

*S 77° 34.577' E 163° 31.687'*

*Explorers Cove, Antarctica, 1.00AM*

*No birds haunt these arid contours, the wind-stretched, wind-wrecked coast.*

We're out of place yet strangely at home here, two figures in fur-lined red sitting cross-legged on the sea ice an hour post-midnight.

The Explorers Cove sky is overcast for the first time in weeks, the promise of snow weighing heavily on the shoulders of Hjorth Hill and the wider Dry Valleys' horizon. It's unusual not to be in the company of full sunshine at this hour and time of year, but this is an inscrutable continent. That much we can take for granted.

*Savage drama and exquisite subtlety live cheek-by-jowl; nothing escapes the sharp-flat cadences of weather.*

South West of where we're sitting, a desert wasteland of wind-scoured rock offers just enough nourishment to sustain shy colonies of microscopic blue-green algae; to the East, a craggy labyrinth of frozen waves and heaving pressure-ridges punctuates the Sounds as far as the eye can see.

Tonight, the air is still, the earth a waiting page. Beneath and around us, the sea ice is singing. There's nothing straightforward about this music, neither is it conventionally harmonious, but there are slow, measured passages, satisfying accents and flourishes, glissandos and pauses - and every so often, a phrase of rare beauty finds its way up to the surface.

*I remind myself to breathe. This private moment is also a communal one.*

Tonight, people ordinarily divided by distance and difference are reaching for notebook and pencil as I have just done. We're momentarily poised above the same piece of paper, the same piece of ground.

Mountains, glaciers, sky and ice lean towards us with benevolent intention. It occurs to me that they are lifetimes ahead of us, the way they know how to sleep together, dream together, lie awake in the dark and light together, rarely – and always – at ease with their independent thoughts.

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*Submitted by* **CLAIRE BEYNON**  
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