

The great wave's grammar

To float is to trust — and trusting necessitates loosening control, and control intoxicates us. But life, like water, has its own grammar, which Tara Menon employs in her debut novel to speak of Marissa's life. Marissa knows the ocean, but resists its tutelage when life overwhelms her. Grief, memories, regrets thrash against her as she keeps fleeing, while the narrative, meandering through her past and present, patiently waits for her to be, to float.

A nightmare ushers us to New York in 2012, to a day in Marissa's life, when the city is preparing for a storm as the privileged prepare for a spectacle. This storm correlates with one in Marissa's memory — the day in 2004 when the tsunami in the Indian Ocean hit Thailand, swallowing her friend, Arielle, who gave in. Marissa felt betrayed by Arielle and by the ocean because she had thought she knew them well. With Arielle she had mapped the depths of the ocean; with her father and his research team, she nurtured an ac-

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tivist-like zeal for the ocean's cause. Brutally bruised by both she trusted, she abandoned Thailand for New York even though neither the ocean nor Arielle left her.

New Yorkers' preparation for the storm, with a zest matching adventure sport, unnerved Marissa. As she witnessed the city capitalising on the storm as entertainment, she recalled her helplessness after the tsunami had scattered their lives. She witnesses how disaster capitalism gorges on precarity to gash deeper wounds. She watches how animals sensed danger now, and even on that day when the ocean had roared. But human hubris bleaches out intimate senses, more so when disaster has not called home yet. But Marissa knows her scars well although she cannot find a way to accept them. So she encounters the storm again to brave



its strength, but succumbs this time, faces her regrets, and returns home/ocean to float freely with the manta rays.

For Menon, water/ocean is the element that threads the narrative together. The discomfort that is con-

jured by both mechanistic New York and immersive Thailand makes one wonder how we have failed this planet and our co-inhabitants, a thought that requires urgent action.

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