

Unforgettable

The clear blue splashed against my ankles as I sauntered along the shore. Ahead I could see the sharp, geometrical, black objects that defined the end of the beach which signified the halfway point of my journey.

I glanced at the time attached to my wrist: 6.08am. The perfect time for this lone adventure. Few others rolled out of bed at this early hour to embrace the beautiful scenery, and those who did were also content in their own company - they didn't require my attention or communication, which was always a welcome opportunity as I was given time to consider my own thoughts. To sort the chaos into somewhat organised chaos.

The shrill whistle of blustering wind in my ears was a welcome one and created a musical tune as I rotated my head in different directions, taking in the surroundings. I was very familiar with them as I had visited this exact location many times, but each return offered new features, enhanced views - or maybe I am just becoming more observant. I analyse the icy water to see if I'll brave the almost paralysing plunge into it.

Today, I decide to.

As I'm in the sea, attempting to adapt to the movement of the waves, I scan the headland before me. On the far left I see my home, I would give you the address if it had one. Portnoo has a very relaxed approach to such details. Rather than being given a number it's known as 'the house on top of the hill'. Makes sense, I guess.

It's a small white cottage with a forest green shade of paint on the door and window frames, in front of which there are various plant pots scattered with an array of flowers that my wife, Elizabeth, has so delicately arranged. The precision isn't obvious from this distance, instead they are pops of colour enhancing the white canvas of the walls.

Continuing along the horizon, following the old, crumbled road, there are more houses, but none quite as authentically pretty as my own. The next building my eyes ponder over is the church with its impressive spire towering above the level of the rest of its roof, the dark, rustic exterior of which has a stark appearance against the rolling green fields behind; but the once grey brick walls, which are now covered in a layer of velvet like moss, begin to blend in to the background.

Connecting the church to the local post office is a string of wild plants; not similar to the dainty ones set on the window sills of the cottage, this greenery is more free, unpredictable. At the end of this trail lies the humble, family-owned shop that is internally adorned with shelves of culinary necessities as well as plenty of confectionary for the aquatic activities that commence in the harbour nearby.

My eyes fall down from the road and onto the slightly eroded structure of the pier, which is constantly trying to absorb the energy of the crashing waves.

Although I had quite rapidly acclimatised to the environment in which I was still within, a sudden change of direction of the wind quickly snapped me out of the trance induced by the beauty, and urged me to take actions to escape the water.

As I walk against the force of the water opposing me, it gradually lessens and water drips off me as I once again feel the finely crushed shells beneath my feet, inviting themselves between my toes.

A few cowrie shells crackle under my weight. If my wife were with me, she would have picked them up to add to her extensive collection back at the house. She's on her 9th large glass jar (bearing in mind they're only a few millimetres in size each) - it's a family tradition.

Soon enough I'm back at the beginning of the beach and I collect my flip flops that I had carelessly flung beside the wall earlier, obviously caught up in the eagerness to stroll on the sand.

I follow the steep, twisty path up to the cottage and carefully wash the sand off my feet under the stiff outdoor tap. After my peaceful walk, I momentarily pause outside the front door to prepare myself for the madness I'm about to descend into.

The content chuckles of my children that fill my ears give me the go ahead to enter without disrupting a war zone.

'What shall we get up to today?' I ask as I walk through the wooden doorway, the kids' eyes lighting up like luminescent glow-sticks. Their eagerness to learn makes me think about when I was that age. One day they'll know this place as well as I do. An intricate mental map will be built by their exploration, as mine has been over the years; all of the unforgettable details engraved in my mind - too delicate to interpret onto paper.

Many tides have come in and gone out since the family last visited their fond holiday home together, thousands in fact.

Things can change. Things have changed.

At first it was only insignificant, unsuspecting things: keys, the TV remote, the date. It was passed off as just a normal part of ageing - forgetting. Then the problem grew. Losing things more important: the ability to identify where he was or why he was there. It sounds like a small problem, but it was a lot more drastic than when you walk upstairs to get something and forget what you're looking for.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. The seconds seemingly passing progressively slower.

My name moves across the screen and the dull beep indicates that Dr. Hill is ready to see me.

I walk out of the Doctor's room differently to how I walked in. Before I went into that room I didn't have a life long, cureless disease. I didn't have Alzheimer's. I couldn't escape it, as the multiple leaflets in my hand readily reminded.

Life goes on, no matter how many tears are shed. Time can't be paused for convenience... unfortunately.

I know there's something wrong, but I'm not sure what. I know that every morning I get up, I take 12 tablets, but I don't know what for. I got up this morning and got dressed, only to be told it was the middle of the night. I know it's a day in the week, but I don't know which one. I know I have children, but I'm not sure who they are. I know a lot of things – vaguely - but I don't know why or when or how or who.

One day I'm in the car, my wife is driving. I know there are suitcases in the boot, but I don't know of their contents. I drift asleep. When I wake up, she gets me out of the passenger seat and tells me we are going for a walk on the beach. She says it in such a way that sounds like I should know the beach.

I untie my laces and take off my socks and carefully place them by the wall. I walk to the shore and let the gentle water swish over my toes. We, my wife and I, walk for a time before coming to some rocks.

I'm instructed that we are going to have a rest here before returning to the car. I take a minute to look around and try and comprehend where we are. In the distance, to my left, I see a small white cottage with a green door - it seems nice. I also see a church with a big spire, a few houses, a post office and a harbour.

Nothing recalls any memories; maybe I've never been here before.

I ask my wife to see if I should know this place and she responds saying that I once knew it very well. I don't understand, it all seems so unfamiliar.

I catch eye contact with her again. A pleading expression drowns her face; she wants me to remember, but I can't. Her eyes flicker away from mine and I see the water glisten in their corners as it proceeds to leave a shimmering trail down her cheek.

This place I'm in, I know it's meant to mean a lot to me, but I don't know why.

Anna Finlay

Y12