

Untitled

Before her, ice. Within her, ice, her eyes empty pools. Incised razor-sharp into her cold face. Any moment now her face will begin to slide: there's the crack, it's getting bigger, her face is starting to slide, it will fall onto the table at which she is sitting and burst there into pieces. And there's the ice lying there already.

They had been making for each other, a broad valley yawning between them, a pass. It was snowing, and the snow had settled between the blades of grass and formed a blanket over the green. To the left and the right, cliffs soared up overhead. It was cold. Although they were dressed for summer, they weren't chilly. They were still far apart. It was not clear why they were making for each other, they just were. You don't need to understand everything, they told themselves. And yet they trembled slightly. They walked on, and as they strode they left footprints.

He had a bag with him. In the bag was ice, she found out later. She had ice with her too, she had hidden it well on her person. They walked on. In the sky above their heads white shaded into grey, the cliffs were dusted with a fine layer of snow crystals, and their eyes nearly missed one detail in the landscape: gentians were growing in the meadows underneath the snow, hundreds of flowers. They pushed up through the snow and melted round holes in it. As if their growth were producing heat. As if each gentian were a little oven.

Winter was breaking out all over the sky now, as if it could not be held back, and was setting upon the fresh grass, the stones, the gentians. Flourishing and snowing. It was a battle that would be won by the spring, gently and implacably. Or at least you might think so, after all the springs following all the winters to date. But this time it was the ice that persevered. They carried it with them.

Thus they made for each other, or tried to. Both of them noticed the calyces, the little walls of snow surrounding the blossoms, tiny abysses. Both of them saw it melt. They saw it from two sides.

At some point they met, but by then all the words had been used up. They went on falling from their mouths, lay there broken, no new ones came to take their place. It began to crack behind their faces. And then, they had gone on and on over every possible pass and through many different landscapes, they came to a city. There were houses there, stone steps, there were tables in the houses. Nothing particularly conspicuous. Except there was ice everywhere. It had fallen out of their bags, there had been no stopping it, it had fallen onto the steps, onto the tables.

It was cold in the heart of the city, they were chilled. And it was cracking behind their faces. Over and over. Thresholds and demarcation lines arose. Obstacles, sprawling empty zones, they grew even faster than their shadows.

And the gentians became a picture in their archive.

Now that picture floats in this room with all the other pictures. It is light, it is as mobile as all the other pictures in the archive, it shimmers slightly. It is constantly filled with several different images. It presents a different aspect depending on the way you hold it, and depending on the angle from which you look at it. It flickers. Blue, white, calyces, steep cliffs, abysses.

While the ice remains on the steps and on the tables. It lies before them, between them, it does not melt. There are no passes, no more little ovens. All that is left is the picture among other pictures. They stand by it. And in the cold light of day their faces begin to fall. They fall. They burst. There is no sound.

Nadine Olonetzky, July 2008

Thumbnail biography:

Nadine Olonetzky (born 1962 in Zurich) is a freelance writer. She contributes to catalogues and books on photography, art and culture. She lives and works in Zurich, where she is a member of the *kontrast* collective (www.kontrast.ch).