

TWO CITIES REVIEW



ISSUE 14 SUMMER 2017

Two Cities Review is an online review featuring quality fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Our editors are:

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Letter from the Editors

Dear readers,

Summer is here at last - and with it, a new issue of *Two Cities Review*!

For many of us, summer is a time of rest, relaxation and reflection. The days are long (here in the Northern Hemisphere) and the sun is high in the sky. Everything seems more bright and full of promise. We spend time with loved ones, read that book that's been sitting on the shelf for months and find time to work on that novel.

This issue is full of the promise and beauty of summer. Our writers are asking whimsical questions about what would happen if time went backwards or if art was permanently banned, but they are also traveling around the globe and through their own inner lives.

Our writers find love on a trip to Tokyo, but also companionship in a centipede scuttling across a kitchen floor. There's so much to relish in these hot, hazy, romantic days for our writers. In this issue's stories, essays, and poems, homesickness and longing for loved ones now gone make for a poignant, and potent, mix. We hope you enjoy these as much as we did.

Happy reading!

Blair Hurley & Olivia Tandon

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Be sure to check out our podcast, available at twocitiesreview.com/podcast, or the iTunes library. Search for “Two Cities Review” — and remember to leave us a review if you enjoy it!

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Housemate

Hilary Sallick

Last night as I sat at the kitchen table
 at work on my autobiography I
 glanced up from the chore
 of ordering clauses of self and saw
 across the distance of the room
 on the worn wood floor at the foot
 of the stairs an insect watery

creature scurrying toward clutter
 of shoes and boots under the bench
 an inches-long centipede I could recognize
 even at a distance casting its shadow
 under the ceiling's glare

As always it startled me
 I sat fixed in my chair watching
 thinking *soft body*
next to nothing smudge of wetness
when crushed

How rarely
 it braves the light
 Surely it must have
 a purpose

Longing Letter

Isobel Hodges

We met in Tokyo in 2002. I wore platform sneakers and glitter in the daytime. It was just you, me, and forty thousand people at a design fair. My two year stay was coming to an end – I braced for grief.

I slid my paintings into the back of Kentaro’s station wagon. Tōhoku expressway. Hot tea in slim cans, soft sky. At the exhibition centre, Kentaro pulled a neat reverse park while Chihiro and I grinned. At booth C-216 we unfolded the camping table and pinned our works. Our neighbours were dressmakers and painters, an industrial designer and a photographer. I wasn’t sure where to stand.

“Miki, it’s okay. Everyone’s friendly,” said Kentaro.

Three women in plastic sun visors paused in front of our display and Chihiro bowed. Thousands followed – my cheeks were sore from smiling.

“Chihiro, can I get you a drink?”

“I’m okay, thanks, Miki.”

“I might go for a walk.”

“Ja ne.”

I found Shinobu Otsuka in her booth, painting.

“Hi, I’m Miki.”

“Hi, I’m Shinobu.”

The joy of meeting a hero. Her booth was crowded. I couldn’t afford anything. I wasn’t sure what to say.

“Here, my business card,” said Shinobu.

She held it neatly, both thumbs on top.

“Thank you,” my face felt hot.

A papier-mache octopus rolled past, its driver a slim figure in green Lycra. End Day 1. Repeat Day 2.

It was an hour before closing, and others had already packed up. I looked up the aisle the moment you and your friend rounded the corner. I recognised you, somehow.

You didn't see me and walked past. I leant sideways to keep you in sight. *Juvenile behaviour*. You seemed attentive as your friend spoke – no sneer of machismo – and I knew I could introduce myself. But you turned and caught me looking. I stood up and you grinned, paused. Unhurried, the two of you retraced your steps.

You held out your hand.

“My name is Joaquín.”

“I'm Micaela. My friends call me Miki. Good to meet you, Joaquín.”

“And this is my friend, Luis.”

“Hello, Luis,” I encased his hands. “It's good to meet you both.”

I directed my attention to your friend.

“Did you see much of the exhibition?”

In the bathroom of a Shin-Okubo love hotel, you laughed, said, “Go on, then.” I pressed my knees together and sank into the bowl

like a kid, and peed. I felt giddy and brave. You brought me down from a ledge.

We only had a few months together before I left Japan.

“*Chau, Miki,*” you said, leaning in to kiss me.

“See you,” I let my hand slide from your forearm.

“I’m not gonna turn around,” you said.

“Me neither,” I wanted to sound tough, too.

The traffic paused on a red. I turned and stepped out onto the city’s busiest pedestrian crossing. When I glanced back, I couldn’t see you. I hadn’t anticipated the finality. With only seconds to cross, the momentum of all that flesh nudged me onward.

I boarded a JAL flight to Melbourne. The hostess had tiny hands and feathery sideburns. I adored those sideburns. I stared at the ice cubes in my tiny cup of umeshu. The plane hit the tarmac. I shuffled out.

“Hello, love, got yer passport?” The officer’s hair was dyed a purplish-red and sweat had flattened the hairs on her top lip.

“Yes, here it is.”

“You home or visiting?” she asked, taking my passport.

“Home,” I said.

She adjusted her shorts. “That’s nice for you, then.”

“Yes.” I felt my jaw tighten.

In Melbourne, I tried to let go of longing. I slept poorly, grew weary of eye-contact and noticed that the ground was littered with all sorts of things.

You phoned me and the line was clear. There was no sense that the Pacific separated us. It was too much – I wouldn’t speak with you again. I laced my trainers and walked down to the river. From my back pocket, I retrieved a creased subway map. I shook your memory out of the folds, and threw it out across the water. A gust of

wind tossed you skyward – you looked lovely, suspended there. I drew a deep breath and inadvertently inhaled the warmth of your delicious skin and easy laughter. My chest ached as it expanded.

You had crawled inside my ribcage and were nestled there, like a cat.

