

Aarti's Diary: Version 2 October 2024

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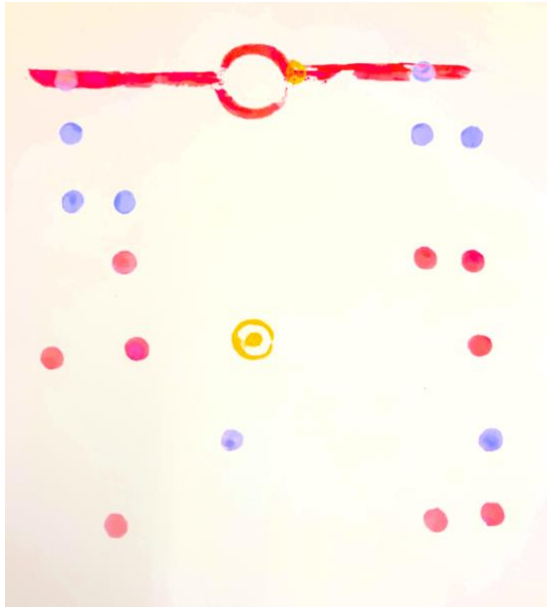


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Last year, in the middle of November, two people - Aarti and Fatima - entered the National Museum of Wales for a tour of an acclaimed astronaut's spaceship. Whilst inside, an electrical fault caused the doors to close suddenly, trapping them inside for four days, before another accidental surge activated the vessel and sent them flying throughout the cosmos...

The following is a series of diary entries written by them.

And when I open my eyes, it's because Fatima is singing. Okinawa / Ubud, Emmy the Great is stirring.

I catch it too.

'here our parents dreamed of escape, now all their dreams are ours'.

I try to translate the words into Gujarati. I try to remember everything we have left on Earth.

I hold the weight of each name – species of birds, trees, fish, lizards, flowers, fungi and humans that have touched me. I told them in my hands and bring them to my heart.

Over in the corner, Fatima's eyes are closed. We are falling through the atmosphere. The engine of this vessel is failing. It is so loud.

She is still singing, but she cannot hear me. I am too afraid, so I comfort myself but remembering more names, and place each one in my hands then my heart, in my hands then my heart.

The repetitive motion, the ritual, the weight of each word, the

friction, my back against the metal, my nails against my palms...sparks fly, it feels electric. A small part of the world that made me in my hands, then my heart, in my hands then my heart. Suddenly, my ancestors begin to appear in blue, hazy outlines. Not all of them are human. Fatima's ancestors are here too.

They are laying on the floor between us. Some, who are birds, hover above us. There are so many of them. Insects form a chain. Everyone is connected. Those who can join hands take mine and take hers.

One of them - a human - turns her head to me and says, 'je bol woo hoi, bol'. Say whatever you want to say.

So, I call out to Fatima – I call her name – and the veins of my ancestors light up as my voice travels through each of them until it lands, like magic, at her side.

When she hears me, she twitches and quickly, in between breaths, she tells us that she is too scared to stop singing.

'The ship will crash if I stop! Song power's the engine!'

That makes sense! The words come back to me and I try to teach our ancestors, but they all curse at me in succession.

'We like to sing, and the song is great but English is for you, not us – we will find our own...something to sing'.

I forget that there are so many generations in this room, ancestors of ancestors, languages upon languages. When words fail, it's good to reach back, pull forward, give space, let the heart soften.

They talk amongst themselves for a moment, trying to decide.

And when I close my eyes to sing, there are so many melodies in the room.

One of Fatima's human ancestors laughs and says 'When words fail, it's good to sing to keep the engine going!'

Okinawa / Ubud, Emmy the Great is stirring.

It is joined by qawalli, bhajans, passionate voices, softness, hardness, grunts, frogs in the throat, actual frogs, wails, chirps,

forgotten words, words I don't know, words I've never heard of,
words I try to hang on to – I must remember to ask someone what
this means, and where it comes from.

It's infectious.

As we sing, our spaceship steadies. All of our vessels steady – skin
and flesh and bone and soul and steel.

We are falling through the atmosphere. Everything is slowing down.

The singing over takes the sound of the engine.

