



FLAGSHIP

GLOBALEXPERIENCESMAGAZINE

2023

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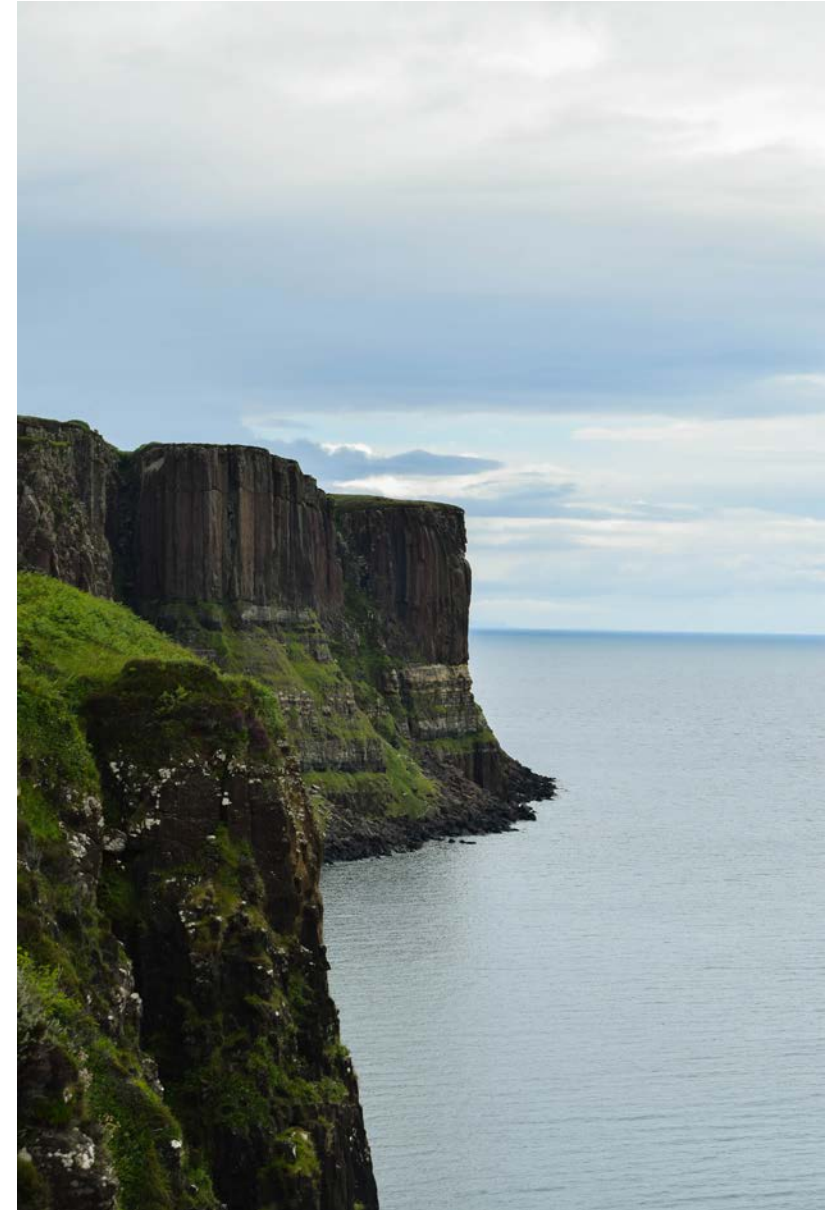
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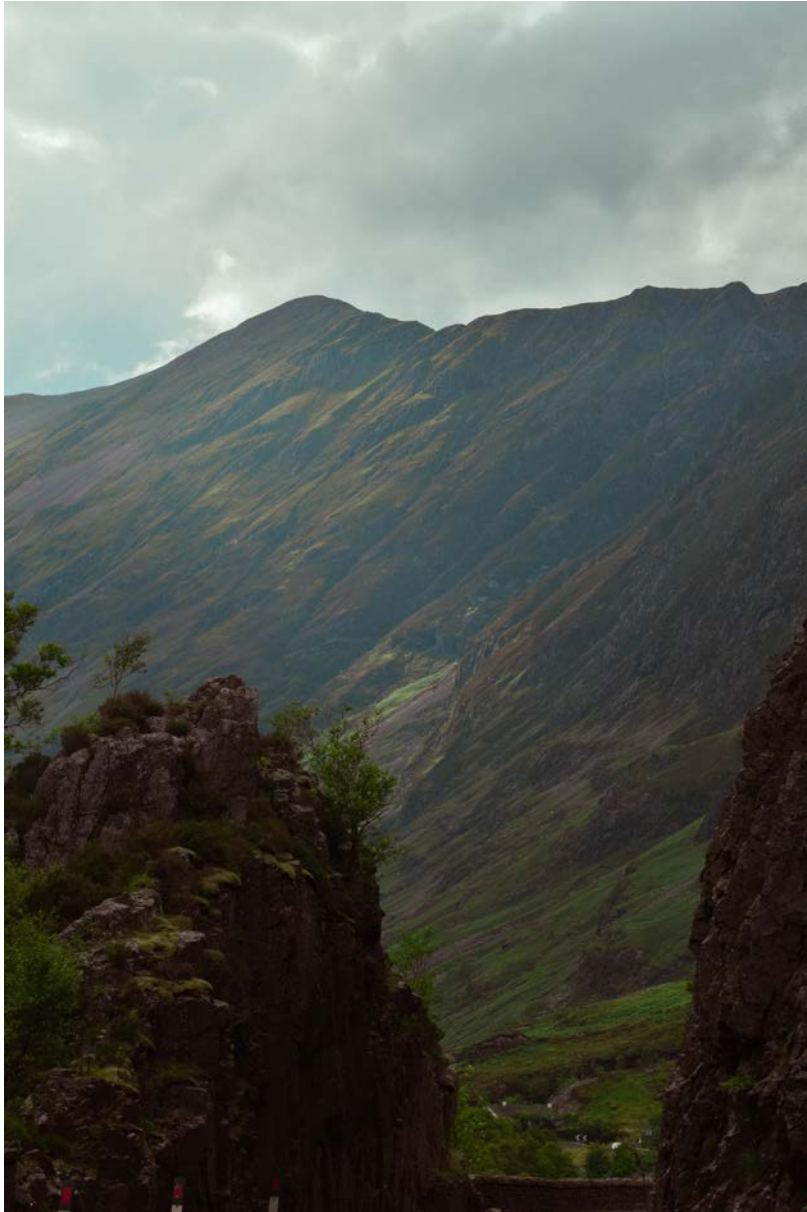
**Kilted**

