

190

190
DANGEROUS



Dedicated to 190 Grove St.
Thanks for the memories



LEAVING
HOME





I hadn't been back to NYC since I spent a few wonderful months of my life here a long time ago. I was deeply in love with a girl and left my beloved San Francisco to pursue what I thought might be happiness outside of The City. Hopefully, this is a lesson I have finally learned. Planes, buses, and automobiles brought me to NYC that spring night. I walked her to class, then waited outside to walk with her to her next class. When summer came, this sweet girl came to stay with me in my little room.

Neither of us had a job. I still had some money from when I arrived and she could always call home for more. The room had our single bed, a nightstand with a tiny broken based lamp and a few milk crates with my belongings. We were in love. Really in love, it was so new, so much fun. It had taken us both by surprise.

The window always stayed open at the end of our bed. We took long showers together and lay in the park talking about all the

beautiful things we ever wanted to see. As I look back on it, I knew from the very first pictures I saw of her. She had everything I wanted. I knew then in that very first moment, that I would go anywhere for this girl. The glimmer in time was a moment that universally would be enjoyed by all. As Daniel and I drove towards New York City, I thought about all the hot days and nights she and I lay in our little room. All things go. She had to go home. The prospects of a job and more permanent living quarters weren't really on my mind. In the middle of the night, I left on a bus. I didn't say goodbye to anyone, I never really knew anyone to say goodbye to. Upon getting San Francisco back, I'd lose my love.

Today, my Georgia days had finally come to a close when Daniel picked me up at the D.C. airport. He was supposed to spend the day with me there before heading off to a job in NYC. In NYC he'd arrange to sleep on the floor of a friend,

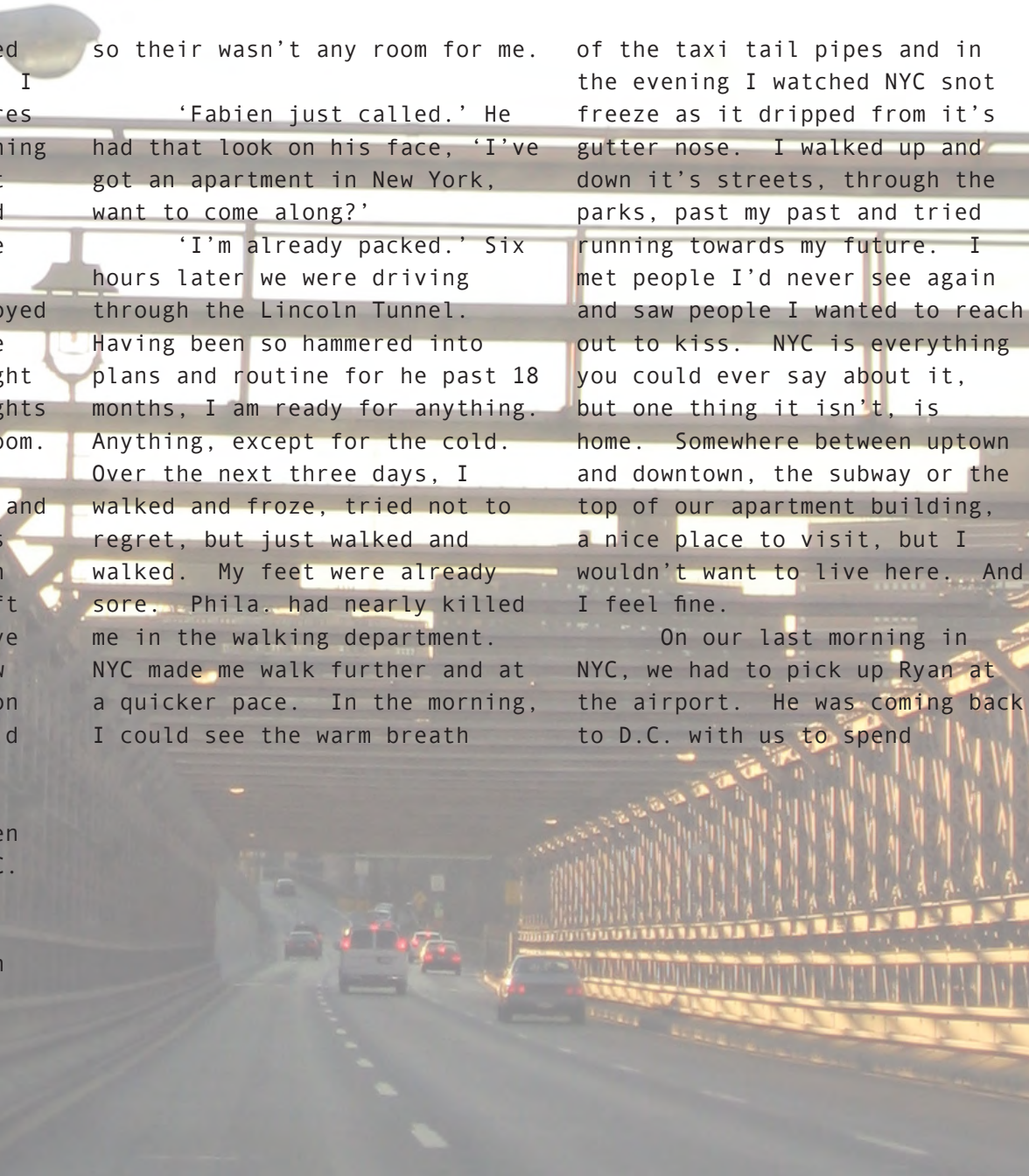
so their wasn't any room for me.

'Fabien just called.' He had that look on his face, 'I've got an apartment in New York, want to come along?'

'I'm already packed.' Six hours later we were driving through the Lincoln Tunnel. Having been so hammered into plans and routine for the past 18 months, I am ready for anything. Anything, except for the cold. Over the next three days, I walked and froze, tried not to regret, but just walked and walked. My feet were already sore. Phila. had nearly killed me in the walking department. NYC made me walk further and at a quicker pace. In the morning, I could see the warm breath

of the taxi tail pipes and in the evening I watched NYC snot freeze as it dripped from its gutter nose. I walked up and down its streets, through the parks, past my past and tried running towards my future. I met people I'd never see again and saw people I wanted to reach out to kiss. NYC is everything you could ever say about it, but one thing it isn't, is home. Somewhere between uptown and downtown, the subway or the top of our apartment building, a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live here. And I feel fine.

On our last morning in NYC, we had to pick up Ryan at the airport. He was coming back to D.C. with us to spend



a couple of days. He missed his flight, but would make the next one. We were tired and already at the airport, so Daniel and I slept in the company car. Idling in the parking lot with the heat on. Daniel wasn't too comfortable, but I hadn't slept so good in months.

Over the past scores of days, I'd given most of my possessions away. The little I saved of myself, if I never saw it again, that wouldn't be the end of me. I'd already lost so much. So many hopes walked out the doors. So many dreams I garbaged up and put to the curb. So many plans, that never included sleeping in the JFK parking lot with your best friend in the driver's seat. There were still thousands of heavy hearts yet to hit me. Self-doubt that would linger when I lay alone. I can lose all of it. Take it. I give it. But you can't have one thing. My friends. My true friends. Time tested. Loyal Friends: If I don't have my friends. Then. Only then. Will that be the end of me.



What even
when ever
Hella!





The train had been pretty empty. Both coach seats were mine to sit in. It must have been Casino, where there are no casinos, when he boarded. Prison tattoos grace the tops of his hands. His left was a bird with what looks like a broken neck. All black and faded on the edges. On his right, seems like some form of semi-tractor trailer wreck. It has some yellow fire bursting from a gas tank. The fiery gas tank could actually be a pussy scab, though. I can't be for certain, because my eyes hurt. His 'essence' is making me **wince**. Below his feet is a red-white-blue striped Chinese laundry bag. He's using it as a rest for his stinky feet. He crosses and uncrosses his legs.

"Please stop fidgeting. I'm dying over here," screaming inside my head, It isn't making me nervous, although I do fear he might fall asleep and let his flaky head fall upon my shoulder. Everytime he shifts, bubbles of depravity burst. As if a soggy corpse just punched you in the face. His motions stir the careless chemicals

that burn my nose hairs. Ugh. It's beginning to permeate everything. Slithering around me and slowly squeezing out my last breaths.

'What time are we arriving in Grafton?'

'I don't know.' I barely can whisper. He tugs on my sleeve.

'How long to Grafton?'

