

Remote and at Home

My beloved,

There is no better way for me to tell you that I love you than to write you a love letter. A love letter to and a postcard from. You are my beloved island, my dreamworld, my escape. My homecoming, my kingdom to be conquered. I love you, I loved you, I will love you.

The first time I set my eyes on you, despite having travelled so far to reach you, I had a strange sense of familiarity. Although I knew quite well that I didn't know you, I couldn't ignore the way I felt when I saw you. It was as if I had found something that I had quite forgotten I was looking for, but once I found it, I knew at once that it was utterly indispensable, and I couldn't quite imagine how I had done without it for so long.

Like a deep breath, or a long dunk of the head under bright, clear water, I was simultaneously refreshed and satiated just looking at you. But I wanted more, I wanted more all of a sudden, right away, immediately, post haste.

Four years has passed. I am no closer to believing that I could forget you. I long to make that true. But my physical body won't allow it. The feeling of weightlessness at the pit of my stomach when I think of you, a kind of lifting up and out of myself at the thought of the breath-taking beauty of the blue of your sky and the freshness of your sea and the cool, breathing stillness of the forest at night.

Longing and memory make strange, uncomfortable bed fellows. It was a hot summer just like this. Desire smouldered on the air like the haze across the fields late in the afternoon. I wanted to know you intimately.

In all my memories of being with you, I feel like I had been sea swimming- my skin tingling, my hair damp, lifted up off my neck which your cool breezes caressed. In my memories I am very, very happy.

I remember one night that was boiling hot, and the mosquitoes were huge. I remember standing on the beach of the lake. The blurring light made silhouettes bleed into each other. The gap between us was imperceptible. I stood in silence and looked at the harvest moon above the dark pine forest, the sky that was a silvery pale- no longer light but not yet dark. It was midsummer in the far northern hemisphere.

I was busy making work- sun prints, early morning earth pigment paintings, sea dipped sketches. You became part of the work and your gifts were boundless. Peachy, golden, rose gold light seeping under, into, through everything. A life suddenly lived in sunbathed colours- drowsy with warmth, laughter, potential. A return to a sense of myself. Like meeting another version of myself coming back from a life I had wanted but hadn't lived.

Late at night, or very early in the morning, the whispering traces of a light that never quite sleeps kept me awake too. My body clock was becoming aligned to yours. I felt wired, hyper

alert, enervated. As I lay there, I felt you hearing me breathing, holding me in your awareness. And that feeling made me feel calm and peaceful, and I was never frightened, despite the strangeness of it all.

A while later someone organised a trip to an outlying island. To reach the ferry port I cycled past the cut field where the family of deer liked to gather. The field colours were burnt umber, rose pink, corals; the forest behind deep mossy greens, with burnished yellow lichens and silver branches. You were like a jewel box, a painting come to life, a child's picture book called 'The Enchanted Island'.

I sat in the sun on the deck of the ferry, watching the crystalline waters, smooth as anything, more silver than blue, dazzling in the sparkling refracted sprays of sunlight. So much light. It was a total immersion in the brilliance of a magic trick of water and sunshine. The whiteness of the light enfolded me and left me breathless.

The day grew more and more brilliant. I ate lunch at an inn on the shore of a tiny harbour, on a tiny island, no more than a speck on a map somewhere in the sea between Sweden and Finland. I cycled to an apple orchard, then to the church on the headland. I looked inside for a long time, and I thought about the women waiting at home, praying here for the first glimpse of a mast on the horizon, a sighting- the return. A model ship hung suspended in the knave- a talisman flying across the skies to sanctuary, a course set fair for home, sails blown full with a wind of safe passage. 'Carry my love safe home to me' was what the walls of the church seemed to breathe out.

Afterwards I swam, pushing out from dark red flatbed rocks into the sea. The cool water a relief from the cycling, the lunch, the orchard, the church. I sat and absorbed the warmth of millennia radiating from the deep wine-coloured rock through the dampness of my swimsuit. I sketched. I wanted for nothing more, nothing different, no future, no past.

Four years has passed since that day. Every day I carry on with my life that does not have you in it. I am grateful for what I have. By turns, satisfied, content, happy. I have stopped writing sad poetry, making paintings that bleed with the colours of our meeting and the depths of my sorrow. I have 'moved on'.

But sometimes still, on a very hot, hazy mid-summer late afternoon, the deep cool blue of a shadow or the pink umber hue of a sun-drenched soil stops me in my tracks, chokes me of my breath and punches me in the stomach, it so bitterly reminds me of you. I breathe out, turn away and carry on. I admonish myself for my stupidity- how could I let the memory of you upset me so? What was it about the dazzling sunlight, the brilliance of the glare on the water, the heat of the sun, the intoxicating palette of the colours that connected to something so deep inside of me?

Much as I want to deny it, the truth is Korpo that I love you still. This is a love letter to you, one which I know will never receive any kind of reply. Why is that we can love a place with no expectation that it loves us back? We can feel held, embraced, nurtured by place. We feel a special bond, a unique connection, a secret communion that we can't easily put into

words. We don't feel jealous, we don't guard our love-place from others, we share it freely and our joy is made manifold by the joy and love others feel.

But I do long for you so, to the point that it hurts and I wish it wasn't so. I wish I could turn my memories into plastic squares like my Grandparents' old Kodax holiday slides, I want to contain my feelings in a freeze frame- series of analogue photographs. Maybe then I could let them fall loosely to the bottom of a box, and cover them with more respectable mementos and love letters. And postcards of other places. Places that I have loved, that have formed the memory points on the landscape map of my life, and that I have accepted that I will never see again.

But the trouble is with you, is that you somehow connected me to a part of myself that had been lost for a very long time. Before I found you, and since I lost you, I have felt cut-off, at sea, remote from myself.

I know that this is fanciful, that I should be able to find that part of myself anywhere. People find the idea that a place could complete a person absurd, strange and inexplicable. Perhaps I don't really believe it either. But I do miss you so, and in my heart, you are still the place I call home.

Yours, as ever,
E x