

Preserved

For the first time in longer than I can remember, I'm back in darkness.

It's not the comforting darkness I'd once known, lying in the warm embrace of deep peat for nine millennia. In this new blackness, I cannot hear the gentle burrowing of worms, nor the soft tendrils of ferns grasping through the soil. Encased now in a box of wood and metal, I hear no joyful footsteps of grandchildren and great-grandchildren as they play at hunting above.

I cannot feel the presence of my love as she slumbers, laid to rest within a year of my passing. Within an arm's reach of my preserved body.

Let them not find you, my love. Let them leave you sleeping under the fens.

Since I was pulled from the bog, my world has been one of interminable light. First, the eyes of a sun I had long consigned to my living existence focused its blinding gaze on my skin, now blackened like tanned hide. A man clad in skins from no animal I recognise found an odd joy in my discovery.

He took me to a strange white cave where unnatural suns hung above. For many moons, gloved hands traced my skin, my hair, my hide boots still held together with your stitches. I thought only of you, my love, longing for our shared darkness. Longing for your skilled, flint-knapping hands, your berry smeared lips.

After an age, I was placed inside a strange box, walls as clear as ice and hard as stone. And there, beneath small suns that never set, I remained. My only companions: dead animals held in poses that mimicked the living. Four-legged beasts with snow-white pelts. Blue-footed seabirds. Finches with sharp, blood stained beaks.

Years passed. Each day, people came, noses pressed against my box. Adults and children wearing colours I didn't know existed. Screaming babes who reminded me of ours, my love. And though my heart could no longer beat, it ached for you.

Then yesterday, gloved hands lifted me like an infant and laid me in this box, into this new unnatural darkness. For hours, I've been ceaselessly shaken as I'm moved once more. When will they let me rest?

Through a narrow gap in the wooden slats, I glimpse a terrible beast – a mighty, winged creature like those the tribal chief used to speak of around the fire. But as I am carried inside its belly, I see that no feathers adorn this metal bird.

For hours, I'm surrounded by thunder, and when it stops, there is movement again.

Then, at last, I am still.

Under more false suns, I am removed from my box and laid in another with walls as clear as ice.

But in my new home, I realise that I am not alone.

And though I wish with all my un-beating heart that they had never found you, my love, at least we are together once more.

Perhaps here, under suns that never set, we can reclaim our darkness.