For years afterwards, you would sneak into my daydreams; every email or phone call with you felt charged. We arranged to meet up in Spain. On the evening I arrived, Salamanca's town square generated a languid murmur of *castellano* wrapped in cigarette smoke. I was early. I ordered and the barman corrected my grammar.

I looked up from my book and admired the small white dishes. *I could make friends with all the olives.* You strode into view. You looked the same. You draped an arm over my shoulder; your thumb brushed my cheek.

“This way, Miki.”

We rested our elbows on the wooden table and I tried to ignore your hand close to mine. We hurried home from the bar, in the rain. Our wet clothes hung together in the bathroom. You conjured another bottle, then stopped.

“What is it, Joaquín?”

“I just realised we didn't pay.”

“Oh.”

You looked at me with that half smile. I held your face in both hands and kissed you. *Heat.* Afterwards you wandered down the hallway and returned with a pillow.

“Here, Miki,” you smiled.

I took it, noted the faded floral case, and smiled back.

“Thanks.”

I felt my throat constrict. I retrieved my toothbrush from my backpack; I wondered about your flatmate.

“*ihasta mañana!*” you called out.

“Night,” I replied.

I finished up in the bathroom and switched off the lights. I lay awake for hours in the musty apartment. In the morning you woke me up with a squeeze on the shoulder. I pulled a t-shirt on. We shared maté on the couch.

“Do you think you could walk me to the bus station later?” I asked.

You reached for the thermos. “I thought we had a few days, Miki?”

“Yeah, I know. I should go.”

“Sure, of course. I’ll check the timetable,” you said.

Adrenalin had pooled in my stomach. It was unrelated to the hangover but it had something to do with words. I should have gone for a run.

Years later, a dark-haired waiter in New Zealand shared easy banter.

“From Melbourne?” he said. His accent was enticingly familiar.

“We’re here to get married,” said my partner.

“Congratulations!” said our waiter, his arms outstretched. Then patiently, “No, not Spain – I’m from Argentina.”

Your home country. I sat back in my chair.

The cafe balcony overlooked a tangle of rainforest ferns. You would have loved this view. A tui landed on a thin, high branch, his tuft of throat feathers quivered. He swivelled his shiny head, unblinking.

That night the rain was a gentle tak tak against twenty-first floor windows. I checked my email – there was one from you. Things are good, you said. I've moved – closer to the mountains. The photos showed a bedroom overlooking treetops. There's plenty of room – come stay...a bit different to that awful single bed in Salamanca!

Salamanca. I stood up and rested my forehead against the cool glass. The city was shrouded in glimmering light – I imagined myself the sole observer. I would wake to a changed landscape.

The Feather River

Kandie St. Germain

I remember it saintly,
permanently,
a loom woven with granite,
its surface stenciled by a rocky bed,
once flecked with gold—
the sun a starry-eyed
reflection, Narcissus, perhaps,
looking for a lost solitaire,
loving what he saw:
the sublime geometrics
or a blurry malefic confession
freezing into a winter
of now and here—these
Joshua Trees and black vultures
halved by my backyard fence
from where I look,
pausing in this—

Wall

Brooke Randel

Dad had navy blue lint between his toes again. I was lying on the couch, staring at his fuzzy feet.

"What's going to happen at midnight?" I asked.

"Nothing," he told me.

"I mean, when midnight is over."

"You know this. Time will end and we'll start going backwards."

"And it's all the same? I'll ask you this question again?"

"I don't know. We'll see."

"But what do you think?"

"I think we'll see."

The microwave clock glowed a faint blue, still visible from my spot on the couch. We were an hour away from the end of time.

The news first broke three years ago. My science teacher streamed the press conference for us. A balding scientist leaned into the microphone and announced they had successfully pinpointed time's outer limit, an other-dimensional wall where time would cease to progress. The team hypothesized that after hitting the wall, time would move in reverse at the exact same rate we knew it to move forward. When they finished explaining, everyone applauded. They were heroes, the news reporter announced, for making such a ground-breaking discovery. The years they poured into this research, the progress it represented.

My science teacher's eyes welled with tears, which he didn't even try to hide.

To honor the achievement, an international celebration was thrown. Mom flew to Switzerland to photograph the event. It was a big job, even for her. She spent a week there, probably the longest she'd been away since I was little. When she boarded the flight home, she sent us a selfie to let us know she was on her way. The plane crashed into the Alps less than an hour later. Mechanical error.

"I feel like we should do something," I said, sitting upright.

Dad looked straight ahead and considered. I knew he was prone to drifting away in thought, now more than ever. He was a product manager at an adhesive corporation, a job he took very seriously. I did a show and tell on his work back in third grade titled: *My dad's ideas stick*.

"What would you like to do?"

I thought he'd shake me off, tell me what he always told me—"There's nothing to do"—but now he was saying yes. I was unprepared.

"Well, if time is about to go backwards, our last thing should be what we want our first thing to be."

Dad smiled. "To the kitchen?"

I slid across the floor to the fridge. Our townhouse was small and open, but we liked to act as if each corner was its own distinct room. Dad followed me with soft, quiet steps. He used to be a much louder person, given to stomping and singing.

I peered into the belly of the fridge. "We have eggs. Maybe we can make brownies?"

Dad gave a nod. Silently, he pulled out a bowl and I cracked the eggs and he added sugar and I poured in the oil. Dad leveled the flour and cocoa powder evenly with a knife. He had taken to baking with dutiful precision and I enjoyed watching him, my student, as Mom must have watched me.

Davis was in North Carolina. We had talked to him yesterday and he sounded fine, but I could tell Dad was hoping he'd call again. He was probably in the cafeteria with the bad reception or hanging out in someone else's dorm.

"You want to mix it?" I asked.

"No, you go ahead."

The batter turned a rich creamy brown, like wet eyes. I mashed the lumps against the side as I'd always done. In my fourteen years, I'd been making brownies for at least nine of them. Dad called me his little chef, or he used to anyway. There's no need for names when it's just one calling another in an open-concept townhouse.