'Will the transfer bus be there for me? Will it wait?'

Going.

'We were a half-hour late.'

Going. I keep against the glass as best as I can, but I'm melting. The rain has been falling throughout much of this train ride. I am the water soaked up in his shoes that has begun evaporating. He uses his grease stained fingernails to pry knots out of his shoelaces. It is so hot inside here. He slips his heels out, then sticks his fingers down inside and softly moans his movements. He scratches one foot, putting it back on the laundry bag, he scratches the other. White, water soaked feet-flesh scratched, gouged by black fingers. Like a dead body floating ashore, the foot is

translucent white and pink. Did he crawl out of the ass of a homeless man after hot-boxing a carton of hellish cigarettes. I wish he'd light up a cigarette now and blow all the smoke in my face. Against the glass I remain... gingerly pushing my mustache into my nose hoping it will filter, but his feet are getting furious. They growl at me, sneer at my impotence. Sneaking up behind me I notice a second pair of feet gnarlily smiling from beneath my seat. They are everywhere. The big toe needs it's nail to be drilled into and drained of the pus and blood behind it. He could do it in the bathroom, get a needle from the disposal box, conveniently located in every bathroom and park across Australia. Heat up the tip with a lighter and slide it into that blood core. It will spill out the top of the needle and a blessed blood fountain will spray.

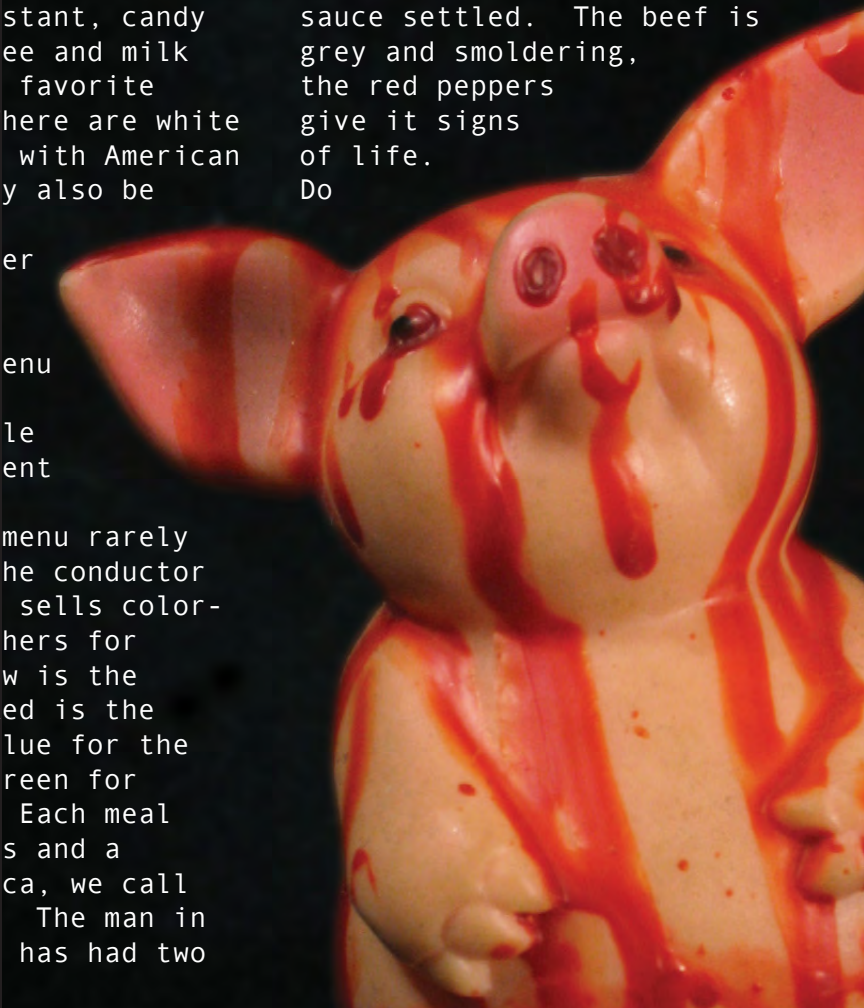
My seatmate is still fidgeting. Using the laundry bag, he has consciously concealed some sort of soft-porn magazine. It is tightly wrapped. He is gripping it like it is his boner. It has

next. He tries watching me from the corner of his eye, while hastily turning the pages. He's paranoid, so he turns his back on me and tries reading momentarily facing the aisle. His furry rear, of course, has risen above his waistline as if it was a barometric pressure tester of how much I can really take. His crack is an ass exhaust pipe, that is pointed right at my face. The right hand comes from against the seat and plunges straight down into the murky recesses of his crack. It moves up and down, side to side. First only to the wrist, then to mid-arm.

"May I have your attention please." Tonight's dinner car menu is about to be announced over the loudspeaker. For a fourteen-hour train ride, food needs to be provided. The train doesn't have meal stops, instead the train has a dining car. There are no special tables to sit at in the dining car, nor do they serve you at your seat. Inside the car is a food stand, which looks

like a food court kiosk, except everything is tied down. A glass cooler serves as the counter top. They have beer for sale and it isn't necessarily expensive, but is only 2.5% alcohol. That's baby sedative. Lots of taste, but no real sleeping medicine. The coffee is instant, candy is corn syrup free and milk chocolate is the favorite amongst kids. There are white bread sandwiches with American cheese, which may also be called tasty cheese. The dinner call is about an hour ahead of mealtime. The menu announcement is barely discernible due the ineffecient announcement system, but the menu rarely varies. Later the conductor comes around and sells color-coordinated vouchers for the meal. Yellow is the Chinese dish. Red is the Italian dish. Blue for the Chicken dish. Green for the Vegetarian. Each meal comes with vegies and a sauce. In America, we call them TV dinners. The man in front of my seat has had two

chicken dinners. His seat mate, a boy from Tokyo, choose the beef teriyaki. When it arrives, he peels back the aluminum edges and removes the white cardboard with silver insulation underside. He really takes his time. The rice is smooshed and flat, the sauce settled. The beef is grey and smoldering, the red peppers give it signs of life. Do



yellow-labeled can of Dark Red Kidney Beans from his laundry sack. It has a pop-top lid, that when removed is absently dropped back into the bag. The yellow label screams food stamps, so poor in fact that he can't afford a fork. He opts to drink the can's contents. Literally, tipping the can over his head into his mouth. Chewing occasionally, swallowing mostly. He peers into the can, puts it back to his lips while tapping the bottom of the can. He brought the can down from above his head and put his eye to the bottom again. He must really love his lunch, because he has a real shit-eating grin on his face,...no that was an idea. The idea wasn't anything about washing his hands, rather he drives that tractor-trailer right to the bottom of his can.

Luckily for me, this past January I learned how to puke in my mouth, hold it, then swallow my mouth's contents without squirting a drop. I puke and swallow. Puke and swallow in three quick breaths. My seatmate squeegees his can with his butt-greased fingers. Every few rotations, he caringly puts his fingers into his mouth sucking off whatever will come. Effortlessly, he wipes them on his pants. I swallowed a final gulp as I turned to look out the window. I have never been so happy to see a town I've never heard of.

He got off in Grafton. The passengers went. New ones came. I can still smell him. I wonder now if those new passengers think the cloud left behind is actually me!



I am so happy to be off that train. My hostel is only two blocks from the train station, so I don't have far to go. The street atmosphere is brightly orange although it is almost eleven p.m. My registration is registered. I leave a deposit for the room key and bottom sheet. The desk attendant gives me a map of the hostel, a map of Sydney, and a list of events sponsored by the hostel for the coming week. I step into the elevator with a group of men, each physically large. The elevator feels very small.

'After 5 months in a hostel,' one said, 'the bathroom really feels as private as it's going to get.'

'That is if you can convince a girl to actually fuck you in a random shower. I've never seen nor heard of it.' The elevator stopped at the second floor where eerily the perfect silence was slashed by dripping water from an unseen shower faucet. The scene made everyone's skin crawl, but now I know the whereabouts of the showers. Make note of floor. Where showers are, bathrooms are usually close by. The elevator stops at every floor, although no one gets on and no one gets

off. My floor looks like all the others we passed. When I step into my room, there is an Asian man lying on the bottom bunk talking on a cell phone. The room is fairly empty. All the beds are made, so I am not sure which bed is up for grabs. The man on the phone, bows while talking on the cell phone, and offers the bed he was laying on. I put my bag down, then take a second to gather in the room. There are two bunk beds, a window unit air conditioner in a very dirty window and some empty shelves. The man finishes his phone conversation, then must mull my face over



in his head. Realizing I am not the person he thought I was, he bows and reaches out his hand to introduce himself, "Komichijeri."