Kaitlyn McHale

Taken in Isle of Skye, Scotland

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Lightside

Kaitlyn McHale

Taken in Glencoe, Scotland

CLIFFSIDE

Calli Lambard

When we arrived at the Cliffs of Moher, we were faced with a white wall. Not a literal wall, but a wall of fog so pure white that you couldn't see past it. I'd seen pictures of the cliffs before—they were what drew me to Ireland—but I couldn't imagine them here at all. I immediately texted friends and family back home, near tears. They all joked about not walking off the side of the invisible cliff edge. Enough people had done that, apparently, that there were strong railings quite a few feet away from the edge to prevent such mistakes.

I had been optimistic as our bus climbed the Irish hills. As per usual, we were all nauseous courtesy of the bumpy roads and sharp curves. Through our study abroad program, we took a field trip each weekend, and plenty of Dramamine was passed around the bus each time. Usually, the sights we saw were worth the nausea. Today, as we climbed higher along the twisting roads, the air around the bus became less and less clear. The fog rose off the soft grass slowly, reminding me of Halloween smoke effects.

Initially, I was having some trouble adjusting to Ireland. On the one hand, it was fine: I made friends, enjoyed classes, and loved the beautiful city. I knew it would be difficult for me to adapt to a new place, but I hadn't expected that the dread would be so all-consuming. Each night after class when I returned to our dingy lodgings, I found myself staring at the wall checking for spiders and wishing I were home.

Enjoying the beauty of Ireland was the only reprieve. I got swept up in the rolling fields with cows and small sheep, and I fell in love with the old architecture of Galway. Everything there felt so filled with history and life. The buildings were colorful, and the streets were winding. I kept

discovering new restaurants or sweater shops around every turn. When I was out enjoying what Ireland had to offer, I felt peace.

Seeing as the Cliffs of Moher were my top interest, I had been looking forward to this particular trip for weeks.

But here I was, standing in front of a blank wall. You couldn't even see a bit out into the ocean, like nothing was there at all. It was depressing to say the least. We had two hours of free time at the cliffs, so a few friends and I climbed the paths, hoping that another section of the cliffs might be visible. With each step the fog remained unmoving, and the dread weighed down on me. Someone dubbed them "the Cliffs of Less," and everyone chuckled, but I just felt hollow.

It's hard to describe the feeling that settled in my stomach when I finally resigned myself to not getting to see the cliffs. For a moment, it felt as if my entire six-hour plane ride had been for nothing, like nothing I had experienced in the past three weeks could even compare to the loss of this sight. It was an exaggeration, to be sure, but it felt like the hardships I'd gone through just weren't worth it. Finally, the bad things outweighed the good.

