

Always been a sucker for symbolism

The bus Chris McCandless died in has been removed from Alaska – didn't know people died trying to find the bus, but god it sits well.

I graduated last weekend – well, not quite, tassels have been turned, but Thesis still needs to be defended. As I'm casually floating on top of this speeding whirlpool of who-knows-what's-gonna-happen, feelings inevitably come.

For a while I've been struggling to tell my story (with a capital S maybe, for maximum cringe?) in a simple way. That's dramatic, but true: trying to edit down feels dishonest, trying to play it like an opus is definitely inappropriate.

In my infinite wisdom I mostly just avoided dealing with the story, treating it like the home-made cup of coffee you convince yourself to drink when really, you just want fancy takeout – absentmindedly leaving it at home, and occasionally spilling it all over yourself and others.

Thing is, sitting with uncomfortable feelings is, well, uncomfortable. But since I have to finish a master's thesis and execute a cross-continental move, this seems as good a time as any to be doing it.

Last year was a breath of fresh air. I crashcoursed the hell out of navigating my turbulence. I figured out some of my tricks and was abundant with the energy they saved me. Having a gentle, sober, quiet mind was so good, it felt almost like cheating.

But this year is messy, and so the story of hashtag healing and hashtag getting better had to be extended to include the mess.

Partly because there hit a crisis, and measurements of time and sanity became things like early morning alarms and walks in the botanical garden.

Partly because my shelter in academia is coming to an end.

And mostly because emotions I haven't felt for long don't tend to return to me in calm, sober, gentle ways – instead they come with the intensity and grace of sitting on a mechanical bull, and I'm left to build my skills up from the levels I left them back when I disengaged.

(This is the point where I woodyallenesquely look into the camera and say, trust me, I'm going somewhere with this. Let's hope that's true.)

I love moving. I love fitting my life into a suitcase. I love that every time, without fail, I manage to convince myself that it's gonna be an upgrade. And it usually is.

It's just that, having moved 10 times in the past 5 years, it can become hard to have a consistent idea of me and of Where This Is All Going.tm I have a manuscript of my life in four different languages, with too many cultural references and little punctuation, and it's been a real hustle to try to fit it in suitcases.

Luckily, this week I'm reminded of the kid I once was – full of ambition, fast and smart, warm, uncool, too much, and pretty magic – and it's a joyful pain to remember her.

These past months, I sat with the kid on top of the most sacred mountain of Taiwan soaked in rain. I made sure he had enough water. I walked with her, let her steal some joy from other people's dogs. I let her enjoy being seen for a short while, and let her ask for help. She's been a pleasure.

The story of course isn't over, but it's not the very beginning anymore either. It's late twenties, when you can finally have the things you've always wanted, or so I've heard. And these two years, rocky as they were, I still came up this goddamn mountain. I'll sit here, holding my almost-degree, biting into my last guavas, and take a bit of time to enjoy the view.

Making sense of Taipei, if it was a time-out or a lean-in, will have to happen over a longer time. But if nothing else, it's been a heartwarming story.

Or Story, if you will.

I'll be coming back now, if that's ok.

Cover pic and the better pics in the gallery are by my friend Shuai.