"Hello..Komichijeri. I am Josh."

"No. Cawl mEE Jerry."

"Jerry. Oh, call you Jerry. Hi Jerry, Josh."

"This bed here is the unoccupied bed, please take this one instead." So I do. I've been in AU or Oz long enough to use my second sight to look to the left for cars when stepping into the street and to know that Oz isn't necessarily a derogatory word used solely by foreigners. The liquor store is pretty

full with backpackers. I come out of there with a tall-boy of something local and begin to wander. There's a Korean market and a Chinese restaurant on the corner. Across the street a surplus store's mannequins are menacing. Pedestrians politely wait for the walk sign. There are no cars in sight, but no one crosses either. That's when I discovered the monorail. When it first passes over my head, I initially had dreams I was in the movie Blade Runner. Maybe it's the Asian neighborhood I

was standing in, maybe because it was dark and misty. I've never seen a monorail. I hadn't noticed the pillars and supports until the actual car pass over my head. Certainly, it is no highway underpass. Really a glorious invention. Now, if they could get it to climb an 800 ft hill to a freefall decent and figure out a way to get it to do a loop-de-loop, my carnival ride plan for the Haight-Ashbury would be complete. Imagine a section of public transportation that actually was a roller coaster!! My whole plan includes putting the vast number of homeless to work as clowns and carnies for the Hippie Carnival. Ashbury St. will be where the log ride 'Summer of Love' will pass.

The hostels are really full. My hostel is along a block that one might consider Hostel Row. There are people standing everywhere on the sidewalk and half in the streets, smoking cigarettes, talking fast, laughing and chasing one another in the orange night. The internet cafes illuminate faces. Above the sidewalk awning, there stands a model and fashion shoot happening. Steam splashes off the hot bulbs.

Others hang from windows watching the night pass on. Hostels really are very different beasts. In Oz, hostels are for foreign travelers, but also they are residential hotels for the locals. I'm not talking about businessman residential hotels with small kitchens and daily bed service. Or like government handouts, prowling the streets late at night, and using the small washbasin in your tiny room as a piss pot, because you don't want to get dressed to walk to the shared bathroom at the end of the hall. Usually hostels are somewhere in between. I brought my video camera along with me and I have a two-week train pass as well as a very valuable U.S. passport that I don't necessarily want to go to the terrorists. I inquire at the desk and find out there are pay-by-the-day lockers in the basement. They stiff you with stuff like this. Instead of putting a cheap small set of metal lockers in everyone's rooms where occupants can use their own locks and keys to secure their belongings, conveniently, they make you walk to the basement. On my way back up, I stop off where

I'd seen the showers earlier. If I use the bathroom now, I might not have to go again till morning. The high traffic carpet has grey paths that disappear at the end of each dark hallway. To my right, is white bathroom light coming from around the door. It is metal, with a rusty vent grate around the bottom. I push it open, but do not step in. I don't here anyone and the room isn't very big at all. The left side of the rectangle is five full service stalls. On the right wall are two sinks and a wall outlet with extension cord IVs plugged into plugs that are plugged in and my first thought is this must be the girls' bathroom. I step back out and go to the other end of the hall. I find the laundry there, which I may need to know about, but still doesn't answer my question. There isn't anyone in the bathroom, so I go in and use it. There isn't anyone in the room when I get back either. I climbed to my bed and put my ear buds in, it was 4 a.m. when my roommates rolled in. I reposition

the ear buds and ignore two drunken elephants being as quiet as they can be.

I know for sure where the kitchen and common areas are, but after my first cup of coffee this morning, I start to explore the hostel as a whole. I go up and down the floors and there aren't any other bathrooms. I check the fire escape maps they all say there is a bathroom on each floor, but each of these doors is locked. I try my room key on the lock, but no luck. The dark hallway must be the only bathroom. Only five stalls for the entire place? I go in to use the bathroom at the end of the hall. There's a girl standing at the sink when I come in. I quickly duck into the first available stall. As I leave the bathroom stall the girl looks up from her acne pad to give me an undecipherable look. The rather large feminine hygiene disposal container next to the toilet didn't



really ring any bells, because somewhere I had read that this hostel is co-ed, which means you could be having anyone in your room. The exact opposite would be like the hostel I stayed in Venice. The boys and girls were separated and each was not allowed in the others' sections. This didn't feel right, though. I left and came back after my second

cup of coffee. As I emerge from the stall there were three girls all hovered around the sink, so I asked since I was in there.

‘Are these bathrooms for boys and girls or did I miss something?’

A thick Oz accent, ‘girls only.’ ‘Really?’ ‘No, just joking.’

Now I was confused. I couldn't tell where her sarcasm lay. Throughout my day, my thoughts go back to that bathroom. I feel like I may just leave and go to Central Station to use the bathroom.

I come in from my first day in Sydney with this list of thoughts:

Things I hardly believe people still do

1. litter-throw cigarette butts on the ground, out of windows, leave them burning. not like there isn't already enough smoke in the air.
2. brush their teeth while letting the water run

3. touch museum exhibits
4. use flashes when taking a photo in a museum

I had a drink in the park about an hour ago. Before I head up to my room I stop off at the bathroom. The shower is as silent as the floor, when I step off the elevator for the bathroom. White light fans from the door. I am surprised when I discover yet another girl at the sink. She is wearing a black top and a black towel around her waist.

“Am I suppose to be here?”

“Why wouldn't you be?” “Is this for girls only?”

“Nope. It's for everyone. You in The Church?”

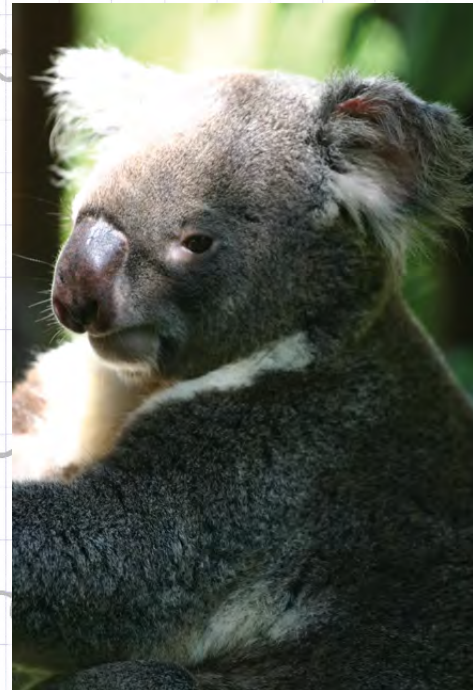
“Uh,” I remember seeing a placard somewhere, I don't know what it means. This is visible and I half mumble, ‘no.’

‘Oh, I'll see you up on the 13th then.’ And she left. The thirteenth floor.

I'd heard a whisper of this place, but hadn't been.

My roommates are still in bed as I climb back up into my bunk. They must have been chasing some trim last night. Trim is the only thing that will get you so messed up, so late into the day. They will feel glorious when they rub out last night's fantasies with a headache and a head full of hot water pouring down from above.

Staring up at the



ceiling I was thinking about buying some bleach, I don't have any slippers to wear in the shower. The bunk shakes a bit. The guy on the bottom bunk got up, then disappear behind a revealed secret sliding door. I sit up on my elbows and my ears perk when I hear a toilet flush. When he comes out, I peer over his shoulder, trying not to be too obvious.

Nonchalantly, I get up soon after he lay back down. I snuck behind the door and close it quickly. There is no lock, so I keep my hand on it when I turn around. I am staring down a very low ceiling'd bathroom that is longer than wide. At the end of this room, the toilet sits below a cracked glass window. The sill is a very soggy ashtray. On my right is the shower stall, on my left is the sink. I am so confused.

I need to stop thinking about the bathroom, so I leave it and walk right out of the room.

It is time to eat anyways. Well, time for everyone else to eat. I just go sit and watch, while drinking a cup of instant coffee. You can really tell the differences between the kids who have taken care of themselves or take care of themselves and those who wide-eyed can barely brush their teeth without mum's help. Some walk around deer in the headlights, staring at everything, trying desperately not to fall apart right there in front of you. Others here, are AU locals, living and working in the region. Kids coming to the city for the week or weekend. Many don't even bother to check in at the hostel. The common area is always available for anyone needing respite. There isn't anything to stop anyone from walking into the hostel and up into the common area/kitchen. By the amount of bodies sprawled around the couches and floors in the mornings, you

can see many do just this. I feel sorta bad for making any noise in the kitchen, but I always drop something heavy anyways. Dinner revs up in the common area. Pasta water boils, while jars of pre-made pasta sauce stands in queue for the microwave.