"Better stick it in the oven," Dad nodded toward the microwave clock. I started pouring the batter in the pan and stopped. We looked at each other for a second and broke into those low exhales that served as laughter in our home.

"We forgot..." Dad started.

"We forgot to preheat the oven."

Dad walked back to the couch. "Bring it over. We'll enjoy it as it is."

We spent time's final minutes licking brownie batter from the bowl with a spoon and spatula. Mom would have hated this. She found salmonella very concerning.

The microwave clock clicked. 11:59. Dad's phone rang and he sprang off the couch.

"Davis!" he said, "Everything OK?"

Dad: "Yes. OK."

Dad: "Sure."

Dad: "I know."

Dad: "Can I put you on speaker?"

Me: "Hi, Davis."

Davis: "Hi, Britt."

Dad and I both smiled at the phone, but Davis didn't really have anything to say. That was OK, I thought.

12:00.

The microwave clock seemed to hang on midnight. I could hear Mom saying, *A watched pot never boils*. Everything came back to the kitchen for her and now, I couldn't keep away either. My eyes were fixed on the microwave.

Then, the numbers clicked.

11:59.

My head didn't think backwards, but forward. I thought, Oh.

We had reached time's wall and bounced off.

Unlike my head, my body did move backwards, back toward the couch after saying hi into the phone, back to the bowl, to the brownie batter with the chocolate chips. The movements all felt smooth and easy. Everything, after all, was very familiar.

Davis was no longer on the phone then and I could see, more clearly, how Dad's face had changed from hearing his son's voice, to thinking something might be wrong to sitting on the couch with a look as numb as night. I felt a flick in my chest, a feeling I couldn't place.

We were back in the kitchen now. I should have realized we wouldn't be making brownies as our first thing. We would be unmaking them. I took out the oil, Dad removed the sugar. This time around, I didn't feel any special way about the brownies, which is probably what Dad had felt the first time. I looked at him and wondered if he was seeing things my way now or just watching me see them his way.

"And it's all the same? I'll ask you this question again?" I heard myself say.

Eventually, Dad's navy blue socks were back on his feet and I couldn't see the lint between his toes. Eventually, I was pulling the plates out of the sink and back onto the table for dinner. Eventually, the plane extricated itself from the side of Mt. Weisshorn and our phones buzzed with that unfiltered selfie of Mom, smiling, safe and on her way. A week later I hugged her goodbye, which was now hello. She seemed different than I remembered, which made me mad at myself for forgetting. I looked at Dad, but he showed no sign of thinking what I was thinking. He looked happy.

And so, Davis was home and without a goatee and Mom was home and Dad was singing loudly, like a famous Italian soprano. I watched everybody change like coloring books being filled in. Dad's hair came back thick and brown. Mom taught me how to crack an

egg. No eggshells ever got in, even there on my first try. I let Davis push me on his skateboard up, instead of down, the hill behind our neighbor's house. I unwrote *My dad's ideas stick* on slick white poster board.

I felt no nostalgia, just a deep awareness of what I had missed before—the dark circles around Mom's eyes, her nervous nail-biting when Davis left the house. Dad must have adopted all her worrying after the crash because he seemed so breezy now. Where's my little chef? he called from the couch. Every moment was unfolding the same, only now with new meaning. I saw how wide Dad used to smile and felt a loneliness I had never known.

Time kept retreating and we all got younger. Dad threw me on his shoulders and paraded me through the farmer's market. He pointed out the apple cobblers and portobello mushrooms and the fluffy dinner rolls I liked so much. I had forgotten all about this. He tapped the top of my foot, a song of sorts, and I wondered who exactly it was from.

Ryan

C.C. Russell

I catch you staring across my desk this morning. In photographic grey-scale, you are nearly a man now. In memory, initially, I always see you as that tiny boy, the day we moved to New York. You stared out between the slats of your stairway railing, asked me the question that adults don't often answer sufficiently. Tears in your eyes, you asked me why I was leaving.

I want to say it's funny, the way that time moves separately, separated as we are from each other.

I want to say it's funny the way you grew into yourself while I was becoming more and more lost.

It is difficult to see you this way. It is difficult for me to face the acceleration, difficult to look at my daughter and know even as she crawls into my lap for her morning cuddle that I am losing her in this way. And let's be honest, difficult for me to know that I am growing old.

To know that day, I cried too, after leaving your house, that I still felt that young in ways, that I understood.

That I still have no satisfactory answer to the question of why I left.

We just learn how to leave. We learn to stop asking why.

Anastasia

Kyle Hemmings

1.

I tell her not to stand too close to windows. Trying to protect her from the soldiers of the night. From the rats pretending to be rabbits. Tell me again she says with that accent drifting from Eastern European train wreckages, the lips of women waiting for a body to fall. I tell her there are so many causalities under Avenues A, B, C, and D.

2.

There's this recurrent dream she has of a man from the old country entering her between rest stops and strategic points. When he's inside, she says, (while sitting erect on the small cot I prepared for her,) he feels like a snake slithering this way and that. Until he coils around my spine and I can't move or breathe.

How does he get back out? I ask.

She gives me a threatening look, the scowl of a gangster.

He sheds. He sheds himself. He becomes part of my waste and removal.

3.

She sits on an old cushioned chair auctioned off after the 2nd Nameless Revolution. Its cover is decorated with yellow and red flowers. She's smoking a cigarette that she's rolled with great delicacy and precision. She repeats with greater detail the story of how a thick-lipped man with grossly small ears sold her to the skin market in Belgrade. The name she was credited with on screen spelled lunch ticket and left over sarma with potato dumplings. After she was fired for puking in a sex scene, she ran across the border. She wanted Switzerland but was afraid of heights. She wanted Morocco but was afraid of drowning in crowds. And the sun would not be good for her skin.

4.

