. You have dyscalculia. It's cute."

You've offhandedly diagnosed me in the past. *You scream unrecognized OCD and Your acne is because of a gluten intolerance and Your hands are so cold—did you know you have Raynaud's Disease?* But I don't quite like how you say this one so blithely, with sunset in your hair. I am not the goose homed to its south, nor the bee to its hive, nor the ant to its hill. It is not cute, not at all, to be accused of missing the thing that makes us one of many, flocking, intimate, knowing, homing. It is not cute to have a mind made up of islands with no poles.

"I'm not *that* dysfunctional," I say. You see, if anything, I overcompensate in my calculations. I feel unmoored when I can't fabricate myself in time and space.

You chuckle. "*You're* cute."

I look away, warm. That's an entirely different diagnosis.

"Mags, don't let me forget, our hotel reservation has changed," you say suddenly. "We're at the Hilton Nordica now. Corporate says cheaper."

I roll my lips. I want to say we should skip the hotel. We should camp on the back of the Langjökull glacier. We should learn everything there is to learn about each other out on the ice, before *your* homing instincts kick in.

I am thinking this not because these are things we should do, but because they are upwellings of mantle, suggesting new ground at the rift between us. Because there is something growing—at least on my end, and I hope on yours, too—demanding to be defined.

At that moment, the screens in front of us light up and the flight attendants get into formation to mime their safety demonstrations.

"Can you also take some time to read through the descriptions of the panels?" you ask. "By the time we land I want a list in my hand of your recs. I'm going to try to sleep."

The voice from the animated video is bright and stilted. "Hal-ló og gott kvöld! Welcome, valued passenger to the Airbus A320, flight 8080, from New York to Reykjavík. When the seat belt sign illuminates, you must fasten your seatbelt—"

You rummage through the backpack at your feet, emerging with a pill bottle in one hand and a pamphlet in the other. You press the pamphlet into my palm. The cover is a gray and blue photo of an

iced-over volcano, superimposed by the text, *International Conference on Engineering Geology, Environmental Geology and Mineral Economics: Reykjavík 2025*.

The plane jolts into a roll down the runway and the pajama-pantsed man clenches our shared armrest.

KENORLAND: Drape your spine across  
the equator, heels uprooting beds of sea.  
Regard your body as a repository of lakes,  
inland and shallow. This one stinks of algae,  
that one lusters with fool's gold, navel-deep.  
How easy it is to flood you, to bury your  
pieces under miles of snow.

You should know that the distance between the tarmac of the JFK airport runway and the lower stratosphere over the Hudson is approximately thirty-six thousand feet, and it takes precisely seventeen minutes for our plane to climb to its cruising altitude. I chew the inside of my cheek as the contracting joints of the wheels and sinking teeth of the engines squeeze the cabin into a moistureless, flavorless fruit. Metal pierces my tongue. Dead cells tighten on the skin of my forehead, my chest, my hands. I am one straining organ underneath it all. The pamphlet creases in my grip.

You've already slipped a satin eye mask over your face. Your head droops toward the window. At first, there's relief. I haven't been alone with you, outside of an office setting, for long enough to know how to handle the way you make me feel. But still, it takes everything in me not to touch your shoulder, to wake you and ask you to decide what I am again.

It's like this—say you go the first twenty-some years of your life believing your parents when they say it's only a matter of time before you bring home a man for Christmas. Despite feeling no nesting instincts for anyone, never, least of all a man. And then you take a job working for a tall, big-eyed woman who demands that you see her every blemish, who wants to understand your every flaw. And even when she's wrong about you, you think, I could come home to this. It's a strange love that you're afraid you're imagining. It's like that.

I look past you at the circuitboard of the city below as New York becomes something half-melted in the dusk, shadows long and cubic over the monuments of a million, million lives. Your chin lobs forward, obscuring my view out the window.

The aisle-seat man struggles to untangle his headphones. I watch him jam his fingers into the wired knots for a minute, two, before I turn to the screen in front of me. I select the tiny map icon, and the Eastern Seaboard spreads. I zoom out with an ebb of my fingers. A variegated line arches from the silver plane icon over New York, sliding up through New England, across the strait to Newfoundland, out into the wet of the Labrador Sea, and then west through the toil of the North Atlantic, to Iceland, that speck of dandruff below Greenland's dripping nose.