A girl coughs. I watch the germs as seeds spread an illness from mouth to food to fingers



to cup to door handle to toothbrush to shower floor. All those mouths and hands all over everything and nobody has bothered to use the sink to wash their hands. A preschool of sorts, adults eating like children. Pork and beans poured over white bread. Spaghetti O's from the jumbo can. Juice by the liter to help with tomorrow's hangover from tonight's expectations. Cheese spread. Cheese sandwiches. Tea. Instant coffee. Powdered milk. And the girl, half-heartedly going around offering free roast dinners. Whatever those are. Corn Chips. Ramen Noodles. Discounted hamburger. Liquor = American. Beer = Australian.

The kitchen is my favorite spot of the hostel. There is a loft here at the end of the kitchen/common area. Some sort of Wright Brother's contraption hangs in the

ceiling-air cavity, a luminous shadow upon the microwave and prep table. A group of Asians busy themselves with chopping vegetables, while the other half of their group together mix up a 'sauce.' One momentarily breaks from rice watch to carefully drink from a 2L bottle of juice. He holds it above his mouth so as not to touch it to his lips. Cups are in short supply at The Hostel, so most everyone does it this way. I see the packers as ants, the invisible queen ant is their hunger.

One girl, who has no real idea how to cook is walking through the kitchen with a tiny cell phone pinched between her purse strap and ear with a big pot of boiling water. She doesn't notice and this is precisely why everyone within scalding dives for cover. This in turn, knocks some food from another girl's hand who was doing the proper



thing at the moment and was headed for the almost full garbage cans. When her hand's contents are tossed to the floor, she shrugs her shoulders and kicks the pile near the can before moving on.

There is much being discussed in the kitchen. There are heavy negotiations going on as the 'doneness' of tonight's vegetables. Next to the rice watchers,

others are damning the demands of the gas stove. The ever-beating heat igniter ticks at a rapid pace, then jumps locations to another gas top. Users hope and hope as they try firing the gas. Users don't completely comprehend the gas stovetops. They hold the dial pushed in making the igniter tick, while thinking if they release the gas it will turn off. Maybe they think it is a safety measure, maybe it is a very good idea. They stand, irritated by the sounds themselves, yet remain watching the food trying to cook.

There are dishes dropping in the sink as plates and silverware are washed. Still dirty, but wet. Most don't even bother to really get them wet, they just put the dishes in the racks. Others are wandering amongst the stacks of dishware and cookware asking, 'where is that pot I saw earlier?' They find

it and put it into the sink to rewash it. They may not feel anything sticking to the surface of the pot's insides, but they know the score. You dry your pot with a flick of your arm, there are no towels provided. The moisture softens the crumbs on the floor, but the American with "Mills" tattoo'd in blackletter as his tramp stamp, doesn't seem to notice as his toes grip the grime of the tile floor. He peers in the various refrigerators that are marked with warning dates of when they will be cleaned again. He stared long and hard at the 'Free Stuff' shelf initially, but with that many notices, it must not be a notice at all. An advert instead for something he is not interested in, but should have been. What the yellow sign says or warns "Mills" against is that today was the day that this particular section of the reefer is cleaned.

Seven refrigerators, one refrigerator is cleaned each day. This way the food is rotated and nothing is left to mold experiments. Still he cusses, because he's looked in the free food shelf and his stuff is there. Just not how he left it. His jaws are half shut and half empty. His leftovers have been opened and sniffed more than he can bear. He cusses lower with each revelation, because the worst revelation of them all is the one where he

knows he must go back to the grocery store again. There is no dinner for him now. Not even a grocery bag to accompany him, so he retrieves what remains of his groceries and sits down to eat.

His buddy picks up an apple rolling across the ground. He is another Spicoli type, only smarter. Through his dirty blonde hair underneath a red bandana, he exchanges warm glances and usual banter with the apple's girl: "Where you from?"



"New Zealand."

"How long will you be here?"

"This is my last night."

"Are you going out tonight?"

"Yes, a couple of friends and I are going to The Mint."

"Ok. Maybe we'll meet up."

The apple finishes its journey from palm to palm. The dance means nothing and it means everything. She takes her apple and walks it out one side of the kitchen door while dozing briefly upon something dreamy she wants to put in her journal. Coming in through the door are dirty plates three in each hand. You can really see the pirouette of the food servers amongst the crowds. They dance expertly through everyone. Silverware neatly stacked on one plate, leftovers and pans follow the server's lead. Fluidly dodging upstarts, while managing a crowd

that bows to their kitchen superiority. They're servers, not dishwashers, so while the girls with the plates expertly empty the drying racks, separating bowls and plates into stacks and separating the silverware from the serving ware, her friends pack up tomorrow's take-out and begin washing the dishes.

Here she doesn't take on the small pieces first. No, the forks and knives can wait, she is going straight to the burnt pot. She takes a dinner knife and begins chipping away. No soaking. No waiting. Only stabbing. Others come from behind her grabbing at the sponge that was new this morning, but now looks like the most haggard of humans wrinkled by time and broken by work. Green for scouring, yellow for delicates the sponge looks more misshapen brown. The sinks aren't big enough for two to use it in tandem. Washings work more like engine pistons. One



scrubs leaning away from the sink, while the other leans in to rinse. Wet plates pile quickly, but they rarely are left long enough to dry. The server changes tactics, the knife isn't effective. Next, she chooses a fork. She works up a sweat on the pan while a man, who obviously has an overbearing mother sheepishly examines the sponge as if he just isn't

sure how it works. He's smart enough to figure it out though, but the gas-stove top in his future will be his demise. Careful not to come between the server and the pot, he works around her to fill up a pot with hot water. Working around her, he fills up a pot with hot water and then takes it to the stove. He has the pot securely in both hands as he maneuvers the kitchen crowd. He moves from stovetop to stovetop, blistered by the lack of igniter know-how. He has no clue how to ask for help either. From shoe to shoe he dances, blood boils in his face and he may as well just put that pot right there on his face, because nothing in this kitchen will be that hot. Finally, the mother of the kitchen, the only one who looks completely relaxed pats this large man on the shoulder and gently takes



the pot from the stove. She is much smaller than the burdened beast. In a purple camisole, linen pants and sandals, she has complete control of him. Her family is spread around

the parts of the kitchen collecting utensils, rinsing and washing, prepping food all under her general direction. She checks her cooking station before walking the beast

to the instant hot water dispenser on the wall. After carefully moving the girl gouging the pan with a fork, she dumps out the hot water, now lukewarm. Expertly, the kitchen mother rips open his ramen pack, then pours the water on top for him. 'Just leave it a few minutes,' she smiles at him, 'then strain.' Yes, mothers care for the world. The refrigerator compressors hum as the opening and closing of the heavy doors keeps a beat. A boy puts the plastic strainer on his head, another boy snaps the moment into his cell phone. The strainer gets put back with the pots and pans.

Food gets bought, food gets cooked, and food gets eaten. Dishes gets used, dishes get washed. Discount hamburger cooks to a grey splendor. The friend of Mills" is cutting through the grinded meat tubes. Mindlessly chopping what had already had been chopped and reassembled.