Whenever I make love to Anastasia, I feel as if I'm entering and leaving a country of doe-eyed snipers. Ones who become very small when cornered, who give up everything when pressed. I try to imagine myself behind the scope of a high-powered rifle, how I could zoom in on a small piece of the world. After we both fail a climax, Anastasia pushes me off, says she couldn't love me for long. She could break me so easily. As if I am her prisoner.

5.

It's true. As a child, I never felt wanted except for telling stories, for smuggling tall tales. I kept Icelandic princesses in the attic. One died from inhaling too much asbestos. At night, I could hear the others crying through insulated walls.

6.

Anastasia spies on the faces passing under our no-frills second story apartment. What are their lives like? she asks. The blatt of a taxi in the distance. She says as if trying to compose a song--the mummies and the daddies--why so many mummies in bed? How do they turn so cold? Why so many zombies walking around during the day? And the vampires, I say, don't forget the vampires. She becomes very quiet and sullen. She says she's been raped by both men and women vampires. Their histories still infecting her under her skirt. Stop thinking, I say, it's not good. Why don't you go take a shit? she says. She apologizes and laughs. In the bathroom the size of a broom closet, I listen to her make child-like noises behind the door, hisses and indistinct whispers, as if I am being watched and ridiculed, smothered by her silliness, by her morbid playfulness. I can't shit. Everything's stuck inside me.

7.

One day I return from the bakery with some fresh raisin bagels and coffee, although she prefers croissants and a small café mocha with whipped cream. But today, I'm broke and stingy. I find a girl hanging from the ceiling, slowly turning. I drop the coffees. My legs are soaked and burnt. But it is not a girl. It is one of my sister's ragamuffin dolls that she never took with her after she married and moved away. Anastasia sits on the leather sofa, shaking her head. I'm so tired of walls, she says. My only company is walls. I rush over and lift her chin in my hand. Anastasia, I say, did you take your meds? All of them? From now on, I will sneak pills into her breakfast, her pancakes and eggs. Or perhaps she would be better

off as a ragamuffin doll, slowly turning in the air, no strings attached.

8.

Anastasia and I stand looking through each other at the train station. A man is waiting in the crowd and I will hand her off to him. She takes two steps closer; my breaths could coat her words. But for now, she has none. I tell her that she will be in good hands, that he will give her the kind of shelter I could never offer. You will have the best doctors, I tell her. But there are other neutral countries where the sunset doesn't sink you, she says. Couldn't we go there? You and me? I've gotten used to you.

You get used to so many people or things that are not good for you, I say. You will adjust.

We embrace but do not touch. The man with the briefcase takes Anastasia by the hand. The ticket collectors yell out to please board the train. Anastasia turns around and yells out through a crowd of crunched bodies--Did you ever love me? I smile at her. My throat tightens. I won't give her the satisfaction of an answer because that word, love, always causes me to self-destruct. To become phobic to light and go underground. The train pulls away. There are so many faces in the passing windows. They could all be Anastasia.

I Heart Yogyakarta

Jillian Schedneck

One hazy morning in Yogyakarta, I stumbled out of bed and into the shared bathroom— fairly confident that the cockroaches had vacated the premises by daylight. I looked in the mirror and let out a sharp gasp. My right eyelid was completely swollen. I had been exhausted for days, pinned to my bed. For every hour I managed to stay awake, I was lulled into sleep for two or three, consumed by a world of agitated dreams. My arms were pocked with mosquito bites, even though I slept with a sheet over every inch of me. And now this ugly, bulging eyelid. I could only wonder: what next?

At the local hospital, the doctor said that the swelling was a result of an insect bite, and gave me a packet of small white tablets. I dutifully took them. By the end of the day, the swelling went down, but my fatigue didn't falter. Next it was the bridge of my nose that ballooned. Then it was a lump on the side of my forehead. It was like a unicorn's horn, but instead of a glistening protrusion, I had a repulsive stump. And was it just me, or did my neck look chunky all of a sudden? Paranoid, I stroked my face and neck every morning, searching for a new bulge or swelling, and then inspected my features thoroughly in the bathroom mirror. I decided I was allergic to this place, and wished myself back to Adelaide, Australia.

Sure, it was a typically cold and rainy July back in Adelaide, but at least I maintained my normal features. In Adelaide, the skin on my arms was smooth; I slept without fear of being mauled by mosquitoes. Why had I thought spending two months in Yogyakarta was such a good idea?

This wasn't the usual consequence of travel for me. Typically, a new climate revives me. Years ago when I studied abroad in Bath, England, my aunt came to visit. She promptly proclaimed the place suited me. And it did. The moist air gave my skin a glow, my cheeks were perpetually rosy from the fresh air. On the strength of this, I moved to London after graduation, where, during walks to work, I entertained visions of myself traveling to the continent. I would head out into the European morning, shedding any need for makeup, my hair shiny and cascading. And even though those mornings in Europe never materialized, they still seemed plausible.

But it wasn't only appearance. At twenty-five I spent a month in Prague. I visited Vsyehrad Castle and felt as though I was walking on springs, that this mythical spot high on a hill was the emanating source of all creative energy. Surrounded by the graves of writers and artists like Neruda and Mucha, I returned often, wrote in a fury, and dreamed of owning a house below, the ruined castle just a short climb away.

At twenty-six I moved to Abu Dhabi, where, at my first 'real' job, my university students thanked me profusely after each lesson. Every morning, my all-female class told me they loved me. I

experienced an appreciation for my teaching that I had never thought possible. And then in Dubai at twenty-seven, I went to parties on the Palm Island and rode to clubs in friends' limousines. Making friends from all over the world was suddenly effortless. At 30, I won a PhD scholarship at the University of Adelaide, and moved to Australia. There, I sold my travel memoir and did interviews on national radio. Clearly, my personal charm and talents amplified and were more appreciated abroad.

Up until that trip to Indonesia, whenever I woke in a new city it was as though a giant knot in my chest unwound. But every morning in Yogyakarta, I woke knowing that the city was rejecting me. No real cause was ever found for my ailments. When I was well enough to walk around my neighborhood, breathing in the smell of burning garbage and avoiding feral dogs, I wondered what it was about this place that I couldn't tolerate and that couldn't tolerate me.

