

Antarctica:  
Whimsical and Wayward Realities

M. A. Howe

*Winter turns to “Summer” at the bottom of the world. Above us, several feet of snowpack begins to thaw. ...McMurdo Station was built decades ago.*

10/20/20

The ceiling is leaking, so we’re told to hide all electronics under metal furniture. We’ve been instructed to use old cans of *Pears ‘n’ Peas*– the luscious, fat ones; the kind made for Food Court Slop– to collect The (eternal) Drip.

And that is an official policy.

I place a tin bucket just in time for the petulant drop to rikoshay, getting me in the eye. I hear stomping and shoveling above. Looking up, I think back to this morning...

Everytime we lose power, I say: This Is It. Casey and I talk: Is the whole world held together by tape? People who don’t know any better think this place is NASA. That was us once! Something something “*how the sausage is made*” something “*never meet your heroes.*” Something jaded, something *tired*.

Even NASA isn’t what you’d think... forget it. Maybe only a benevolent billionaire can save us. Can they and... will they? The Ford of our generation. Save us! Innovate! That mf assembly line. Or whatever.

Make your legacy: names-on-public-buildings. Be like Carnegie! Build us a Librar-ee! See that dedicated bench? The one under the shade tree.

10/28/20

The roof is leaking again. This time in the corner of the room. I go to the jano closet, grabbing old cans of sliced beets. I move the probably-asbestos-ceiling-tiles to the side, coughing a little, but suddenly finding all kinds of junk in the ceiling. Twenty bars of boxed dove soap. No less than seven giant geographic maps of Ross Island and Antarctica. They’ve been all bundled up and gingerly placed inside green plastic. I hold it in shock, for once at a loss for words. I look up again. There’s a shrine to a full bottle of Jamison. Out loud, I read the literal writing on the wall. “Rainy season? This should help.”

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10/29/2020

A Thursday.

I have my first library shift. For two hours, I sit in the deafening silence. I haven't heard this much nothing in... forever.

No one comes in, and it is wonderful. (As I spend 80 hours a week surrounded by all 340 of our inhabitants.) I get a ton of reading done on *Wool*, but it takes active focus.

I keep trying to go to the bathroom but some asshole has locked himself inside and seems to be watching tv.

I knock lightly, politely indicating that someone's been waiting.

He loudly coughs.

I come back an hour later, bladder full as a water balloon, and jiggle the door handle— pretty aggressively this time.

Another cough.

Fuckin freak.

I head back over to my tiny circulation desk and see *The Vagina Monologues* resting sideways on the dusty shelf. It makes me uneasy and ...curious. I've always wondered...

No time like the present. I dive in like I do.

I begin, immediately enamored. There is no forcing this read, I am awake. I'm on fire. These women are me and I am them. I sit up. Is this passion? I wonder.

*I see now... I was a child then.*

Maybe I need a passion? I muse. Something so good it ignites flow, trumps all else, pulls the self from [...] and into [...]. A slight sinus burn. Tears are forming in my eyes. I think- *Nah*.

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11/??/20

The water is coming down all over my room but mostly by the edge of the roof where this person has hidden things. I finally pull down the liquor bottle with writing on it. Again it reads, "Rainy season? This will help." And dated one year prior.

*Rainy season.* They knew that the roof would leak exactly here. These things were meant for me. A small recompense amongst the worst of the leaks. I make a mental note to leave gifts for the poor souls who come after me. Silently, I thank my little precipitation angel.

Many ceiling tiles are now out of place.

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11/02/20

Tomorrow is the election. But it'll take at least a week to count all the mail-in votes because of covid and whatnot. And apparently  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the country has already voted! Which is unprecedented and historic! As last time, only like 40% of these motherfuckers voted. Which is normal.

We are afraid of civil war, and sometimes plot to stay in NZ if things are really bad by the time we get out. RBG died a while back, which was a national tragedy. Now we already have this new evangelical female judge appointed who's probably going to send us into full Handmaid's Tale/ Iraq post-90's.

Afraid for my daughters. Afraid for my sisters. Afraid for me. Saddened and deadened by the world.

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11/05/20

I took a melatonin and slept 11 hours.

It's 7 am. But we've already been at it for 2 hrs ("working"). For Katherine, it's been 9 ("midrat"). Yee, we use military terms. Midnight rations, mmm... [clever captions].

We're huddled around Katherine's laptop, refreshing election results. *"Let's pretend we don't exist, let's pretend we're in Ant-arc-tic-aA—uh-uh-aA"* plays on repeat in the background, defiant and surreal.

It's way closer that we expected. Casey points to a figure on the right. "66,000,000 racists," she says.

I hug Marisa a few minutes later, and she invites me to watch her band play music in the chapel later. 'If I need a little solace,' she says.

I'm sitting on a cart wheeling around. The head chef tells me to get off. A few minutes later I tell her I'll do literally anything to stay on this continent.

*Ask me about brainwashing. Ask me about being in a cult. There is only the white and the snow and ice. There is nothing else.*

If there's one thing I've learned about USAP, it's that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. And I am that motherfucking squeaky wheel. That's how I got to Antarctica.

*...Ask me about brainwashing. Ask me about being in a cult. There is only the white and the snow and ice. There is nothing else.*

I guess someone changed the music.