He isn't blinking, he's only chopping and stabbing while thinking of something he sees in his mind's eye. As one burger is finished cooking, it goes directly on a bun already prepped with red and yellow sauces. A patty is put in its place on the frying pan. Why not put it in the blender? Red meat smoothies, then just pop it in the microwave. But he only stabs it again. Cuts it again. Yes, the smell of blood. Fatty brown with a black styrofoam bottom mat. At the hostel, kids stake claims of tables before fetching their foods. As dinnertime rolls on through The Hostel, the tables fill with kids who displace or assimilate smaller hoards of kids. Behind them they leave crumbs, tea mugs, bowls of cold ramen, with a swoosh of their hands, newcomers sweep the debris to the floor. Eager to drink, eat, fill their minds with possibilities. Fill their stomachs with chips-

heal their hearts of hurt - hoping all their dreams come true. Dinnertime is social time, when cliques are established when ruffled feathers are acknowledged and peacocks strut for their fans. Even though some are trying to maintain some semblance



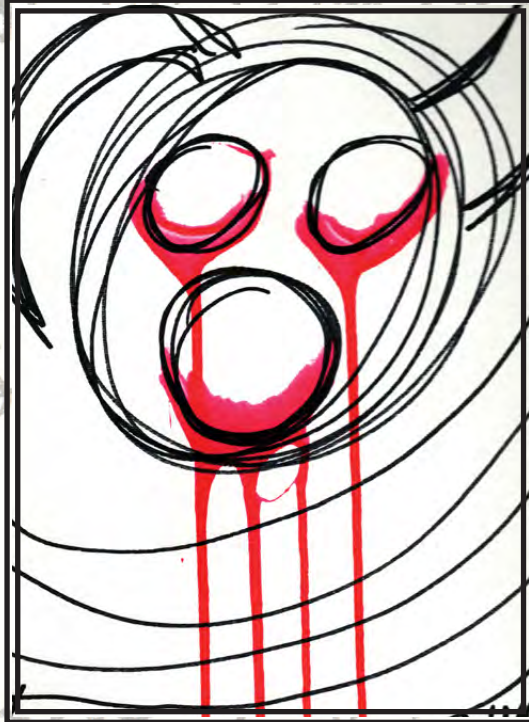
of normalcy, the dirt and scum just pile up. As dinnertime progresses, the processes are repeated until finally everyone has eaten, everyone has gone. The mess they leave is to behold. Slowly, it accumulated. You never really see one person or

group blatantly walk away from an entire dinner of dishes. A plate here. Forgotten pasta on the stove there. Spilled milk. Sloshed sauce. Broken bread. Everything is soggy and the halogen overheads help the grease-covered walls make everything even

more yellow. Now it is just me, my sandwich and the hum of the refrigerators. Hostels are not for the weak or weary. Hostels can wear you down. Make you feel lonely. Make you feel like everyone in the world has friends, except for you.

The cleaning girls will be in shortly, everyone will be dispersed. The girls always shake their heads, but are never surprised by what they find. They are paying their way at The Hostel by righting all the wrongs that were put upon this kitchen

since lunchtime today. They wear rubber gloves and do more talking than scrubbing. It's just a job. The kitchen needs to be put to an appearance. They wash some dishes and put them away. The drains are clogged with noodles and pastas of every shape, chunks of broccoli and cauliflower, and cooked meats. They sweep and they mop. Empty the overflowing trashcans. The dishes remain far from done, but there is a semblance of order. They admire their work, but ever so briefly. There's no reason to really think about it, because it won't be like this for long. The quality level is so low and everyone just really wants



to pay little and wreck more - the question comes down to: Who really cares? In the common room, writers have their heads down pouring over their own journals. Already looking back through them, really struggling to make sense of what it is they are doing. Anguished looks as they finger the various brochures of things they participated in. Desperate to make something out of what they call: holiday. Strangely enough The Hostel encourages visitors to congregate and cause their mayhem in the back out of sight of the front door. This is exactly the opposite of every other hostel I've ever been in. Usually it is first on all

the lists. Where to drink? Where to shout! Drinking is certainly a daily part of Life in The Hostel. Six guys sitting around a picnic table playing cards to see who gets a drink from the funnel. A black plastic funnel is attached with a metal hose clamp to clear acrylic tubing about sixteen inches long, then an on/off valve. The drink of choice is a murky yellow substance that is served from a metallic bag. Below the valve, another sixteen inches of empty tube teases the drinker as they anticipate the cold rush. The group plays a couple of hands, drinks a couple of rounds, then en masse abandon ship for the front steps and cigarettes. When the boys of bongs left, the room gets quiet instantly. There's the token guitar player sitting cross-legged on the floor. Playing peacefully, while the rest of his circle drink wine that came from a glass

bottle. They have cups, but that doesn't push up their noses. The TV's room opens to this common room at the opposite end. There is a group of German girls in the doorway passing around a glass bottle of red. They drink from it without letting the bottle touch their lips. The girls don't want too wild a night, but they are itching for something. There they stand in the doorway, on the cusp: Sit down and drink their wine or keep standing to go for more wine. They watch the TV as intently as the common room. Eventually one of the spectacles will win out. In a big gush, voices rush in through the main hall. Their noise splashes everyone scattered between tables and chairs. The wave fills the room and splashes all of us again. The alcohol is sinking in. More wander in and announce themselves in Whoops and Hollas'. Beating on their bellies, beautiful, new,



tight with age. Punches to the arms, the mock punches to the guts, the lonesome pool table diverts their attention. If you are in your pajamas and don't want to wander down to the 7-11 for a midnight snack, then you are left with what is in the food machines. The usual cast

of characters. Did you wake up with a taste for potato chips or pretzels? Sour Cream & Onion. Chocolate. Fruit sours. Or onion rings? Coca-Cola? Well, consider yourself lucky, they have just what will put you to sleep. The concierge at the front desk isn't your average hostel kid, but a gentleman easily of 40 and dark skinned. Contrary to most, he cares. He cares about everything. He shushes rabble-rousers as they holler in the lobby. He deals with his clients with a no nonsense lacking most everywhere else. Professionally polite, his English isn't perfect, but this doesn't discourage his authority. The lobby is peaceful and that's the way he likes it. They mayhem is building behind him though. In the elevator, three

metal chairs and a beanbag have collected about nine to 11 people. This court varies floor to floor, depending on who takes a chance to get onboard. There are bottles and cans in the elevator with piled people drinking from them. One guy DJ'd the party from his laptop. I stepped aboard looking for the boys' drinking apparatus. When I enquired about it, an English girl with too much sun and not enough clothes politely connected my assumption that the 'beer' was actually something called 'goon.' She was certainly talking down about it, "Cheaper than cheap. Sure, it comes in a box, but the box probably tastes better than the wine. It actually says on the side of the box, that this product may contain any of these contents: eggs, milk, animal by-product, and other natural and artificial flavors."

I departed the party elevator and took to the stairs. I must have walked the building stairs three times, listening for the bong rumblings. I was sure a device like that didn't lead to a quiet night in front of the TV. Frustrated and figuring to turn myself in for the night, I thought 'once-more,' then off to bed. The out-of-place concierge boarded with three more men whom he was personally caring for. They were speaking another language politely while he held himself like he wanted the lobby. The elevator door opened to screaming girls running while barely holding their towels on. The concierge holds the elevator door with his foot, while he stretched to see what they were running from. Everyone in the elevator is thinking machine gun mad man and wants the door shut quickly. With a finger he asked his guests to

understand that he must investigate this. The elevator returns them downstairs, but I followed the concierge. I have a clue as to what he would find, but I didn't know in what condition. More girls, their faces washed, but more perturbed than really scared, huffed from the shower. I stood behind the concierge peering over his shoulder as we approach the commotion. He was unsure of his next action. From inside the shower, sounds of male voices are discernible. I can hear the party and the effect of the bong. Two girls yank open the doors and suddenly we are just two more perverts.

"What is happening in there?"

"Some jerks won't leave the showers."

"Jerks!"

"Yea!" she's as pissed as he is now. I follow him in He stops and turns to me. I shrug my shoulders to encourage him on. The

ever-eerie shower is alive tonight. He turns and proceeds around the corner where there are certainly men's voices laughing and hollering.

"Look at him dance."

"Dance, fag, dance."

"I want more ass. More ass." The whole group is congregated in one shower stall. They think nothing of the concierge coming in.

"What is going on here?"

"More Water!" A half-naked pudgy boy with a bucket comes from the next stall. "More! More water!" He tosses the water, then maybe without remorse, the bucket too. All the men cringe in joyful hope, then laugh loudest when the bucket hits. The concierge breaks through the boys.

"What is going on here?" They are ignorant of him as is the naked guy in the shower. All their eyes are floating in their heads. Through all that goon, they can't

determine much. 'Mills' is the one in the shower. He is holding the bong over his head underneath the hot shower. A boy sitting on the shower partition pours the goon from the metallic bag. The hot water is lubricating "Mills'" movements. He is reenacting the infamous Buffalo Bill as his friends mindlessly egg him on. "Stop this. Stop this."

The concierge must be asking how he ever got himself into this business. The boys are all laughing, now more at the concierge, because of the fright on his face. You can tell they are only a few sips away from pushing him into that shower to dance with 'Mills' and the goon bong. "Stop this at once! This is totally inappropriate!"

By now a group has gathered in the showers to enjoy the moment. The boys never really pay much attention to the concierge as he shouts and apologizes to the guests. "Get out!