I'm so fixed on the slow crawl of the illustrated plane along the map that I don't hear what the man beside me says. I only catch the tail end of it.

“—a coincidence, that's all,” he's saying.

I blink my eyes back into focus. “Sorry, what?”

His gaze darts to the pamphlet in my lap. “It's just, I'm going to the same conference.”

“Are you really?” I pick up the pamphlet and unfold it into ever-expanding lists and schedules and panel descriptions. I scan quickly through some of the panel topics: data-driven urban planning, artificial neural network-based land cover classification, geographical spatial analysis of wind energy, mafic volcanism.

He reaches across the armrest and presses his finger over one of the textboxes. “I'm guest-speaking for this one.”

“Will Earth's next supercontinent assemble through the closure of the Pacific Ocean?” I read aloud.

I have a working knowledge of geology and plate tectonics, though most of it has been by way of osmosis—there are only so many times you can fact-check chemical classification and petrology before you know the elemental composition of every igneous rock on this big, melty planet of ours. You would say that my expertise is purely romantic. You've returned my write-ups for textbook blurbs with big doodly hearts alongside curt annotations like, *You can't just say, 'rip open the seam of deep time and unravel the fabrics of rocks,' Mags, not when 'interpreting mineralogy of rock suites' does the job.* But what do you expect from me? I was an English and education double-major who didn't actually want to teach and couldn't actually find a job in

literary publishing.

“Well?” I say.

He blinks slowly. “Well?”

“Will the next supercontinent form in the closing of the Pacific?”

He’s leaning a bit too close now. I can see the translucent layer of skin on his lip. “Oh! Well, I can’t tell you that. No spoilers.”

That’s boring, I think. But I shrug, peer back down on the description of the panel. “Are you Mclean, Chomsky, Forester, Lee—?”

“Forester,” he says, teeth chattering with each syllable. “I’m James.”

There’s that leg again, jitter, jittering, jittered. I stare at his knee and introduce myself, too, but don’t offer any alternative routes for conversation. James seems harmless enough, but I don’t trust restless men. Not that they aren’t allowed to have their anxieties, their aerophobias, their restless leg syndromes. But every man I’ve met who seems on edge has always been on the edge of propositioning me. The timidity is usually a front.

The seatbelt light chimes, then goes dim. My ears finally unpop, and suddenly everything is pressure-controlled, subducted, vacuumed into a cochlea, spiral-fist.

COLUMBIA : Loom across the lowlands.  
Your lungs are a mountain range, swelling with oxygen, rammed from either side.  
Unfurl your riverbanks. This is where the flagellate splits from the ciliate, where the microbial mats untangle. You are spinning too fast for the miracle of the eukaryote.  
And yet, life.

You should know that the distance between my foot and the tap-tap of James’ left Converse is approximately ten centimeters and closing. In five seconds, he’ll be back in my space, rubber to leather, nervous contact. As such, a small relief comes when you suddenly snort awake. You push your eye mask up onto your forehead, hand gravitating to your belly. “*Oof*,” you oof, and then unclip your

seatbelt. "Mags, it's the IBS again."

An awkward choreography follows where both James and I unbuckle ourselves and pile into the narrow walkway to make room for your escape. I can feel James' breath on the back of my neck.

"Do you need me?" I ask, but you shake your head. As soon as you're restroom-bound, I slot myself back into the row. I sit in your empty seat by the window. You've left it warm, the cushions bearing the indents of the lines of your spine, your hips. Below, the plate of New England is fusing with the sea, boiling under the griddle of dusk. The carpet of trees along the coast seems to be rising and falling, breathing and dying. As if a decade of decay and regrowth is happening in a matter of seconds, without us.

James settles back into his aisle seat and procures a thin paperback from his bag. I squint at the cover. An orange hot air balloon, a bolo-hat-clad man, zipping past a montage of universal monuments: the Eiffel Tower, an Indian elephant, the American steam engine. *Around the World in Eighty Days*, the title.

I don't trust restless men, but I've read this book before and I trust a kindred taste in literature. Besides, James is a funny kind of calm now. Not a wrinkle of emotion on his face. I can't help myself.

"Say I worked for a textbook publisher," I pose. "Say I was going to Iceland to scout contributors."

He lifts an eyebrow but doesn't look up from his book.

"Say I wanted to edit a chapter about the future of the planet. Two hundred million years in the future. What would you write for that chapter?"

