

A note to the reader:

Kathryn's letter arrived as a series of postcards, some of which appear to have been mislaid en route and all of which were water-damaged in some way. We have reproduced them here as far as we were able. We would recommend removing the two sheets on which these postcards appear, cutting along the dotted lines, and reading them in sequence. If you are reading this issue on a screen then you will just have to use your imagination.

1/

I know you don't like the name Ishmael but I need to call you something; your real and chosen names just don't fit. 'Call me 'the Sage' tonight?'¹ I would like to go one day to your house in the hills. I know you won't mind receiving me in your casual generosity, large as the span of your boringly beautiful hands. Be there when I am there. Let's repeat the same conversation, without the termination so impending, without my trauma and my drunkenness (yours, I can't control) [...] Under the frigid sun I feel free, a country away from yours. Mountains do not scrutinise, do not judge.



¹. Reference to the final line of *Tonight* by Agha Shahid Ali.

3/

I telephoned last night to report pleasant things from under Macchapucchere. Despite the lectures that came in its shadow, I know (more than you) that the worst things about myself – about anyone – are already inscribed; known; near; closed; embraced and reviled.



4/

I'm impatient until I get what I want, wearing myself down and out. Isn't that what you noticed? [...] Running to here, the plan was to make my peace with the last place by the date of my return. Timing is important in this way, but distance lengthens it. Yesterday I wondered what I should do about you; how to fix more hours together. You will always be connected to the breach of the land I wish to make right again, want to have all over again.



6/

Today I feel the absence of all the birds that have flown. Ours, especially. I wonder why I write, when all the effort is mine. [...] Ishmael, I wanted more of you then, but wanting wanes. There is an abundance of people in the world who desire our hides. Maybe this will soothe my teeming head more than wine, hemlock, limbs and all derivatives.



Ishmael, I am writing to you because I thought I should miss somebody, though I didn't and I don't. [...] You'd approve of this drifting, though I have the safety of anchors in sight. There's a presence of gadgets and humans but I'm choosing to be alone [...] There is sunshine in the blue sky and on the sheet of the lake below; there are momos² and lemon tea [...] I've attained the desired state of mind with no witnesses. Maybe this is my way and always will be [...] Just know that it has happened, Ishmael, and be happy too.



2. Momos - Tibetan dumplings

[...] We should live every night with the knowledge that there is a party waiting for us. I'm in a side street tea shop with the chaos at my left shoulder. The waiters have sat down to dhal bhat,³ which seems a good meal to have to last you until midnight: you're unlikely to do anything too mad with dhal bhat in your belly. This waning year has not been bad. I have crossed boundaries; I have kicked the prostrate; I have bled from my mouth and still [...] I met you and felt the hours, the heights and the mornings. God give you joy, if you follow a Gregorian calendar.



³. Lentil curry and rice, a staple dish in Nepal.

Dear Ishmael, I fear my time is up. Perhaps the well-intended hints have been correct and it is indeed time to stop being a disaster, though it's too early in this interval of freedom and transience to make convictions. I am waiting to go back to your country while the new era's slaves are waiting to board for Doha.⁴ Truly I have too much leisure – even writing to you is self-indulgent. There is space in transit to take a few more missteps before landing. What I am supposed to do here is [...]



⁴ 'I just want to be paid what I am owed, on time and every month, and to be treated with respect. Is that too much to ask?' - Sita Ram, a plaster and masonry worker based in Qatar, quoted in an Amnesty International report on Migrant Labour Abuse, May 2015.

12/

Kathmandu did not want to see me leave [...] Only a bodhisattva may forget that peace is relative to entropy. When two forces push against each other is it possible to remain serene?

I tried to phone you from this airport. I'll try you from the next.



⁵ Kathryn Hummel is the author of *Poems from Here* (2014) and the forthcoming *Broken Lines: Writings from a Disrupted Lifetime in Bangladesh*. Her poetry, fiction and non-fiction has been published and performed throughout Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the US and Asia, often in collaboration with musicians and fellow writers. Her website www.kathrynhummel.com serves as a travel diary/static set of postcards.