Out!" The boys grab 'Mills' by the arms, as they selectively remove their shirts and snap 'Mills' ass with them. He's completely naked, but I don't see any man's clothing in or around the shower. After they are gone everyone lingers to share pieces of what just happened. When I get back to the party elevator it is pretty docile now. Everyone is a bit stumped, 'some Indian-looking-dude just screamed at all of us and said we have to get off the elevator.' When we make it downstairs, they've decided to head to the T.V. room, but leave all the furniture and trash. I cut off and go to the lobby. There in a row, staring back at the door as if there is some fear to again cross it are the three amigos of the concierge. "He'll only be a few more minutes," I tell them. They look at me, but I'm still unsure if they understood.



When the ticket lady comes by, I am asleep. I laid my ticket on my lap in case this happened, she wasn't having any part of fetching it. Gently she woke me understanding that I had been waiting for this train ride all day. Once she passes, I get up to use the bathroom. Obviously, the boy sitting on the toilet when I barge in doesn't know how to use the lock. He apologizes, I apologize. As I wait, two security officials pass by. One is giggling through a goatee, the other is well dressed and standing with a straight back. This is the first train I've seen with any sort of security. They are a presence only because it is highly unusual.

When I get back to my seat, I get a chance to enjoy the countryside. Behind me a bastardized boy with the super size breath has stilled. At least temporarily. We pass by a lake, the train traces its banks. Small and medium AU towns that are of no consequence from the distance of the train window. I am thinking about alot of

good things. Eventually, the thoughts begin to wander to what I really want to be doing to the kid who again has begun pounding on my seat. "Ya! Yaw!" The Spaz drums the window. His father ignores The Spaz as long as he can, then tries containing the spasms. All the while allowing me to suffer his degenerative sperm. Why is it I who must endure the fact that his weak sperm penetrated an obviously inadequate egg. I just hope dad doesn't get smart and begin bribing the kid for quiet time with soda and chocolates. The Spaz climbing the glass as the cops stroll by.

"Take the kid. He's dangerous," I want to yell, but I don't because they are really more dangerous to the train than the kid. The giggly guard looks like he's been drinking. His companion has grown tired of the antics and wants to get back to suspecting everyone. Along the way, giggly will spot someone and make them both back up to take a second look. They aren't looking for trouble, they are the trouble.

I wake from maybe an

hour nap and it is urgent. I must go to the bathroom. We've been on the train for at least 12 hours no As I move down the aisle alternating my grip on head rests to keep my balance, I reach for the door releasing my supporting hand when the door slides open. The doors between train cars are motion sensitive. I am literally tossed across the threshold and into the cabin where two cars meet. Stumbling with my arm out I reach the men's bathroom door before hitting the floor. Inside, there is a mirror, which helps with the claustrophobia. Because this is a train, doesn't mean the bathrooms are larger than an airplane bathroom. How much room do you need anyways? Only enough to shoot up in, because the first thing I see is a dirty needle disposal box. The shivers shake me to the bone upon

absorbing the entirety of the needle exchange program. I use exchange here, because it is. When you dispose your used needle it is suppose to be secured. Instead, the top of the box has a hole drilled in it and when I peer inside. Not only can I see how many needles are in there, but if I am a jonesing junky I can get one out. Yes, saving the parks and public bathrooms, by providing used dirty needles to desperate junkies. 'Please deposit needles here. Take what you need, need what you take.' To the right is a miniature sink with a drain stopper on a chain. Wash the

needles, while sitting on the airline sized toilet and dry them under the standard size forced air hand dryer. The floor is soaked; it smells like a bathroom, do the two go together? Probably. We all know how filthy men really are. Men are blessed with the most convenient urinating mechanism know to nature and still struggle to use it properly. Add into the mix a rickety diesel train rolling down uneven rails at a decent clip and you can understand what I am standing in. After considering all this, you are probably as surprised as I am that the walls aren't dripping.



Once I wash my hands, dry them under the hyper-loud fan and finish the patting process on my pants, I tear off a wad of toilet paper to help with unlocking the door. I get my foot around the door to brace it open, and then decide to drop the paper on the floor. It is really the best place for it. When the automatic door opens for me, I step through casually this time, maintaining my composure.

The Spaz wakes from his nap and the first words out of his mouth are “I want food.” Dad marches him to the dining car immediately. The aroma of the ketchup’d meat pie punches me in the nose. I stick my face in the crook of my elbow to help me breathe, but the stinky pie is just behind my head. I can’t keep it out. Buses, trains, and planes, within them you’ve agreed to a level of intimacy. By traveling on a train for 14 hours, you are living with these strangers and many of them carry about their day like they are still at home. The Spaz kicks my chair, bangs on the table, making an already rough ride rougher. I’m still afraid his father will get desperate and



‘sweets’ will be used to coax. He’ll start tugging on my hair and his thug dad who is over-sensitive to his walking weak sperm stream won’t listen to any reason. I’ll burden my cross. They are already looking at me funny. I must have done something, or said something in my sleep.

Once I’m awake again, I want to go to the bathroom, but I’m initially a little bathroom shy. I go anyways. The giggly guard’s cheeks are so red. He is obviously more towards drunk. Appropriately, I come across him standing around the bathroom. I look at him, but don’t stare. I try ducking into the bathroom. The door slides in easy, I think I am out of the crossfire of the giggly guard, but my streak of walking into occupied bathroom continues.

“No. No. It’s occupied.” Giggly says as things are sinking in. The serious security guard stands abruptly before the mirror. His walkie-talkie awoke and was squawking something I couldn’t

understand, but he certainly took it seriously. He took it so seriously, he hadn’t even changed the picture in his camera phone yet. While he gazed off into the radio’s distant message in that pose that people listen to the static sound on the shoulder strap and adjust the volume with their other hand accordingly. In his camera is a self-portrait in the bathroom mirror. The determined security guard is intrigued by the coming story. He stormed passed me for some sort of national security threat. Giggly follows, fluidly shifting his hips to move down the narrow aisle. I’m watching them squirrel off to

the front as The Spaz exits the bathroom. His grizzly father tugging at his pants and is turning them straight. I’ve barged in on two people in this bathroom, so I



decide to go in behind The Spaz. When I enter, there is piss up on the wall and running down on the floor. This is labeled as the men’s only restroom, so I don’t

bother with the seat either. I finish the job this kid started by pissing on the “Please Flush the Toilet” sign. I flush it like it says and think about the shades

Blue, like the beach. The memory swirls away I realize I don’t actually know if a toilet does flush the opposite way in Oz.

I am the only reading light left on tonight on the train. My pen is getting low on ink. Like my energy, I’ve more ink elsewhere, so I keep writing. In the reflection of the window I am a hunched over figure under a spotlight. The light highlights my hand, but leaves the rest of me as silhouette.

The conductor comes down the aisle, when she gets to my row she sits down in the empty seat next to me.

‘What are you writing about?’

‘What am I suppose to say? Here see for yourself.’ My notebook looks fragile in her hands, I wonder if that’s what I look like under this light. She flips through some,

‘I don’t
qualify?’

‘What do I
than a mention?’

'I've seen people die.'