*I'm just a teenage dirtbag, baby  
Listen to Iron Maiden, baby*

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11/04/20

Casey and I talking about the power plant– She says it's a representation of America. She's right. We are a microcosm; a man-made, amplified version of our worst selves; a magnifying glass. "Things fall apart."

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Head is pounding. Have to drink water constantly or we come to this. Ant-friggin'-Arctica. DRYEST, coldest, windiest wonder of the world, She is.

Katherine does some beautiful work with watercolors.  
If she's peein' and someone knocks on the door,  
she says– "Come in!!!"

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11/06/20

No one questions you if you power walk. Now, if you saunter...

Greg [name changed] just condescendingly told someone to go wash their hands.  
He walks away, tapping me on the shoulder,

“That’s how we do it.” Then a nod.

“Yeah... that’s right.”

I will be your hype man. *I am your number one fan.*

*[Context–“Greg” is a person of power. And I am really really not. I often do not feel safe. Self preservation is a powerful motivator.]*

Are you a reliable witness to your own life?

I think Dara did a lot of blow in Key West. That partially explains... everything.

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11/09/20

Tell me

Does this book take place on Mars?

Casey says all the time-

How they’re gonna to need people to do these same junk jobs

When they colonize Mars.

Would you leave today?

\* \* \* \* \*

Called mom on that old phone.

Bunch of beeping noises.

Was that you? Sometimes I think someone’s listening to these calls.

Mom: I have no doubt someone’s listening. Or at least recording.

30 seconds later

a bunch of beeps

Me: god that’s so creepy

Mom: what?

Me: there were a bunch of beeps. Because they’re sending us a message

Always hearing a click when I’m a few minutes into a call. I hear one again awhile later.

Clicks and beeps.

Silence.

Soft click.

\* \* \* \* \*

I speak with conviction!  
And I spit with vitriol.  
Begin to weep  
Want to wail  
Sleep on the floor  
Wake up and...  
No Eggs Benediction?  
Lmao.  
I have 4 beds  
I use none of them

So I live on a government commune.  
And do you know what? We get 3-Square!  
Can't complain, can't complain.

They say it's  
An old mining town on the moon  
That's what they say.  
There's this theory that they put us here to watch us. Like we're in a zoo.  
People love to talk about that.  
They are watching. They are always watching.  
What is this place?

Prone To  
Paranoia?  
But  
But  
Am I Wrong?  
Am I Wrong?

Light a fire under my ass!  
And reluctantly.  
Am I washing pots or are the pots washing me?

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Smuggled [...] some avocados today. They are gold here.  
That's some Antarctic black market trade shit.

Open mic was last night. I'm in love with a woman who plays the violin.  
"Amazing women, mediocre men," she said.  
Swatting away Antarctic dick... I will puncture your eyes.

If you are outside for too long without the right gear, you get the feeling that you could really kick it. This is it. Like two minutes on the wrong day.  
You come inside gasping for air, because you are an idiot who made a detour.  
(And forgot your third layer.)

[...] said I should write a book.  
You know what's so played out though?  
People who have extreme experiences just to write about them.

Vonnegut!? Repetitious! Sassy. Give and take. Give, take.

The Italians are coming.

Rented a violin. I need something else! To get me through ...

My sexual fantasy is:  
Thyroid medication.

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Did I tell you that I went to the band room the other day? Stomping all over Station trying to rent [time in] that goddamn thing.

I finally get there, I want to feel something.

Could music be my passion? Could it add... something? *I want something else. To get me through this... dumb*, I think. Again, could music be my passion? I don't think that it is. Why am

I forcing this? I guess that sometimes, we want so badly for something to work. Just work, goddamn it! But your gut is always right (the bastard), and it's just doomed. So if you think! Then it is. Or rather, it is not.

*A funny little frog, a child. I see that now. Can I be kind to past me? I'll wrap her up in compassion. She's a-stumbling, bumbling. A fog, a straight-dumb desperation. I want to say to her- "It Gets Better."*

*I was a child! SHE was a child! Christ on a cracker! I can say! As least, as of today. Trying to laugh off this trauma. 'Cause 'I say, 'Goddamn!' You don't even KNOW, what you don't know.*

Jump back to! The Big Dead Place.

I tinker around a bit on the violin [what is this weird maple-colored motif], feeling a jolt of energy when I finally draw sound. Bored now, I crawl up into the loft and sit on the couch. I look around at the musty collages-since-the-'80s and the much-loved harps and guitars. *There's a lot of history in this room.*

I walk back from the library. A helicopter takes off and flies out over the ice shelf toward the mountains. Where are they going?

Casey's left some skua items at my door. A winter puffball hat that says: "Happy Elfin Christmas," along with a map of the United States.

Inside- I start to weep but really I want to wail. No, no. The Jones'. How did I get here?

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The best part of my day is when I rip off my entire uniform and throw on my ragged robe. And I'm alone. But I've got about a million things to tell Casey.

Laid in front of her door in my shark.

So exhausted and needed my buddy (I hate everyone that isn't you!)

*[Context- A worked 60 hours a week in a grueling, laborious, very public humiliating job. No complaints here! At least, anymore. I just need you to understand Why.]*

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11/13/20

*[context– McMurdo Station is an Antarctic support hub and research station. Often, people pass through from New Zealand or Chile to get to the South Pole, the Italian station, the Kiwi station, etc.]*

Casey says: We live and work in an airport.