

## One More Open Gate

✧ *Isobel Wylie Hutchison (1889–1982)* ✧

✧ *pioneer, botanist, painter, poet, voyager* ✧

who is blood moon whisperer, lore makar,  
Saturn-eyed, owl-eyed, willow-catkin-saxifrage-eyed,  
—so many monikers it's humbler not to list them.

Isobel, privileged as you were, it did not spare you  
death's savagery, its graceless aching—  
father first, then brothers both. Perhaps grief  
sent your mind fleeing before the body could:  
Edinburgh to John O'Groats, walking  
with the spirits—deep north, all ways north,  
60° Shetlandic north, Leith to Copenhagen  
hella' north; norther still.

Isobel, first Scotswoman to set foot on Greenland,  
collecting flowers on the tundra, greeting  
cherishable humans and—dressed in  
those famous seal skinned breeks & island knits—  
dancing reels imported by Scottish whalers.  
Banshee fiddles, the squeeze-box,  
figures-of-eight and dos-à-dos—  
did their music dial the heart's hotline  
into your bale of memories of home?  
More likely, the other way around—back  
in Caledonia pining for this  
moonlit frozen ballroom.

Isobel, watching the river that carried you  
gush ice into the fjord, feasting  
on boiled salmon, hand  
-torn, bones becoming  
toothpick spears. The upturned boat:  
a wind-breaker, its seal skin belly drying  
by the fire's fuzzed amber  
as oil lamps turn tents to lanterns.  
But it's the welkin, of course, that wins  
the night—Auroa above like a giant ship  
of light, land the bottom of the ocean:  
electric seaweed ribbons of emerald  
& amethyst. Dragon's breath.  
The silence explodes with Greenlanders  
baying up at stardust glaciers.

The Northern Lights are Merry Men  
they tell you, souls of the dead  
playing games with the head of a walrus.  
What a night's kip

that must have been. How many ghost ships  
sailed by you sleeping? How many dark shapes  
sucked into the freeze?

Isobel, traveling by dog sled  
by the rope of Artic wind, towards each  
*long unopened gate*, inking letters home,  
scrawls to end: *that's if I ever make it back.*

I wonder what you'd reckon to us, so  
starkly elsewhere, eyes plunged into a screen,  
uploading the lens's latest  
capture. It's not all bad, I'd tell you, sometimes  
we too are watching dolphins leap, ships  
overcome pelagic trials, posting pictures  
that might combat the long loneliness,  
but not before we chrome filter those suckers,  
revving up the faint glow  
of the *cruising stars*, to a red-gold  
sweet shop bright.

Isobel, it just takes some getting used to.  
Did I mention, we've found water on the moon?

Michael Pedersen

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