'Oh gosh,' she became so much more than a railroad worker. There seemed to

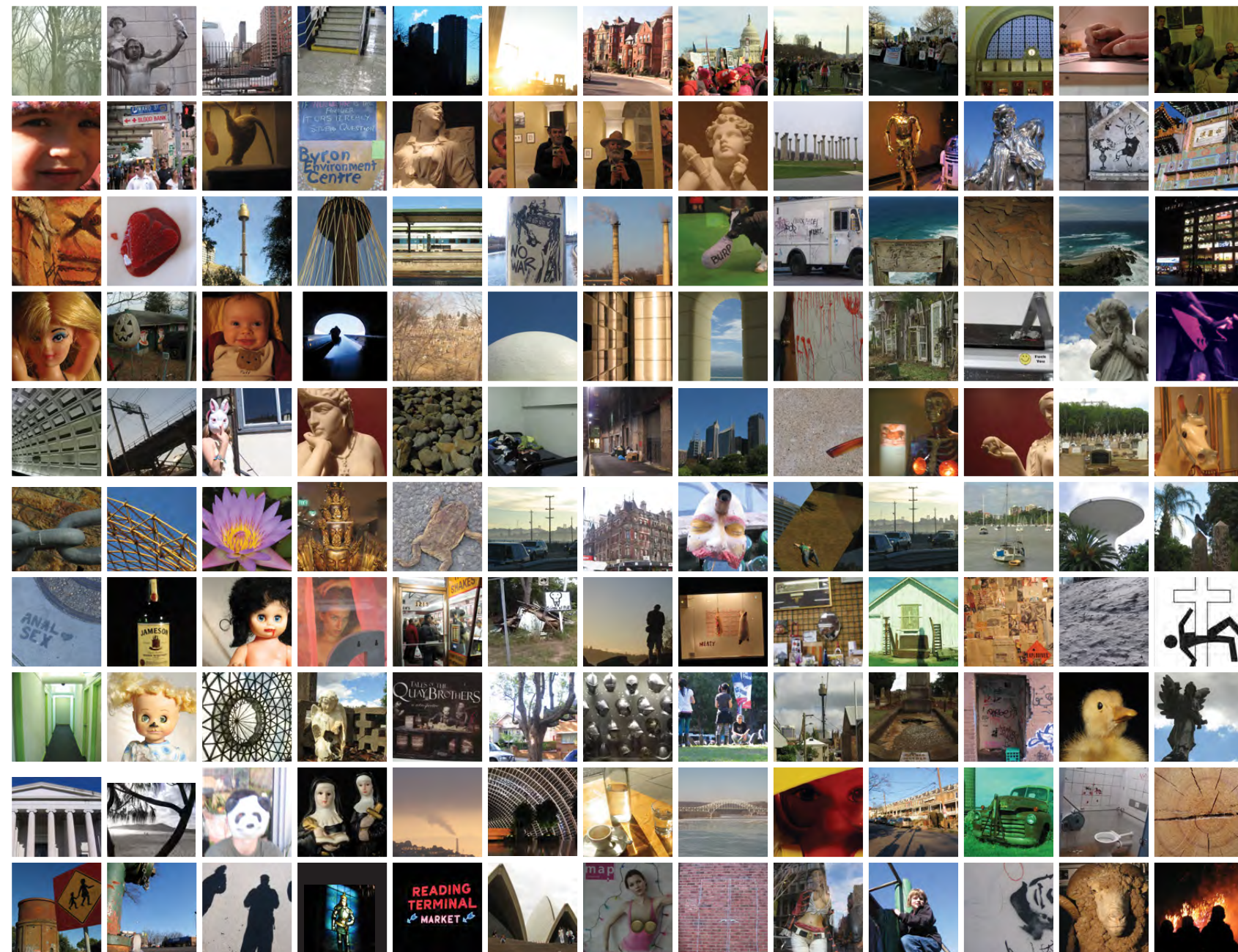
‘Oh!’

‘At their seats? On the tracks?’

‘Yes!’

‘...Excuse me. Excuse me, sir.’ I wake up to the same rail conductor. She isn’t sitting next to me, but is standing above me as I lay across both train seats. Mouth most likely wide open drooling stupidly.

'Oh sorry about that...' I sit up, get my act together wanting to hear about more dying on the train, but I never did.



The coach dumped my groggy body out at around 5.30 this morning. What the fuck? About eight people got off the bus with me. Three others sit with me under the bus stop shelter. They obviously knew they had a wait in front of them. They situated their packs into a corner and stretched out on the benches. After the coach leaves, I step out of the shelter and look in both directions down the road. It is still dark out and the downtown street is just the same. When I turn back to the bus shelter, I see all the kids in various stages of sleep and wonder why anyone would show up here with out a room reservation. Maybe the shelter is their reservation. I have a reservation, but the courtesy van doesn't pick me up for five hours. In my head is a vague map of Byron, I use the vague map to leave the shelter for the beach.

The sun is just beginning to send old rays of light up and over the lighthouse. Right now there is nowhere else I'd rather be. I lay my head on a rock and let myself seep in to the sound.

I don't ever want to get up. After sleeping so peacefully, I consider sleeping on the beach more than once. There are others out here sleeping. I don't know why I don't, I just don't. By ten o'clock everything has really heated up. By now I am checked into the hostel, but I still have my sweatshirt on, while I adjust to the smell of my new



hostel dorm room. The smell in here is especially tough. Mix the beach, a couple of boys and then close up the room for an afternoon of

surfing. That's a stench that won't wash off the first try. Traveling is certainly a bonding experience. The friends you bring with and the friends you meet while you are here. There is a certain intimacy that must be shared with everyone you dorm with at The Hostel. They see you in the morning, before you're even awake. They see you fresh from the shower and probably in your underpants. You leave your shorts to dry laying over your bunk bed rail and your bikini next to it. They share a bathroom with you. Probably share in your soap and shampoo. Their butt touches your butt on the toilet. They stare naked into the same mirror you stare into. They are sharing space with you. If you leave your things all over the floor, they have to walk around it. They eat together, drink together, go to the beach together, lounge together, and sleep together.

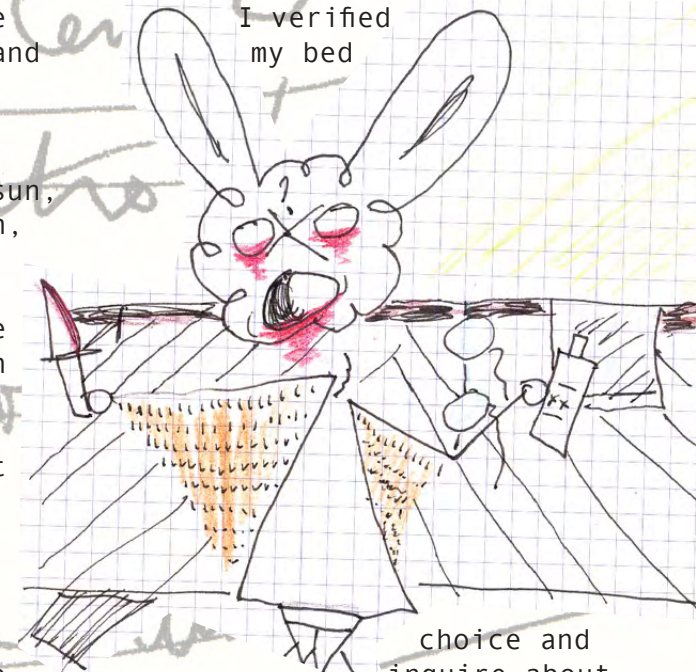
This unifying theme, this friends forever holiday heaven can provide memories that are one of a kind. Bonds can be formed, friendships ruined, loyalty cemented, all in the

midst of a hostel. Most anyone will talk to anyone. All the strange faces, all the new places, a new bed regularly, swarms of drunkards coming in at all hours to distract and awaken. Some places have noise curfew and 'lights out at 11' signs. They'll warn you against liquor in your room and about the dangers of the sun, but you can't see the sign, because of the stacked goon cases. You throw your valuables down on the floor next to the sunscreen you should be using more often. Your ipod is charging on the sink. Put your passport under your pillow and your driver's license in your backpack under the bed. For a colony started by and for criminals the hostels here have been very trustworthy. Any half-wit homeless person could wander into any of these dorms and steal so much. Nobody knows who belongs. The faces are transient. The trust is essential.

My dormmates are one girl and several guys. A German student and I are the loners, I don't know about

the girl. The other five en masse essentially rule the room. This type of Mafioso stuff isn't that uncommon. It really has to do with numbers. It is with they who

I verified
my bed



choice and
inquire about
laundry.

Sometimes it
very hard to
which bed is
suppose to be
yours. I was
going to say
clean, but

I'm not sure that
anything is really clean.
Packers will move into the

newly vacated spot. Others may have been coveting the bed because of it's proximity to an outlet, bottom vs. top, away from the main door, closer to friends, farther from friends. When they do this, most bring their sheets with them, but just throw yours on your bed. If you are lucky they give you the clean sheets and don't leave you with their dirties.

All five of these guys are on holiday from England, here to live the life. Surf. Eat. Surf. Nap. Surf. Drink. The horseplay is endless like the waves they came here to worship. Throwing each other from bed to bed. Yanking down their shorts. Shoving their sweating butts in each other's faces. They shake the beds, turn over chairs, take silly pictures, and live life only as they know how.