Along with a motley crew of five other American postgraduates, I was on a two-month fellowship connected to Gadjah Mada University. Everyone else fared swimmingly. One woman decided to stay on and teach English. Another traveled to Bali with her Indonesian friend and later they met up back in New York City. Another went for a run at 5am every day, enjoying the fresh morning air. Only I was the perfect storm of susceptibility to whatever could ail a person in this city.

There were other indications that Yogyakarta was not a place where I would feel beautiful or talented or appreciated, or even normal. At a restaurant, the man at the table next to me asked my age. When I told him I was 31, he laughed so hysterically that he was barely able to speak for several minutes. Finally, he was happy to tell me that he thought I was “MUCH MUCH older!”

I had just started a relationship back in Australia, and these blows to my face and ego did not bode well. I’d done long distance twice before, and was reluctant to do it again. The email misinterpretations, the dramatic phone calls, the missed connections. I didn’t want any of it. But Duncan didn’t have that kind of history. During our three-hour Skype sessions, he didn’t seem to mind the random and fleeting alterations to my face. I have no idea what we talked about for that long, only that neither of us wanted to stop staring at the other through our blurry screens.

I still worried Duncan was getting a strange impression of me as weak and unlucky in my health. Yet three weeks into my stint in Yogyakarta, in one of our daily emails, he asked me to move in with him when I returned to Adelaide. I agreed. After walking around Yogyakarta smiling for days—despite my swellings and fatigue—I realized I was in love with him.

But I was so unloved by this place. If Yogyakarta could not love me, then at least I wanted to be accepted, or just tolerated. Anything but so thoroughly rejected. But why? Why did I think any new place owed me this? Yogyakarta was a city of 400,000, a center

of education and fine art, what did it need with approving or accepting me? Perhaps the thrill of being somewhere new was finally abating.

Near the end of my stay, I developed a bad case of the flu. While everyone else was excitedly buying up their last souvenirs to take back home and attending good-bye parties, I made my way to a nearby 'spa' that advertised a health cleanse body wrap and massage. Surprisingly, I learned that a man would be performing the treatment. Even more surprisingly, he told me to remove all of my clothes. There were no sheets or towels to cover up, no little robe for modesty. Delirious and feverish, I took off my clothes.

For an hour or more I felt his hands rub in the menthol smelling clay, while my mind wandered back to the moment I got on the plane in Adelaide nearly two months prior. I was leaving behind a promising new love. But even then, when I landed in Jakarta, my heart beat faster. Like all the other times I'd arrived in a new place, everything seemed to tinge with excitement as I breathed in new air for the first time. This was the right decision; I had made it to this unlikely place. I was going to learn as much as I could. I was going to fall in love.

And truly, I had. I loved batik, the beautiful textiles so common in Yogyakarta. The tofu and tempeh were a vegetarian's dream. And no meal was complete without tears rolling down my flushed cheeks. This was the city where I learned to truly enjoy spicy food. I also loved the attention from strangers. Indonesians regularly

asked white people to pose in photos with them—in malls, markets, in front of statues. For a moment we would chat about our lives. I would invariably be asked what I thought of Yogyakarta, and every time I said that I loved it here.

I learned about wayung, shadow puppet performance, and became enamored with the creatures that make up its universe. Two of these wayung puppets were presented to me in a beautiful, completely impractical glass case as an appreciation gift from the bunch of high school students I taught. Most of them couldn't understand English, and my creative writing lessons went through a tedious translation process. Despite this, they wrote beautifully and imaginatively, their stories and poems translated by the only student with passable English. On our last day of class we huddled together for a photo. With a swelling on my forehead and a persistent cough, I held up my heavy gift and grinned madly.

And it was in Yogyakarta that I had fallen in love with a man back in the place I finally called home, the man who would become my husband. I had spent most of my time in Yogyakarta trying to explain all of these new loves to Duncan, to carry him with me in this Islamic city where boys and girls rode on motorbikes together, streets clogged with cycle rickshaws known as bechaks, and the house where I stayed swarmed with Indonesian postgraduate students thrilled to take the Americans on another motorbike ride to a restaurant that served only mushrooms, or the best place for batik, or a local wayung performance.

Still, when it was time to leave Yogyakarta, I couldn't pretend it wasn't a relief. As I flew to Jakarta and then out of the country, I became free of whatever ailed me. Yet even years later, back in Australia, my husband and I still carry around our canvas 'I Heart Yogyakarta' bag to all our regular shops. When the handle came apart, my husband sewed it back together, loathe to throw it away. Yogyakarta was where I fell in love with Duncan, and where I was when he fell in love with me. And for that, we heart that city, even if that love is one-sided.

Art and Shackles

James Tager

At first, we assumed someone had slipped something into the water supply. Some type of hallucinogen, or mood destabilizer. It seemed the only thing that would explain the emotional changes, the hallucinations. We assumed they were hallucinations, at first: The borders of paintings blurring at their edges, seeping into the walls around them, overrunning their frames and rooting themselves into plaster and plywood and concrete. We thought we were seeing things. And when we started feeling emotionally overcome by the newest exhibits at our downtown museums, by the eight-by-ten etchings at our local café, by the spraypaint portraits on the wall of our neighborhood supermarkets, we thought they were drug-induced mood swings.

Psychologists blamed the effect on psychedelics, pumped into the atmosphere by gangs of radical environmentalists. That, they argued explained why men and women were weeping at the sight of a piece of art, or raging, or crying out confessions. Pundits and experts began urging people to drink only bottled water, to remain indoors, to breathe oxygen from canisters or, failing that, to hold their breath indefinitely.

