

## **Tiina Itkonen**

Since the beginning of the 1990s, I have been searching for my own Ultima Thule, my place in the Far North. I was enchanted by the story of the Mother of the Sea and, in 1995, it inspired me to set off for the place where the story originated in Greenland. The lack of haste, the friendliness of the people and the silence of the glaciers compelled me to return to Greenland in 1998, 2002, 2005 and 2006.

When I close my eyes I am in Greenland, and the silence is perfect. Blueish light dances across the snow; the icebergs glow turquoise. The silence is broken by a loud crack. An iceberg splits, creating new, smaller icebergs. The ice can be surprisingly varied in colour, from crystal clear, through bright white, to dazzling blue. Some of the icebergs look like pyramids, while others resemble whales' tails. The largest can rise like huge apartment blocks a hundred metres over the surrounding sea - and it's easy to forget that about 90% of each iceberg lies concealed beneath the waves. The icebergs float slowly away from Ice Fjord on their last fateful journey. Some of them might drift for up to 4,000 kilometres before they finally melt away.

When the sea freezes over in the autumn, an iceberg is frozen in place, like a huge sentinel guarding the route into the village. The beauty of this natural monument can be appreciated at dawn or dusk, in the moonlight, shrouded in mist, or partially hidden by a snowfall. The berg will only be able to continue its journey when the sea ice thaws in the spring.

Here everything happens immaqa agaqu - maybe tomorrow. And again the next day, they say immaqa agaqu. Polar Eskimos in North Greenland live according to the weather and the seasons. If the weather permits, the men set out to hunt, or families may travel to a neighbouring village to visit relatives - even in the middle of the night. Nobody is in any hurry anywhere. There is as much time to do things as they require. There is also time for other people. They visit each other, play cards, mend hunting gear, sew fur clothes, do beadwork, play the organ or just are. And nor is there any need to talk; you can simply be quiet. During the four-month 'day', there is really no need to sleep, since you get a lot of sleep during the four-month 'night'.

There are no roads that I could take to get away. I follow my own paths. There are no trees: I can see the horizon far off in all directions. I am incapable of judging distances. I am not used to seeing this far.

On my first trip to Greenland, I was told I would definitely be coming back. According to a Greenlandic tale, a human being can turn into a qivigtoq, run around the fells, live there, and finally die there. My desire to return to Greenland goes beyond reason. On my third trip there I tried to shake off this madness and leave it wandering in the northern landscapes, like a qivigtoq. I did not succeed.