I'm not asking this because this is a thing I think he or I should do, but because time suddenly feels like an asset, something that should be controlled and optimized. Time until you return, time until touchdown, time until I say everything I mean and mean everything I say, time until the grand convergence of the continental shelves. Something about the container of this plane has crumpled the minutes and hours, pamphlet-thin, in my hands. I wring my wrists.

James' knee is totally still, now. He leafs a page and is quiet for a minute, two. By the time the meal cart announces the flight attendants at our row, it's *my legs* that are drumming against each other.

"Well, that's a spoiler," he says, as the flight attendant reaches over him to pass me a tray of Viking-branded foods. Valhalla-vegan couscous soup. One-Eyed green olives. A crumble Runestone-rhubarb cake.

He refuses a meal, takes a cup of water instead. He continues: “Well, the Pacific Ocean has always been shrinking. The Atlantic has always been expanding. If you read the iron in the rocks, it’ll tell you that every great supercontinent was formed ninety degrees to the previous supercontinent. Pangaea to Rodinia to Columbia and back. Ninety degrees. Pangaea was the last, over the equator. The next supercontinent, Amasia, will settle in the Arctic.”

A bright voice interrupts him, chiming from the overhead speaker: “Gott kvöld, this is your Captain speaking. Some mild turbulence ahead as we—”

The plane lurches. The couscous soup becomes a gravity-defying amoeba. Hot broth splatters across my chest.

RODINIA: Weep lava. Every peak a glacier, every valley molten. Anger is a subducted thing, plunging under the nail bed. Spew on, vent vitriol, grow fresh limbs of pumice. Feed potassium, phosphorous, sodium to the sea, and watch as fronds and polyps and teeth rise from your ashes.

You should know that the distance between the plane icon and the light blue contour of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge on the flight-tracker map is only three inches, at first. The longer I stare at it, though, the more elastic the lines of latitude and longitude become. The matte blue of the ocean bulges, the North American landmass sucks in its stomach. Pixel by pixel, the neck of Maine flattens like putty against Canada. Three inches becomes three-point-three, then three-point-five, then four, as the Atlantic engorges.

My throat tightens, and there is a ticking, quickening count-down pounding against the drum of my ear. You see, I feel unmoored when I can’t fabricate myself in time and space. And I have a sinking feeling I’m running out of both of these things.

I peel the damp wool of my sweater away from my chest. Beads of couscous and chunks of potato collect in my lap. James offers me his spare napkin, but it’s flimsy recycled paper, easily disintegrated. I plant my heels on the floor, force my knees to close together, to become one calm continent.

“Clumsy me. Can I get past you?” I say, rising. The plane is still



shuddering, and the fasten-seatbelt sign is green, but I am dripping, crawling, itching. James bends his knees to the side and I stumble out into the aisle.

“Do you need me?” he asks, and I think that is a strange thing to say. I do not know him. Do I need him? I shake my head.

The long aisle to the cabin toilets dilates before me, and the people seem to ripple too. I swallow the rope of my tongue and squeeze past their plying, pilling bodies. I hadn’t seen which toilet you went into, and both the lavatories at the end of the aisle are occupied.

I rap a fist against one of the doors. “Harper? Are you okay in there? Do you need me?”

My knocks echo back, plastic.

“Harper? I’m worried.”

“Ma’am,” a sing-songy flight attendant lilts behind me. “I have to ask that you return to your seat while the seatbelt light is on.”

As I turn to confront her, the body of the plane stutters and my hand slips down to the lavatory latch. Every sound converges into one hungry gnaw. No more chatter. No more mouth sounds. No more belches and beeps and baby cries. Just raw noise. I steady my feet and look back down the long aisle. The flight attendant is nowhere to be seen. The impossibly tall Scandinavians are not in their seats. Neither are the traveling businessmen, nor the happy adventure couples. The cabin is empty, empty of everyone, except for one head, James Forester’s head, angled down, reading from his book, alone.

Do I need him?

The locking mechanism of the bathroom latch relents under my hand and the door slides into the wall. And I’m left standing there, fist raised, in an unoccupied cabin, before an unoccupied toilet. I don’t know what to do with this lack. I step inside and close the door behind me.