You could be going to work. Or to the grocery store. Or to the bank. And the light would fall on a stenciled drawing hung in the

window of your local school, a crude line drawing of a family and a house and a dog. And you would watch as the line-drawn mother or line-drawn father reached out to embrace their line-drawn daughter or line-drawn son. Any would remember your parents, and the house you grew up in, and the summer mornings that stretched on past the horizon of your childhood, and you would weep, overcome with gratitude and nostalgia and sadness for the impermanent nature of human happiness. Don't risk it, the experts urged. Stay indoors.

Things grew stranger. Statues began to move, public figures leaving their posts. Bronze-limbed icons would recite soliloquies, or would sit down on park benches, shade their sun-warmed bodies, and speak in soft interrogatives to the homeless. Granite-jawed presidents would descend the steps of their own memorials to repeat their campaign promises, or wander down the broad streets that they once knew, or visited, or saw in maps or spoke of in speeches. Abstract sculptures would rotate on their axes like globes depicting unfamiliar earths, would fling themselves into the sky to glint in the sun like second-hand constellations. The police commissioners urged citizens not to speak to memorials, indeed, not to speak to strangers.

Tourists would view a new collection of modern art and start speaking in tongues. Pedestrians would stare at underpass murals the way lost desert travellers had stared at mirages in the desert, the way men thirsty for water had stared into the thick air and seen their own imagined salvation.

Children would draw on their sidewalks with pink and purple chalk, monsters with horns and sharp teeth and tufts of long hair, and their chalk creations would come alive and roar out the joy of their suburban cul-de-sac births, and stretch out their chicken-leg feet, and chase their creators in mock-menace, pups discovering how to play. Middle-schoolers' scribbles began marching from their notebooks, two-dimensional figures jousting against each other with purloined pencils. Superintendents cancelled class, cancelled courses, eventually cancelled school.

A Rothko escaped its museum, and the sky was orange for three weeks afterwards.

It took us a long while to figure it out. Art was always like magic. The magic of conveying concepts through brushstrokes on a wall or a piece of paper, the magic of changing a person's beliefs through color and light. We figured out that, over time, the magic simply had gotten stronger.

The government, having finally identified the culprit, acted swiftly. Pencils, pens, paint, paper. It was all seized, all confiscated and strictly rationed. If art couldn't be trusted to maintain its own boundaries, then the authorities would step in. Unrestrained art was bringing down the economy, they argued. It was wreaking havoc on the daily commute. Stock traders were being waylaid by watercolors on their way to Wall Street, bankers were waking up to find that their impressionist portraits had erased their balance

sheets and changed their computer passwords. It was a matter of the country's stability, they said. Of law and order. Of national security.

Artists who refused to submit became enemies of the state. Drawing was punishable by imprisonment, painting by firing squad. Sculptors had their hands removed. Portrait artists were lobotomized. Hard to draw portraits, the military doctors figured, if you can't recognize faces.

The resistance was fierce. A swathe of paint was all it took to make a love bomb. A broken piece of lead could draw a hundred knights in black-and-white armor, their unfurled banners flapping in an imagined wind. Portrait makers became propaganda artists, their creations straining against two dimensions to shout messages of solidarity. Volunteers unraveled tapestries of peace down the sides of skyscrapers; whole regiments laid down their arms. Street artists waged urban warfare, launching nighttime raids to spray-paint images of defiance and resilience. Barrio muralists, graphic designers, sleep-deprived animators and part-time art students, disaffected graffitists and discontented scribblers. A rabble of pencils and paintbrushes and spray paint and clay and stone. Against guns and mechanization and commerce and centralized authority and chemical gas.

The Press Secretary called it a War Against Artists. The next day he apologized, said that he had misspoke, called it a War Against Artistic Contagion. Those who fought on the other side began

calling it the Unshackled Art Insurgency. After it was over, they just called it the Shackles War.

It was a one-sided battle from the start. Not enough artists had rallied around the kaleidoscope flag that was the expressive urge. The museum curators had refused to give aid, to release their armories to the insurgency. Perhaps if they had, the war would have ended differently. Instead, the rebellion flickered brightly before guttering, a candle of creativity that burnt itself out even as it strived to illuminate the way forward.

Today, children no longer draw in class. Museums are prisons. Plays, photography, cinema and literature are strictly regulated, with appointed officials keeping a wary eye for warning signs that the artistic contagion may have spread to its sister disciplines. Libraries are under military guard, as books are seen as sympathizers. Today, each neighborhood has an Arts Watch Committee, tasked with reporting instances of unregulated expression to the police. Some call these committee members patriots. Others call them collaborators.

There are rumors, of course. Of underground art exhibits. Of miners pocketing nuggets of graphite or even lead to bring home to their families, of small groups using camping trips as an excuse to gather wood for charcoal, or berries for homemade ink. Of run-down tenements where radicals debate the merits of artistic movements, of abandoned basements where students gather to make glitter and glue, of paint-making assembly lines operating

after-hours in high-priced bakeries. Of a candle that is not yet gutted. Of the embers of a second revolution.

And everywhere, in small towns and sprawling cities, a small illegal symbol appears. If you look, if you know where, you can find it. You can find it etched on a rock in the middle of a field miles from the nearest dirt road. You can find it hidden on the walls of the bathrooms of dive bars now scrubbed of scribbled punk graffiti, scrawled beneath the sink or drawn in a small cribbed hand behind the toilet. You can find it as a scar of a tattoo stitched into flesh, on the heel of the foot or low between the ribs and close to the heart, somewhere only a lover would know. You can find it written in stolen ink, in the dried residue of fruit juice or coffee, in cut-out strips of colored paper. You can find it written in blood.

It is the symbol of a key, the instrument that unlocks all shackles. It is the symbol of the secret fraternity of all those who have pledged themselves to the creative urge, to a discipline that has been declared an enemy of the state, to the challenge of depicting a world that we cannot yet see. And if you stare at this key long enough, you will see it begin to turn, slowly, as if it is pushing against something which resists it but which must yield. As if somewhere, a lock is opening.