And when I open my eyes, it's because the sky is beaming.

A Planet with two suns, a Planet that gifts us two shadows. I am
twice the person I was on Earth.

Day 3: (Aarti) This Planet is magic. The water here is tinted Black
because it is full of iron, producing strange magnetic currents and
psychic alterations as a result. Everything it wants to say, it
communicates to us up here* and I am learning that, in fact, it never
shies away from a conversation, it always has an answer to your
questions or a story to tell.

Day 5: (Fatima) Our ancestors are playing in the ocean. Not
everyone is as kind to each other as I thought they would be. There
are some communication issues, as expected, but I am grateful for
their presence, their wit, their fight. They teach us about
reconciliation.

Aarti and I listen from the shore. Our friendship is strong. She looks
a bit like me. We refuse to give in. There is so much to learn from
our ancestors, and so much to leave behind. We are grateful that
we have chosen to let go together.

Earth is gone, but friendship remains, so everything will be okay.

We talk about this a little bit more and when things are calmer, we
wade through the water to join some of our ancestors who are
sitting high on a large coral rock.

They've been watching us.

'We have a lot to learn from you', someone says.

The sea is warm, it crashes at our feet and our ancestors tell us that
they're having a great day. The psychic alterations in the water
carry a biological energy, an ancient memory that remembers us

from the time we were small cells learning to play right here. This was always our home.

Welcome, welcome, welcome it says.

The sparks fly gently, massaging our ancestors' bones.

A human ancestor of mine, a woman named Mani, says 'Ah jo mara deechan matigya - The pain in my knees is gone!'

I could walk up that mountain – the one over there, can you see it?

Day 20: (Aarti) When the insects on this Planet drink from the ocean, they are put under a deep, deep sleep where their dreams are said to manifest anything you wish for. Your deepest desires appear and come to life, you only need to think of what you want and the Planet will offer it to you abundantly.

Fatima hasn't wished for anything yet, but I ask for tools to build shelters from the rain. Everyone pitches in, even our ancestors with no limbs, but the first few nights are dry and we enjoy being under the stars together.

Someone points out that the brightest star in the sky is Earth's sun but this is quickly contested. Things become heated, it's no longer about the stars now, but the mere mention of Earth is enough to raise our grief. Things almost get physical.

'You humans drove us to extinction!'

'But you are my ancestor, aren't we same –'. It all lands in the same breath. We kill a small part of ourselves each time, and we don't

even know it. We all have a duty to each other.

We spend most of the night trying to figure out how to articulate what it is. I've never seen a snake cry until now.

Day 25: (Fatima) One of my ancestors – a Banyan Tree – has told us that it wants to be rooted into the ground here, so that it can continue its duty of receiving life and holding death. For a few weeks, we've been trying to help them find the best place to settle down – next to a waterfall, a small river or a stream – the ocean is too salty. They've decided in the cool of the forest is best.

Another ancestor – a mynabird, who was born in the branches of the Banyan Tree, and died at its roots, hundreds of years ago wants to remember its life. After everything has settled down, we gather around for a small performance where they tell us the story of their life, and of course their death, over and over again in a glorious ritual. With each reenactment, they remember something new – the memory of an old friend, watching a comet brace the sky, learning a new song.

When they sing, all the other mynabirds join in.

Day 29: (Aarti) A letter arrives from my sister on Earth. It's been a year, but time here must be slower. On Earth, chaos looms. The descendants of my ancestors are both victims and inspirers of it.

I don't want to go back.

Here, we are surrounded by the magic of the more than human.
Fatima says we always have been.

Everything feels familiar yes, but the way it makes us feel here is different – isn't it?

Life feels infinite. I would still settle for an evening like the other night, where you couldn't have it all because I know that I can come back to this Planet the next day and try again.

And I know my ancestors want to try with me. And they know their descendants want to try with them. We do things because we can. Because we want to, and there is no one here to tell us otherwise. And when we don't feel like it, we simply rest. We're always resting, because we can do so without the urgency to get up, to go, to move on, to respond, to defend.

Earth is gone but everything will be okay. Our duty to each other lives on here, on this Planet.

I am not going back to Earth.