GONDWANA: Suture at the bottom of the world. Air thick with spores, land vast with green. Sweat out the first blooms in your soil, harden the first bones in your seas. As your calcium-rich body breaks, they will cling to you, dream of you, and one day, dripping in salt, colonize you.

You should know that the distance between the main island of Iceland and the technical boundary of the Arctic Circle is approximately twenty-five miles and closing, and the models of continental drift allow every one of Earth's landmasses upwards of two hundred million years to join it at the pole. I've just learned that, from James. And now each breath I take contains another million years. I feel the mega-annum pass through me from ear to ear like a wire with a hook. The years catch on the undersides of my molars. There they will remain behind for the fossil record. Female. Twenty-four years old. Plant-based diet. Unaccompanied bones, very much alone.

There is only enough floorspace for me to stand and stare at my drained face in the oval mirror. In here, the plane sounds like it is built entirely from aluminum thunder sheets and hair pins. Grinding, gnashing, rattle-shaking. And all I can think as I stare at the pink vein in my left eye is that I cannot accept that you are not actually here, bent over this toilet, over the Labrador Sea, which is shrinking, and compressing, and sloshing into a superocean, some thirty thousand feet below.

Do you think this is a dyscalculic episode? Have I disoriented myself into an alternate tectonic reality? Do I have less directional sense than I like to think, so little that I've unmoored you from the future this plane is hurtling toward? Unmoored everyone, except for —

Tap-tap-tap.

"Mags? Are you okay in there? Do you need me?"

It might be James. I think it's James. I don't answer. I feel like every piece of me is colliding.

Tap-tap.

"Mags? I'm worried."

I feel like a fist that can't open.

I slide the door a crack and his hand slips through. My tongue is dry. I ask him before he can enter: "Tell me again, what would you write for that chapter about the future?"

His voice is molten through the door.

"The Pacific Ocean has always been shrinking. The Atlantic has always been expanding. The next supercontinent will settle in the Arctic. And I know I said no spoilers, but when all that comes to pass, if our children are alive, and their children alive, all of us will be living on the North Pole, on Amasia. It'll be too cold to dig so whatever comes after us will have to track us by the iron in our

blood.”

I don't open the door the rest of the way. I reach, instead, for the welcoming splay of his palm. I hold us there, separated by a mouthful of air and an inch of plastic, for a second.

These are spoilers to a version of my life where I will never learn everything there is to learn about you. Where I will rift until I grow into something that lives with a man on a single continent with descendants that blame me for the eternal winter. And though he is nervous and harmless and warm, this is a timeline I do not want.

A bright voice chimes from the overhead speaker: “Gott kvöld, this is your Captain speaking. Some mild turbulence ahead as we—”

The plane lurches. It pitches me past the door, past James, out of the lavatory. I float, unmagnetized to anything, for a moment. Repelled by every surface. Then I land, hard, on the ceiling or the wall or the floor of the cabin. I can't be sure. But I can hear, through the layers of metal and fiberglass and bone, a flock of geese, and their one, harmonized honk.

PANGAEA : You are every memory. You are buzzing, tentacular, chthonic, seeding, writhing, clicking, bleeding. You are amniote and afterbirth, winged and pouched and scaled. You are self-replicating, self-defeating, extinct-exploded-extinct, resplendent. You are heaving, you are opening. You are.

You should know that because the circumnavigating party in *Around the World in Eighty Days* travels eastward, their days are shortened by four minutes for each of the 360 degrees of longitude they surpass. By the end of their journey, they have seen 80 sunrises and sunsets while their friends in London have only seen 79. I'm telling you this not because a plane of bodies moving east around the world will necessarily experience time more slowly than the million, million lives they leave behind on the surface, but because for that to be so, we would need to be traveling at the speed of light, or in a gravitational field stronger than the Holocene Earth's, or in a pre-Date Line version of Verne reality, to notice any difference. Even under those circumstances, a minute to me isn't a minute to

you if I am getting ahead of myself. In my minute, a flock of geese will siphon into the engines, stalling this empty plane over a single continent. In my minute, the plane will drop like a wishing stone, with no one left in the cabin to scream at this version of me: *Brace, brace!* So instead, I will brace nothing and no one and I will be wide and open and floating.

When I claw out of the rubble, fists full of ice and mouth full of metal, there will be yawning white. A new land, cold and whistling, under a midnight sun. And if I dig deep enough, I will find a million casts of us, crushed in the great convergence, dripping in limestone.