Here and Not

Andrew Walker

In photographs, my grandfather towers. Trimmed mustache under a bulbous nose, he stands hunched with a walking stick almost taller than he is. He smiles with his teeth. Always in shorts and a polo shirt, he looms over his wife, who looks small and distant. She wears a sweater and slacks—the smallest size still too big. A golden polar bear hangs around her neck, the nose always pointing to the left, toward her heart. The bear has been hanging there longer than I can remember—maybe longer than she can remember. She smiles only with her lips.

They have been married nearly fifty years and have never changed.

The Wind Crest Retirement Community is located in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, just off of County Line Road and Santa Fe Drive. The community opened in 2007 through Erikson Living, a company that currently has retirement communities across the United States. Wind Crest is the only Erikson Living Community in Colorado.

My grandfather has the amazing ability to mutate any conversation into one about himself. Like a magician, he can twist the topic, morphing it into his own show—a syntactical Houdini. He overpowers any conversation, no matter how strong, making sure

he is not left out of others' minds; standing tall at the end of dinner table discussions, others cast under his all-encompassing shadow.

I am sitting in my family's living room after Easter dinner, college basketball is on in the background—I can only hear the squeaking of the players' shoes over the speakers. My grandmother is doing dishes in the kitchen. My grandfather leans over toward me on the couch.

“You know who I saw today?” he says, propping himself up on vanity pillows. “Lindsay Cook. Oh my gosh, is she something. It's a shame you ever got rid of her, Andrew.”

I don't take my eyes off the screen. Not knowing what to say, I respond: “She certainly was cute.”

“Maybe you can send me her number,” he says, returning to his seat with a small grunt. I can only imagine he's smiling at what he'll later call a joke.

My grandmother—close enough to hear him—keeps quietly washing dishes.

My grandparents are always moving. In my 21 years, Bill and Jan Seefedt have never been in the same place for more than four years. When I was a teenager, they floated around the RiverWalk Community, a cluster of nine developments just outside of Downtown Littleton. Although never in the same house/townhome/apartment, they hopped from development to development, getting to know their neighbors just well enough to wave hello on walks up and down the Platte River.

They were never static—even in the same place.

Dementia is a brain disease that eats away at the mind of its victim like maggots on rotting meat, making it more and more difficult for the victim to generate thought. Those with dementia will slowly lose their personality and memories. Their soul dying in a cage of a body, withering away until there is nothing left but a hallowed shell.

There is a possibility that doctors can slow this process, transforming every living moment with this disease into a more miserable and difficult existence for the victim, while making it easier on her loved ones—so they can hold on just a little bit longer; so they can pencil in the perfect time to mourn.

I am sitting at the kitchen table next to my younger brother: nine and six. My grandparents on both sides mingle in the other room, finding smiles in a mutual love for God and the Denver Broncos. Across from us sits my great grandmother on my father's side. She is old. Oxygen tubes twist around her face, winding in and out of her nose, around her ears, down her shirt as if she's only half human. As far back as I can remember, she has always been this way.

My brother and I are bickering about a video game when his hand whirls around, a half circumference, landing palm first in the center of my chest.

Breathless only for a moment, I punch him in the arm—enough to make him cry.

Rising from her seat, my great grandmother steadies herself on the table and screams: “You little retards will never learn how to be kind to one another!”

My brother and I run off into the other room, crying and apologizing, shocked that our great grandmother knows that word. Eventually our mother finds us and explains to us the disease that has taken hold of our great grandma Lucille, leading us back into the kitchen.

“Hi boys, she says, raspy and low. “It’s always good to see you.” She does not smile.

Technically, Highlands Ranch isn’t a city or a town. It’s a census-designated place, meaning it’s a kind-of-suburb with its own name and land plot but not its own municipal government. CDPs are census-designated for the sole purpose of providing statistical data to the United States Census Bureau.

Highlands Ranch is just a place, floating in Douglas County, unhinged from the state—there only when it needs to be.

In May of 2014 while living in Sun Lakes, Arizona my grandmother was diagnosed with dementia. We had all seen it coming when she stopped cooking or driving or leaving the house without my grandfather. It came like a truck, seen too late in the rearview mirror—too afraid to pull over and let it pass until it barreled its way through, full speed ahead.

Wind Crest currently has a resident population of just under 1,000 between their five buildings. Each is connected by a sky bridge, like those found at a hospital. This is so the residents can walk the entire campus without stepping foot outside. Erikson Living plans to keep adding on to the large, desolate marsh-ish land

the company owns in Highlands Ranch; adding building after building until they use up the entire plot. By the time the community is complete, Erikson Living projects a resident population of slightly over 3,000 senior citizens, making it—in theory—large enough to be its own, small town.

In between their floating around RiverWalk, my grandparents had a brief, two-year “I-think-we’ve-finally-found-our-place” stint in a gated living community in Chandler, Arizona.

I once visited them in middle school with my mother and brother. They took us to the mall and drove us around Chandler and Phoenix. We spent most of the time inside with the air conditioning on full blast. I had promised more visits upon my departure.

“Maybe next time you’re down here,” my grandfather said, nudging me, “I’ll let you drive the golf cart. You’ll definitely be able to pick up some cute high school chicks in that, huh?”

He smiled at me, two front teeth showing under his mustache, circular glasses sparkling in the Arizona sun. I could only stare at my feet.

70% of all dementia cases devolve into Alzheimer’s disease, which catalyzes the forgetfulness in a person’s mind. Eventually, the victim will forget anything and everything, starting with their short term memory. Alzheimer’s will strip away at the brain of a person until they are no longer able to function, shutting their brain down day by day until the victim forgets their friends and family—until they no longer remember why they can’t remember anymore.

My grandfather's sister lived in the Libby Bortz Assisted Living Home in Downtown Littleton for roughly a month before liver failure struck her down in the bathroom. I was lying hung-over in my childhood bed when my parents came in to tell me that my Aunt Norma had been rushed to the hospital.