Besides, who would have the strength to return? Where would we find it?

Day 31: (Fatima) At the ocean's side, I resist the temptation to wish to return to Earth.

I know exactly how Aarti feels.

This Planet takes my breath away and leaves me feeling full at the

same time. Isn't that odd? That I am exhausted by the awe of things and not by fear? Everyday, we lay the suns at the days we cherish in ceremony. We give them to the ground, so that it can help us be strong. And when we eat, we are brave and can give back to this land surely and with ease.

What do you call this, when you love but do not worry?

I know exactly how Aarti feels, but something is missing.

One of my ancestors is a shark, and we spend the night talking about the rituals that emerged in their cultures to commemorate the birth of Saturn's rings. There was most certainly a ceremony that was done to mark the occasion, they said. A soft circling of bodies and fins in the ocean, more and more joined in as the night went on. I think you have to wait for the ocean to respond to the sound you're making, I think it has to mirror the sound of the world being born, they continue.

There are more parts I'm sure, but it's long lost now, it hurts my head and my heart to try and remember they say.

Epistemicides have taken the oceans too.

We grieve together. It's important and I don't turn my attention to anything else for the rest of the night.

Day 40 (Aarti): Fatima and I fight. She told me that she wants us to return to Earth, and that she came close to asking the ocean to grant her wish. I ask her how she could take this away from us – from our ancestors. I told her she was selfish.

She said I was the same. She asked me how I could stay here.

'Everyone is dying!' she says, 'In a few years time, this Planet will fill up with ancestors and then what?. The chaos will just follow us here from Earth and then what? Will we just look for another place to live?

I said I understand, but what will we change if we go back? Who will listen? What will we tell them? At least here, we have a chance to make things right.

She says it isn't enough to call our peace freedom.

(Fatima) Day 45: I am thinking about language. The way I speak. The way I used to hold my silence. The way I fought.

When words fail, I ground myself in the voices of my ancestors.

Languages upon languages, dialects upon dialects. Thousands of years of history fall from their mouths and land at my feet. They nourish the ground beneath us, and make it brave.

I am learning so much.

English was good when I needed to talk about my pain: I could summarise the last 533 years of Earth's history. History that we were not supposed to remember, history that is denied, history that we were never supposed to have the words to describe.

But where is the language that helps us heal? What words do we use to describe justice? To describe our freedom?

What do they look like?

I am learning so much. I am learning that English is not enough.

Day 40: (Fatima) Aarti and I make up but we don't make any promises. Earth is gone but friendship remains. Everything will be okay as long as we have each other. The day before we left Earth, we heard two uncles on the radio fighting about Jamu and Kashmir.

Imagine that, a planet full of oceans, oceans full of people, people learning the histories of the more than human, the more than human teaching us how to climb mountains, mountains that hold all our histories inside...all of this but they would rather settle for a house, an imaginary home, along a border they have never visited, next to a people they've never even tried to know.

They want everything for themselves.

We listened until the end. It turns out that neither of them had any of intention of living there ... not even a fleeting visit or a Southall Travels Tour.

The violence in their voices has travelled with us.

On Earth, chaos looms. I tell her, it is so far away, but even distance isn't enough to separate us from it.

Earth is gone but it is a haunting ghost by our sides and we cannot out run it no matter how far we go.

She tells me that we have to keep building. That there are other Beings on this Planet and that, at night, the bring her vivid dreams of a long bridge that stretches across the ocean. The ghost is trapped, cursed to walk back and forth with no escape. Eventually, the bridge becomes invisible.

She said, it means we have to keep working and at making something here, so we can continue living in peace. I said, it's not enough to call our peace – freedom. Ghosts haunt us because they have something to say, because we need to listen and we don't, because there's something they need us to do and is has to be done.

This ghost seeks justice not peace.

She doesn't respond. I don't know how to tell her that I'm disappointed. Earth is gone but friendship remains.

We are surrounded by the magic of the more than human, and their pain. We always have been. I won't run away from duty to my Planet.

Chaos lingers in our hearts. As a compromise, we go to the ocean and ask it to prepare us for the battles ahead.