AMASIA: Carve out the next common ancestor, a molar in a jaw of sandstone. Strangest of animals, newest of worlds. This land is then and maybe, cold and leafless. Let it aggregate us into an icecap. We will become its last fossil. Sedimented on the edge of imagination.

You should know that the distance between what I should want and what my body wants is a superocean spreading 139 million square miles out from the parting ridge of my spine. It's finally clear to me what I need, though, which is an entirely different diagnosis.

I stare down the cabin aisle as it appears to lengthen and shimmer. It takes me a moment of orienting before I recognize the swatches of pastel and cable-knit sweater and light blue veins as the people of flight 8080. Every blond Scandinavian and business-tripper and adrenaline-chasing couple bounces in their seats along with the turbulence, very much there. They are otherwise untroubled, leafing through their magazines, tracking their flights, eating their tiny Viking cakes, even as their limbs and chins shake like loosely attached doll parts. The lavatory door shutters behind me, and I don't watch if it is James who slips in behind me, but it goes red with the occupied signal.

I walk back to my row, my heart thrumming, tympanic, in my ears. Every window I pass suggests a sea that extends as far as it can from any memory of land. Every flight-tracking map shows a plane icon adrift on a flattened Earth that is an overcompensation of blue ocean save for a scalp of white to the north.

You are asleep in your window seat. Satin eye mask, neck pillow, socks rolled over your ankles.

As I move in beside you, you stir. You push the mask over your forehead and blink at me. "I was waiting for you," you say.

"Were you?"

The plane buckles, and my shoulder collides with yours.

"I was. But I went to sleep. It's how I time-travel. Because look at you—a second ago you were far away, somewhere I couldn't see, and then I closed my eyes, and here you are."

I feel myself unfurl, knuckle by knuckle. It's a funny, comforting thought. That the version of me here, shoulder-to-shoulder with you, is the one that you dreamed up.

You gesture at the conference pamphlet folded beside the *Around the World in Eighty Days* book in James' empty seat. "Well? Any recs?"

"Honestly, Harper?"

You nod.

"We should skip the panels. We should hike the Fagradalsfjall volcano. We should look down into the cauldron of a new planet. We should live in and on the North Pole before the rest of the world moves there. We should love each other, and we should never fly south."

I am saying this not because these are things we should do, but because they are new plates rising, forming into Harper-shaped mountains with Harper-deep fjords. Because we are a growing land demanded to be populated. I no longer care if I'm imagining it.

The pressure in the cabin bursts and every sound is suddenly very sharp, every voice a pine needle in the throat.

You don't say anything. You might want to say no. You might not want me the way I want you. That's okay, I realize. You smile, and I'll be okay. I figure it is simple theory. Time moves more slowly for a body in motion than for a body at rest. And while I have been spinning out, head tripping, splitting, twitching, you have been this one version of yourself, still. And at a rest like that, so much can come together, even as the hours crumple, and taste of sameness, and tuck into a ripple of an epoch like nothing, absolutely nothing at all.

James Forester returns to his seat from the lavatory just as the flight attendants are gathering our trash. He looks at me without any recognition. When he sits, his knee starts to dance. He tucks his

Jules Verne paperback into his bag under the seat. For a moment, I feel sorry that he is the restless version of himself for whom time moves too swiftly. He is here, but soon enough he won't exist in this row, on this plane, by this window, not in my timeline. Not when I've already chosen.

You cough into the whorl of your fist and say, as if picking up on the conversation we had at the beginning of the flight: "People don't understand geese. They don't understand that we made Canada geese become dyscalculic. We build urban spaces that trap the heat in the winter, and we feed them sugary breads and leave out our trash for them to pick through, and soon enough they lose track of their biological clock. That instinct to fly south in winter, north in spring? Destroyed. Whole flocks simply forget their ancestral nests. The world goes on changing, but they are stuck in Central Park, or on some softball pitch, or on the banks of a reservoir—flightless, in limbo. And then, in the dead of winter, when they fly into our jet engines and multi-million-dollar planes fall out of the sky, we blame them."

There might be a metaphor of us in there. But I don't search for it. I lean with you to look out the window as the sea glows over a subducting crust and the Earth turns like a beetle on its back, changing into something singular faster than the air can change over in our lungs. We breathe the same breath, and Amasia forms.