



THE MERCURY

THE STUDENT ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE OF GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

Year 2017

Article 9

1-1-2017

Himmelkos Crossing

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Class of 2019

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Rubinstein, Katia (2017) "Himmelkos Crossing," *The Mercury*: Year 2017, Article 9.

Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2017/iss1/9>

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Himmelkos Crossing

Author Bio

Katia Rubinstein spends her time on campus at work, APO, volunteering, or reading. She is a double major in Religious Studies and English. At home, she follows her cat around seeking validation and distraction from her impending demise.

Himmelkos Crossing

Aaron crossed over when the sun and moon briefly shared the sky. There was no body, since the funeral workers burned them after. Even if there had been, Adeline wouldn't have had any claim to it. She assumed his ashes were out there somewhere, discarded among the bare trees outside the crematoria. His wife was gone, and his only child died at two, so no one could claim his remains anyway.

Outside, she overheard the ocean stealing the sand. The moon high in the sky, Adeline wondered when the insomnia began, or if it had always somehow been a part of her. Although she sensed him out there, she felt the ache in her being. She didn't have the right to ache for him. Sighing, she pushed her crumpled blankets over her toes. Sometimes when she shivered alone at night, she would only use some of the blanket, reminding herself that being alive means feeling the cold. She liked being uncomfortable.

Grabbing her laptop, Adeline found herself searching for Himmelkos. There were pictures full of tourism advertisements, revealing the mountains of glaciers, ice fishing, the Aurora. Staring at the images, Adeline sensed Aaron was there. Whenever they would walk along the beach, she'd question his sneakers, his unnecessary sweatshirt, the tenseness in his gait. He'd utter some complaint about the beach, the heat, the sand, that the paradise for millions was his prison. One night, they sat along the rocks, Aaron kicking the misshapen pebbles into the sea.

"If you could be anywhere in the world, where would you be?" Adeline asked, her amber eyes fluttering with fatigue.

"Landmannalaugar, Iceland."

"Why?"

"It's cold, it has rocks, character." He brushed off some sand from one of the larger rocks.

"There are rocks here. In fact, I believe we're sitting on some right now," Adeline responded.

"How many others have sat on these in the last few days? Hell, even the last few hours? There's so many people here, Addie. In Iceland, we could be away from people. Away from it all."

"We?"

"I have money, you have money. We really could go," Aaron said, his voice heavy. Adeline knew he meant it, but she also knew it'd never come to pass. She glanced down at the backs of her hands, both products of time. Shaking with arthritis, she couldn't even make out each individual wrinkle.

"In our ship shape condition? We wouldn't even get there," she said. She waited for him to argue, but he remained silent, half-heartedly kicking some more pebbles into the ocean.

The next night, he waltzed up to her along the beach. "Forget Iceland. Himmelkos," he announced, spreading his hands as if he were revealing the first computer. Adeline trudged through her memories, searching for Himmelkos. She knew it sounded familiar, but these days the memories became harder to sift through.

“Remind me, where’s that?”

“It’s not where, but when. A town full of glaciers, snow, rocks, even an ocean. Granted, it’s probably much colder than the Pacific. Think about it, about all of the sights we could see together.”

As he began speaking, Adeline remembered Himmelkos. She looked across the ocean.

“If you don’t have any interest...”

“I’ll think about it, I really will,” she promised.

Looking at the blue light seeping from the laptop, Adeline shook her head. He couldn’t be there. She needed to stop deluding herself. The nights were much longer now without her insomniac friend for company, and in the stretches of darkness, she grew restless, desperate. It was in these stretches of time that she felt the longing stir within her. At times, she thought of Phineas.

She felt Aaron now in her home, meandering about her living room. She noticed him staring at blank walls, some containing only abstract paintings. “No family?” he asked.

She smiled crookedly, remaining silent for a few moments. He took the silence for an answer, constructing his own information from what she didn’t say. As he walked toward the cupboard, Adeline dropped her glass.

“Are you okay?” he asked, rushing over to her.

“Yes, I’m fine. Shaky hands,” she chuckled.

Adeline felt his presence leave, doubting he was even there at all. She was also guilty of creating something from nothing. She found herself at the cupboard, the top drawer open. Inside, pictures of Phineas lay, his amber eyes boring into hers. She picked one up, the one where he sat on the tricycle, one hand maintaining balance, the other holding a stone. Just like Aaron, he always had a fascination with rocks. They’d never discuss their shared fascination, both existing in separate timelines of Adeline’s life.

Even after all these years, looking at pictures of him hurt, and she believed the pain in her heart was what drew Aaron and her together. Although Aaron figured she never had a family, she felt his pain when he described his daughter, Cecily, and her death. No one could understand the loss of a child, he explained. She agreed, but he took it in a different way than she meant it.

He knew her insomnia, the uncontrollable shaking of her hands, her love of cupcakes, her hatred of bread with raisins, and her desire to leave the house she’d felt trapped in for so long. He didn’t know about Phineas, the fact that she stayed up later than usual to spend more time with him, or her inescapable guilt. There could only be so much to learn about someone in brief, structured moments, when both parties have time to sweep emotional insecurities aside. Just as he didn’t know all about her, she couldn’t know all about him.

He barely spoke of his wife, only ever uttering a few words about the woman. When he kissed Adeline, she pushed him away, asking him not to involve her in such pain. He said his wife would never know, and didn’t understand how that made Adeline feel worse. A few months ago, he was absent a few nights in a row. Adeline figured he’d grown bored of her, but as soon as she began questioning him, he showed up. She didn’t ask where he’d been, but as he joined her on the rocks, he said, “She’s dead.”

After that, he brought up Iceland more frequently, and when Adeline fi-

nally shut him down, claiming they were both in far too poor health to make it all the way to Iceland and carry out a fulfilling existence, he mentioned Himmelkos. He never understood her reservations with the idea.

A few nights before his passing, he was describing all the wondrous things they could do there together. “Ice fishing, spas, scenic driving, really, I could go on and on about this place, Addie.”

“Would it be the same?” she asked.

“Of course not, it’d be considerably colder than here.”

“That’s not what I mean.”

He hesitated, and the silence grew longer between them. “I can’t answer that. Can anyone? That’s philosophical, not scientific, and you’d have to decide what makes us who we are. Even if it’s not really us, would it matter?”

“How could it not matter?” Adeline asked, slamming her cold palm against the rock.

“What’s the alternative, huh? Where is my wife right now, my daughter? They’re in the ground, fading into the earth like all the others. Do you really want to be like them? An eternity of nothing?”

“Do we have the right not to be? Your wife had the opportunity, why didn’t she take it? Why wouldn’t she go to Himmelkos instead of rotting in the ground?”

“She was Catholic. She thought it was unnatural to abandon your body like that. She said uploading your ‘soul’, or consciousness, in that technological world was immoral, that it went against God and His creation. Instead of God, we become the creators of our own heaven. She thought that was a horrid idea. Part of me hopes she’s with Him, wherever that may be, but somewhere inside of me I know she’s just in the dirt, gone. The difference between her and me—I have no God, no hope of some heaven to even cling to. People like me, like us, have Himmelkos.” His eyes were moist, and Adeline glimpsed his own desperation.

Sitting in her room alone, shivering, she felt that desperation churning inside of her. She searched Himmelkos again, knowing Aaron was there. She knew he couldn’t pass up the chance for his own slice of heaven. The first night she got the courage to talk to him, after many nights of watching him walk the length of the beach alone, he ignored her at first. Instead, he began walking toward the largest pile of rocks, knowing she would follow.