Day 55: (Aarti) Something strange is happening to our ancestors. This afternoon, they all woke up suddenly after the lunch time nap and began heading towards the jungle. They were in a trance. Nothing could shake them. We followed them to the foot of the mountain, where they began to sing for hours and hours.

Fatima and I didn't recognize the song and it was hard to follow along. We take shade under a tree and listen.

Hours later, the mountain opens and they walk inside. Thousands of birds carry the Banyan Tree into a deep dark cave.

'Where are you going' I plead? 'We'supposed to live here forever?'

One of my ancestors, a human, turns to me and says,

'No, you've got it all wrong. We came here to rest after we died but it's time for us to go home now. It's time for us to

return to Earth.

'Why?', I ask

'Because that's where we belong'.

We never see them again.

Day 60 (Fatima): Earth is gone, but the haunting ghost still lingers by my side. My ancestors are not here to comfort me. Friendship remains, but Aarti is devastated. Chaos looms. She is tired. I understand why she would want stay here forever, even without our ancestors but something is missing.

When times are tough, I know I must ground myself in their words.

If this was not their final resting place, if this is not where they belong - then why were they here?

I visit the place the Banyan tree was rested. Only a raised mound of soil remains.

Why didn't they take me with them?

Day 65: (Aarti) I am devastated, I am tired. Chaos looms and yet my ancestors have chosen to return to Earth.

We have felt so much on this planet, we have built so much, we have been so much – we are so much.

I grieve for their losses and mine.

Day 70: (Fatima)

Aarti and I have been trying to figure things out. We find a spot on a hill to lay down and watch the stars. When we first arrive, we did something similar. We sat with one of her ancestors – a hummingbird named Azad uncle – and watched small orbs of light fall from the sky and expand and contract like a breath, like a lung.

We held each other and stared at the sky, watching as they came closer and closer.

'They are being born', he said

'How do you know that?'

'They are talking to me. They are asking me what it's like to live'.

Tonight, we did the same. We fell asleep watching them hover above us for hours and hours.

(Aarti)

That night, Okinawa, Ubud, Emmy the Great is stirring in my dreams.

'here our parents dreamed of escape, now all their dreams are ours'

At the foot of the mountain our ancestors sing this line over and over and over again. Strange symbols rise from them like heat, and float around the forest like the limbs of another creature.

It's not English, but suddenly I understand every word.

And then, my ancestors ask me to join them in the singing circle. There are other Beings here too, ancestors ask me not to invite them in, but I ask them to trust me.

And then, the strange Beings turn the language into tools, and with the tools I make a bridge and with the bridge I trap the ghost and with the trap I learn to live, and with my life I am finally able to breathe again.

And when I open my eyes, it's because something has fallen into place.

We are surrounded by the magic of the more than human, and their pain. This planet is a reminder that we always have been.

A Planet with two suns, a Planet that gifts us two shadows. We have twice the strength that we had on Earth, and there is more to come.

Our ancestors gifted us a new language. Beings from all different times came together to create something to help them imagine the future they want.

I run to the ocean and begin to build a bridge. In the distance, I see the other Beings from my dreams at the foot of a floating island. I swear it wasn't there before.

(Fatima)

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And when I open my eyes, it's because something has fallen into place.

We are surrounded by the magic of the more than human, and their pain.

This planet is a reminder that we always have been, and that we have a duty to set it right.

Our ancestors gifted us a new language. Beings from all different times came together to create something to help them imagine the future they want.

We must go back and share what we know with everyone, so that we can rebuild together.

Something was missing. English was not enough, because being human was not enough. We needed to remember what it meant to be an animal, to be seed rooting itself into the

ground, to be a bird, a Banyan tree, the wind, the breeze, the air that enters the lungs for the first time.

A new way of Being is emerging, another way of existing is not only possible, it is happening and it can happen on Earth.

If this is the Planet of our dreams, we were put here to bring the future to Earth. We must go back and share everything we know.

We were not meant to keep this magic for ourselves. We were not meant to distance ourselves from our pain.

From the top of the mountain, I see Aarti standing at the oceanside. I run to her. I must tell her what I've seen.

We must write the future like we've been here before, like we know what we're capable of achieving – like it's already ours.