Across the way girls get ready for a night out on the beach town. They put on eye make-up and unfold their cleanest dress. Pick at the peelings and lotion today's hotspots. All the packers have some form of sunburn on their noses, shoulders, backs and thighs. The pre-party is

warming up. Dinner has been eaten, everyone has come down from their rooms to carry on the occasion in the common area. Regardless of what all the signs say about no alcohol in the dorms most are standing around with a drink in hand. Bodies endlessly roam the pathway going from dorm to dorm or walking in circles, talking on their cells. Soon enough everyone will head out to dance and drink until someone makes them stop. Coffee and brekky in the late morning. They'll gargle the salt-water to help their throats and drink plenty of bottled water. Zombie like to the beach, where they sleep off the pain in the sun.

I am on the balcony looking in at all this and I turn my head to the other side as I ponder their charades and homosexual taunts. The curtains are spread open on the girls-only rooms.

The girls are trying on their new

clothes and matching them to what's already available to make tonight's outfit. Over and over

again, they are taking off and putting on tops and bottoms. Changing their brassieres to accommodate strapless or complementary color strap. Then to the make-up mirror. A check of the make-up. A brush of the teeth. A sip of their goon and a good joke laughed at relentlessly.

Dirty and still sweating from the afternoon's beach rugby game, the five boys discuss which bar they are going to chase some trim into. I have seen no toothbrushes, nor any deodorant. They've been passing around whiskey, while one by one the girls become comfortable in their clothes and reassured by the others that they look cute. Later, these two crowds will meet up knowingly or unknowingly at the bar, because most out of town hostellers really go to just a few bars. Whether recommended by the leading world travel guide or just because it's drink

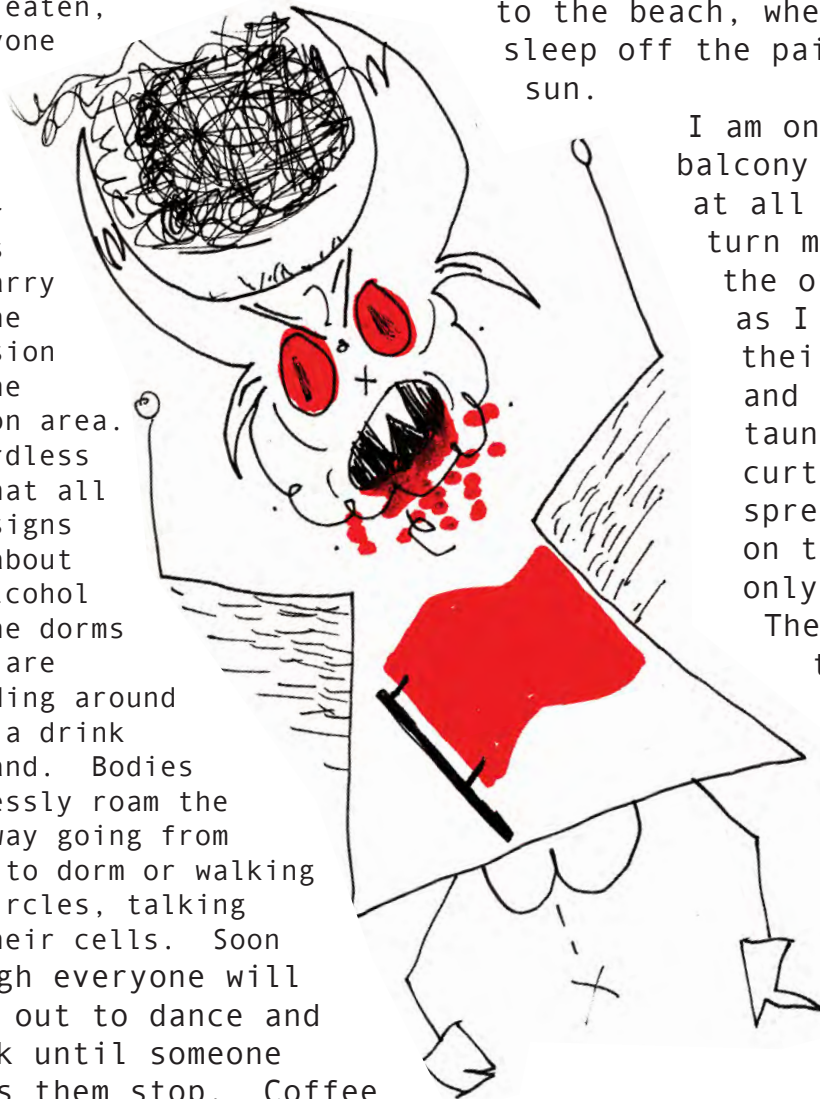
specials are on the wall of the hostel. Everybody is swimming in the same information pool. The boys will continue their crude sentiments and the girls will laugh it off, because, sure, the girls would love to meet somebody, but they didn't come all the way to AU to get dressed up for strange boys. The girls had a great time getting dressed up with their girlfriends. Exploring themselves, sharing their ideas of themselves, saying things not appropriate for all company. The girls get dressed up for each other. With each other. When they get to the bar, these boys really don't matter. Still, some will get kissed and others will get drugged. The memories will be both splendid and blurry moments to talk about when we find our way home.

This hostel is more of a compound. On the grounds is a bar, café, restaurant, cinema, and a secondary kiosk open later than all

the rest. Somewhere there's a recording studio and a dance/yoga studio. And don't forget the art gallery. There's a drainage pond that they call something else, the stench is 'a natural process.' The hot tub is khaki brown and the pool looks oily. They've done everything they can to discourage you from cooking your own food, they would prefer you eat from the menu. The kitchen has hardly enough room for all the packers at dinnertime. There are only two sinks, so a line is constantly que'd to wash the pans. Packers are then waiting around to cook, because the pans are in short supply. When you are ready to eat you have to go to the front desk with a \$10AU deposit for a dinner set of a knife, spoon, fork, plate,

bowl and cup. Suddenly you feel like you are in the army. 'We issue it in sets, then you return it to us when you check out. Just lock it in your locker when you aren't using it.' I'm holding out my \$10. The money doesn't bother me, everything is done around here by deposits or your room key, but all I want is a spoon. Since I have been on the beach, I have been living on juice and water. This started three days ago. All I want is the spoon, because I am having just a small amount of

cereal this morning. I don't even need the bowl, because the cereal package says I can pour the milk right in. I





don't need a plate. I don't need a cup. Nor a knife or fork. I hold up the \$10AU offering it in return of a spoon.

"I'm sure you are very trustworthy, but things disappear around here. This is how we do things."

"I never said I was trustworthy, I only asked for a spoon."

"Now what room are you in?" They have internet access here, which are the best computers I've come across while in AU internet cafes, but they charge you by the minute. I'm sure the minutes keep you on your toes and keep the computers from queuing with users all day. Not only though do you yet again feel nickel & dimed, which literally you are, but when you are finished and in line ready to check out, the help is in no hurry. Here, the people behind the counters are

foreign workers paying their way. More often than not, the help will linger with someone about a party, about surfing, or about some picture they found of the combination of both on the Internet. This is all fine and well, I am not even complaining about having to wait for it to end. What I can't stand is that he is costing me money. His conversation just cost me 30 cents. Sure, a quarter and a nickel, multiply that twice a day over three and a half days = \$2.10US still not alot, whatever. Then multiply \$2.10US times 20 users all day, then by 356 days. This comes out to about \$4272US a year. Atleast I know why the computers are so nice. There's a reason they nickel & dime you. How many probably forget to get their deposits back? For keys, for dishes, for the Internet, for a board game. It's a racket.

You know what else is a racket, all the clattering of the mismatched dish set I'm carrying up the stairs, because I wanted a spoon. Fuck. Next time I'm going to eat with a ladle from the kitchen. It's one of the few utensils in the kitchen. Or maybe I'll take the rest of the kitchen utensils and use them as tools for a sandcastle today. The coffee cup I was issued has a smiley face, but no handle. A cute nose juts out the face. I stare at it while eating. Using the knife, I break off the nose. I'm thinking for ten bucks, I may as well break all the dishes, stick the fork and knife in the garbage disposal, and then return the pieces.

"I'm sorry sir, but it seems you've broken a few of your pieces."

"Yea, but its all there. Can I get my ten bucks?" Peacefully, I enjoy my meal, making sure I don't eat too

much. I drink more soymilk than actually eat. In the kitchen, there is a line to the sink, so I head down to the bathroom. The bathroom is between here and the front desk. I rinse the spoon off by stirring it around in the toilet. I carry all the racket back to reception.

"Bettenhausen, Room 8" She doesn't even look at the stuff. The desk

attendant that gave me just a spoon yesterday, when I began soaking the cereal was working again. I was holding out my ten bucks then too. She put the spoon on the counter and just winked.

--May 2007

