

New settlement in the island's north.



Their mountain changed the colour of sunsets.



View of Montserrat from Antigua.

The old airport, it's down there, only a minor patch of tarmac left. That's the end of the runway with white lines still painted on it. See it! The control tower looks as an archaeological relic protruding from the mud.

On the leeward side we'll go as far as we can towards abandoned Plymouth, where pyroclastic flows reached the town and the port in 1997. We'll see the tree trunks, bare and lifeless as sculptures to destruction, upon the lower hillside; and we'll see homes snapped like twigs with the force of the volcanic earthflows. There! To the distance is Plymouth, like a long forgotten shelf in an attic, covered in dust and memories. It's as they left it, so the locals say. There are family photos hanging on walls; there's a pen on a desk with a half written letter covered in dust. Their mountain made a museum of exhibits but no visitors.

On a red tile at a safe distance we will leave our handprints in the dust that covers everything, there too, as we hear how the Montserratians occasionally need face masks when the wind blows northward, when the volcanic storms that fertilise the surrounding islands of the West Indies and far across the Caribbean, keep busy their brooms.

We will stop in the green north again to drink from a small spring on the hillside. There's a sign that reads: 'If you drink from this burn, you will surely return..' But for the two-thirds of Montserratians who left for surrounding islands and Britain, it's a promise that's unfulfilled. Perhaps the return at the burn follows a longer cycle.

In the evening from Antigua, as we eat dinner, we will see the stripes of fire on their Soufrière Hills horizon, bringing light to the night as sure as their mountain once endowed darkness upon the day.

Wake up. It's 2013. It's the other side of the world, in Dhaka, in Bangladesh. The time for unconsciousness and memory processing are done. There's to be action, a stirring of a different sort. Perhaps it will leave things altered, but not like in Montserrat; rather in a positive, healing way. Maybe it was always there, you know, the mountain we didn't see.

The alarm clock is ringing. The Earth is calling. ■