I visited once, with my brother and mother, to get lunch with my grandmother and grandfather. Upon finishing, my mother asked if my brother and I wanted to go and see my great aunt.

"That's not a good idea," my grandfather said, leaning into his walking stick—some of the light had gone out of his eyes. "She's not the same person she was when the boys knew her. She wouldn't want them to see her like this."

We left the hospital. She died the next day.

In one of the dining centers at the Wind Crest Clubhouse (centrally located around the four other buildings) our waitress—a student from a nearby high school—moves behind my brother's chair.

"Man oh man," my grandfather says, putting his hand on my grandmother's lap, "You checking these girls out? They certainly are something."

He nudges me, as I stare into my food. I can only give a small, fake smile.

"Oh that's right," he continues. "You're taken. You can still look and appreciate though, right?" His hand tightens on my grandmother's lap as she stares blankly at her dry, overcooked

chicken, unsure of how to go about eating it. “I mean, come on. How can you not?”

“This chicken is too dry,” my grandmother says, her voice is, like her, somehow smaller than it used to be. “Bill? Bill, the chicken is too dry.”

Like my grandfather, my smile remains. Like my grandmother, I can do nothing but stare at my half-empty plate.

Before my grandmother was professionally diagnosed with dementia, my grandfather had decided that it would be best for them if they moved back to Arizona.

“I just think it would be better for Jan,” he tells my mother over the phone. “Besides I miss it there. We miss it there.”

They moved back to a retirement community in Sun Lakes, Arizona, a CDP just outside of Chandler.

A year and a half later, they had submitted their application to become residents at Wind Crest Retirement Community in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, known and renowned for their Alzheimer’s care facility. “So we can be closer to our family,” my grandfather would say. “It’s where we want to be.”

My brother and I were sitting in the car of a Highlands Ranch Tattered Cover when my father got the call that his grandmother—our great grandmother—had died from Alzheimer’s.

Overhearing bits and phrases from the conversation and putting it in context, I was crying before he even broke the news.

Although they understand that there is a possibility of it being passed down genetically, doctors are still unsure of what causes dementia. There is no cure.

My grandfather's right front tooth is false. When we were younger, my brother and I would watch him make it disappear and reappear with a simple sneeze. One minute he would have a full, bright smile, the next thing we knew, the tooth would be gone—but not really. Just hidden, somewhere in the back of his mouth. Maybe it was under his tongue.

There will come a time, later in my life, where my mother and father may contract Alzheimer's disease. It has built itself up around our family, within each member, only to tear them down one by one. Hiding in our DNA, it is passed down like an heirloom. One day, it may come for me and I will forget where I live, who I love and that I am slowly dying.

Forgetting is part of my heritage.

Our kitchen is quiet. Large flower arrangements litter the house where my mother's half of the family sits in formal wear. Eyes are red and sore, everyone seems tired and worn. My mother is wearing a polar bear necklace, the nose pointing toward her heart.

"Well, I think it's about time for me to get going," my grandfather says, standing, using his walking stick as leverage. I give him what seems like the hundredth hug of the day. He keeps his hand on my shoulder and leans into me.

“Off I go to my lonely house,” he jokes quietly in my ear. “Maybe I should have someone send some people over, keep me company.” He looks at me knowingly.

I suck on my teeth and walk away, making eye contact with my father, the only other person in the room who heard him. He shakes his head and looks at the ground, giving off a heavy sigh.

I slide the tie from around my neck and leave the room.

The last line on the Wind Crest website reads: “You will be most happy living at Wind Crest.”

Alzheimer’s took my grandmother down softly, in her sleep like a lullaby.

She did not know where she was when she died. She forgot the faces of those who surrounded her—seeing nurses as strangers and family stranger still. She grew smaller and smaller until the last day, unrecognizable from the photo that sat in the frame on the bedside table of her hospice room. Forgetting even her own death, she became a husk of who she once was in a bed in the hospice wing of the Wind Crest retirement community.

Here—but not really.

We are sitting around a dining table in Wind Crest once again. The waitress has just set our food on top of our napkins, folded into Christmas trees. My grandmother, a shell of a woman no longer there, stares through her plate at some fast approaching future.

“Dad,” my mother says, pulling and unfolding her napkin. “Would you say grace?”

We fold our hands and I stare through at my plate, eyes unclosed. My grandfather thanks God for the meal, our family, my brother's successful first semester in college, my exciting journey into my last. He thanks God for my mother and father being at this table with him, with Jan. He thanks God for the strangely warm weather we've been having and hopes for more in the future. He asks God to watch over his sister in heaven and to help him and Jan through the next and last phase of her treatment. He begins to cry and my mind goes elsewhere, finding a fear for the future.

I wonder if I'll remember this day, if it's something I'll carry with me to my death. Or if it's just another point in time that will soon fade from memory, leaving nothing—not even an outline—in its place.

Wiping the tears from his cheeks, he looks at the table, at his wife and daughter, his grandchildren. "Let's eat," he says, attempting the shadow of a smile.

Survival Lessons

Kayla Heisler

Put your mask on before helping others. Those words crack over the intercom anytime I strap myself into an airplane seat. The moral is obvious: you cannot save a life if you do not have one. Most flights I travel alone, so this lesson generally feels futile in the moments where my knees dig into the cheap plastic in front of me, surrounded by mouth breathers and gum snappers. That intrepid compulsion of self-sacrifice I once possessed dissolved after an ex-Navy man looked away from me and into a place I hope to never know. He told me of the day he jumped overboard to rescue a drowning crew member at sea. He hit the water fast and hard and outstretched his arms toward his flailing friend, but as soon as he swam within striking distance the drowning man thrust his weight onto him, pinning him down beneath the water's surface to hold himself above the waves. Light headed, sore-limbed, lungs swimming with salt—the would-be savior punched his buddy between the eyes, then watched the body sink down deep to the ocean floor. His tale made my mouth go dry. I had twice before saved the drowning.

Contributors



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