

# Chapter 21

## Milk Is a Thin Fluid Thickly Filled With Opaque White Globules

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### ABSTRACT

*Weaving together text with visual imagery, Rickett explores the condition of photography through subjects such as landscape, autobiography, memory, and language. The title, Milk is a Thin Fluid Thickly Filled with Opaque White Globules, references the idea of bearing witness to life in the most granular of ways - looking up close, questioning the visually apparent, combining affect, and the lived experience of the body with primary research into a range of subjects and contexts, (for example, an astronomical telescope at the Institute of Astronomy in Cambridge, or the restoration of an Elizabethan Water Garden in Somerset). With landscape and the natural world as a backdrop, photography emerges not only as a tool for seeing and representing, but also for thinking, processing, navigating, and framing the world and its relations.*

### THERE IT IS, THE SOIL

*“A borrowed view is a garden design term used when one garden ‘borrows’ a view from another space. This can be in the same garden or external to the garden such as a vista or other object in the distance. Sometimes this borrowed view maybe a rolling field, mountain range, running river or in some cases a high-rise block of flats.”*

*“The masseter muscle is used for chewing and jaw clenching. Muscle overuse from teeth grinding and jaw clenching causes the muscles to become tense, inflamed and very painful.”*

*Can I take out my brace?*

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*No. Leave it in.*

Glistening with saliva, the corrective device is placed on a papery napkin between her, her sister, and what is soon to be the remains of a bowl of crisps, waxy with grease, lips stinging with salt.

\* \* \*

We'd arrived early for our reservation, having misjudged the time between the restaurant and the house. The village was quiet, the air soft with the scent of pine, mountainous and fresh. With no one around, we waited in the garden, a walled area shaded with trees on the edge of the square, pinched out cigarette butts drying in the dust. Further away, behind the church, the ground fell steeply - the view would've been terrific - though we didn't go and look. Somehow, even at that point we were stuck, not moving freely.

We are me and my two kids, my brother, his partner and their three kids. After a short wait, the restaurant opens and we are shown to our table. It's been set for eight, though it is huge - would comfortably have sat fourteen. Under the inhospitable glare of the lights, something about the size of the table feels odd - the distance between the settings, the room for six more.

Menus are passed around, but they are written in a language that we don't understand.

*Perdó, no parlem Català ... sorry, we don't speak Catalan. We only speak Spanish...*

My brother hovers his phone over the menu. He has an app, which translates an image of text into a real text that is translated from Catalan into English and then reproduced back as an image. Something about it, maybe the way meaning quivers in time with the movements of his hand, is strangely grotesque.

*What is that?*

*Mum. What is that?*

*What does that mean?*

*Mum.*

A rising insistence, the weight of their presence.

Anxieties converge; calorific content, regional speciality, the novelty of tasting something for the very first time. But I want something I recognise, something I know. I want a big plate of food. I want to leave feeling full.

We order wine. I drink it fast and before the food arrives, I go upstairs to the loo, a brief refuge, some time alone.

Downstairs in my absence, the atmosphere begins to warm, topics of conversation tested, rejected or pursued, the discourse being sought to be both intergenerational and familial, a delicate balance. And I stay in the cubicle for longer than I need, turning my hands under the mechanical roar of the drier. The warmth and dryness of it is delicious. It was getting cold down there.

I stagger slightly as I make my way back; the stairs are steep, the wooden rail conspicuously hand-made. I hold on tight; I need to steady myself, I'm all in my head, I'm beginning to float. While I was away the food had arrived, and now the room is full of the smell of it; piles of jet-black squid ink rice, steaming piles of it, meaty, robust, enough for the ghosts. And I see my family below me around our

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