

I begin this from where you ended, from the wishes of your 28th birthday, from your core of absolution, from your bed of hope. I thought about the angels of my own life — sent to me as I stood breathless upon those shivering intersections — how they’ve taught me to dance to the beat of a different drum, to hear the lost rhythms and the abandoned melodies of youth; amidst the cacophony of the world, to listen — for the lonesome waltz and the music from a farther room.

I guess I’ve been blessed similarly in that way. We’ve been blessed. How we have become the accumulation of those experiences, of those recurring hopes and dreams, the convergence of those rivers of tears. My favorite passage from *The English Patient* reads:

*“We die, we die rich with lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have entered and swum up like rivers, fears we have hidden in, like this wretched cave. We are the real countries, not the boundaries drawn on maps with the names of powerful men. I know you will come and carry me out into the palace of winds. That’s all I’ve wanted— to walk in such a place with you, with friends, on an earth without maps.”*

“Random” you’ve always said. We are but temporary arrangements, transient and isolated and burning in every moment with no before or after. We are love’s echo. I always liked those snapshots at the end of Before Sunrise, when you see the streets they walked the night before empty in the morning, it was funny that following Sunday when I went to get my car from Sunway after you picked me up the night before, going through all the same roads, like a *déjà vu* one gets after really long weekends. How tomorrow, the light will come to reclaim us all, our voices and our whispers, our bodies, our stories.

A long time ago, I flirted with the idea of doing a photographic series on the spaces that have mattered to me in my life: the swing in the garden of my old house, that sunlit corner in my primary school where my grandma used to bring me lunch, that pathway Anthony and I used to walk to get to Petaling Street from school, that park bench where I made out with my first girlfriend, the departure gates of KLIA where I said a thousand goodbyes and felt my heart sink into a vacuum every time, those mindless wanderings down Jalan Ulu Klang at four in the morning. I thought about a while back we were talking about the identity of Kuala Lumpur, and how any significant artistic work must encapsulate the mythology of the spaces

of our lives. The purpose of any collective artistic movement must serve the invention of mythology. The aggregation of its origins, its histories, its rituals of birth, marriage and dying.

I guess that's why I make it a point to see my friends for lunch in the city, as I have enjoyed tremendously the last few weeks meeting you in the city, the chance to walk those "old streets" again, to listen to the city again, to assign significance to these spaces again, the same streets we walk now and the secret narrative histories they contain for each of us. I feel as writers, we have to do this if we are to ever draw stories from them. To live with a heightened sense of things. The romantic image of strangers across a street, lovers when you sleep. So much is left to chance. To serendipity. So much depends on it. How often I have found more solace in the company of strangers than in the arms of lovers. How often in the arms of a lover I have found the navel of the earth, the return, home.

If you google the phrases "*I should have*" and "*I shouldn't have*" (and for added fun tag in the last word "*kissed*") you will see that humanity's regrets for those things we should have done, far outnumber and outweigh the regrets we have for the things we did do. I fear that I will live having not lived enough. Or love and not loved enough. I guess I stand now at the union of those fears and realizations. I used to ponder a lot about destiny. But I've come to learn that destiny takes too long. There is that creeping voice that whispers "If not now, then when?". I used to joke that on my gravestone, my epitaph will read: "*Now what?*". Maybe now it should be: "*Where's the party, dood?*".

It was the cessation of stories that irked me most. For a long time, I stopped chasing stories, I stopped inventing memories. My heart became autistic, dyslexic. If "*the heart is an organ of fire*", then somewhere along the way, I let my heart atrophy. I remember one of the first times I wrote to you I wrote that I felt like I had become a broken Richter Scale, no longer able to register tremor and reverberation. I guess the last few months since then have been a crucible of sorts. We used to think that the idea was to emerge unscathed with our hearts intact. But I'm glad I've emerged (emerging?) scathed, bleeding with my heart on fire.

Beckett once started a famous essay with the statement: "*The danger lies in the neatness of identifications*". I used to chant it to myself like a mantra when I wrote, when I thought about stories, and about people. I find it amusing how you and I are always playing the 'I' and 'E' thing (you still

owe me two more alphabets by the way) even though on certain nights it would seem completely the other way around. I find myself falling in love with people again. With their stories, their truths, their deceptions, their hopes, their illusions. I've come to rediscover the two great truths that have always driven my search: that nothing is ever only one thing. And that there is nothing that does not yearn. We are fugitives of emptiness, of absence. Our lives and our dreams are shaped by those things we are without. I am drawn eternally to those fault-lines of the heart, to its imperceptible shifts, its restless velocities and its involuntary convulsions betrayed in a moment of fire and surrender, to the gravity of its unyielding fulcrums, the autonomic faith of the spirit to find that which will outlast Shakespeare. To emerge perhaps, one day, into the garden of that first spring light, into that "*palace of winds*", where nothing obstructs vision except the limits of vision itself.

I thank God — and truly I do — for convergences, for chance, for the roll of the dice and the luck of the draw, for the angels I have found in the wilderness, and those thrust upon me in the eye of storms. I end here where you ended, upon your hopes that when you check out, that you would have given more than you have taken. And I write this now to thank you, to let you know (because sometimes we have to know) that you have given, and been all this to me. The listening presence in my silence, the harbors of my forgotten restlessness, the secret sharer. I thank you for having helped me co-author the prologue of these quiet revelations of the last few months. For truly, they would not have been possible without you (or at least, it would have taken me much longer to arrive at them). And finally, for taking me along into that frenetic random world of yours at a time when I needed most to be reminded what was missing from mine. I would have kicked myself silly had I been told then that I'd be writing such a thing as this one day (to a girl who went to GIS no less!). OK, you can get off that pedestal now. Turn off the lights, children. Our play is played out. Tomorrow we'll turn back into pumpkins and wonder about the visions we have yet to dream and the stories we have yet to tell.