I finally decided to sit down on the steps and eat my lunch. It wasn't very good; my last remaining vegetables had gone bad before I could use them, so my sandwich was sparse. Even though I'd packed my favorite chips, they didn't offer much comfort. One thing did, though: a dairy milk mint crisp chocolate bar. It was like a crunch bar, but with even more crackle and a lovely note of mint. I took a small bite to take the edge off. I knew I'd need the rest for the depressing bus ride home.

For some reason, not being able to see the cliffs felt heavier than it should have been. There was one more weekend on the trip, so there was the possibility that I could find my way back for a second chance, and I'd done plenty of amazing things in my month in Ireland already. Losing this wouldn't make it all for naught. Still, on a trip filled with things that didn't fulfill me as much as I'd hoped, this was the icing on the cake.

One of my friends, Miles, sat down next to me. He was pretty down, too. Somehow, I was near tears but also hysterical laughter. We tried to talk about other things, but it was difficult when the blank wall stared back at us. We contemplated going to the gift shop where, at the very least, we could look at stunning images of the cliffs on postcards.

Someone called us over from the cliffside and announced that the fog was lifting. A few people got up to look, but I didn't believe them, taking another bite of my chocolate instead. I almost didn't want the cliffs to come out; it was

more fun to wallow in my misery.

Miles turned to me from the cliffside, a wild look on his face.

"You can see them," he said. "For real."

Still skeptical, I packed up my lunch and made my way over.

And there it was, a little bit of cliff peeking out behind the clouds. It was beautiful, but it wasn't the sprawling beauties I'd seen online and in movies. The grass in front of us was impossibly green, and the gray clouds that still lingered put a dark film over the ocean. At first, all I could see was the outcropping of the cliff, but more slowly appeared.

I took constant pictures just in case the fog returned and that was my only glimpse. I couldn't risk taking my eyes off it. Every few minutes, the cliff would become a bit clearer and I would take a new round of photos, in case this was the clearest they would be. You could make a stop motion animation with the photos I took, the cliff slowly revealing itself in front of me. The fog hadn't lifted anywhere else, just in this spot. Suddenly, I was okay with this being all I saw. I had a hunch things would change, but I focused on being grateful for what I had.

"The world is beautiful!" I shouted.

Miles narrowed his eyes. "That was a really quick turn around."

I shrugged. "I do that." My moods tended to shift quickly, but their flexibility became all the more obvious during my time in Ireland. With my anxieties and emotions heightened, I was more prone to quick mood swings. In that moment, I think I was just so euphoric at the thought of actually getting to see my dream destination that I let loose.

From there, we walked all along the cliffs. When viewed head-on, the cliffs were beautiful, but it was even more rewarding to explore their curves. From each angle, something new became visible. Our starting point seemed so far away as we walked, and the cliffs became more visible.

I don't remember everything we talked about. I think remarking about how beautiful everything was and how lucky we were that things cleared up was all we could bear. We'd seen some cliffs the previous weekend on the Aran Island of Inis Mór, and they had beautiful views of the island.

We also biked up to an ancient fort known as Dún Aonghasa. It was mostly uphill the entire way, and it was beyond tiring, but the view was so worth it. I could turn around and see the paths I had ridden, and they seemed so far away. The ocean was spectacularly blue, crashing against the cliffs below. It was crazy to think that, when a foreign army closed

in on the fort, there was nowhere else to go but off the cliff. Those cliffs, though, were nothing compared to these.

I can't imagine the forces necessary to create the Cliffs of Moher. I almost felt lucky that they had been shrouded in fog; I liked that they had revealed themselves slowly. Even now, as we walked the long paths around the cliffs, the fog hadn't completely lifted. Some of their mystery remained.

After we'd had our fill of the trails along the cliffs, my friends and I headed back to the gift shops. I wandered around alone, determined to shop quickly so I could get one last look at the cliffs before we were set to leave. I wanted a moment with them alone, where someone wasn't chattering away or complaining about how small the path was.

I went as quickly as I could, picking up postcards and a pin for my backpack along the way. Then, I returned to the cliffs alone.

I'd found that being alone was my favorite way to experience things in Ireland. Before, I never enjoyed being in places on my own. It's always been hard for me to explore by myself. I'd get embarrassed looking around or be too afraid to ask for help if I didn't know how something worked. Here, each time I ventured out alone, I was filled with pride at the fact that I was doing it at all.

I felt most at home on these journeys, too. I struggle with home—not the physical place or my family, but with the feeling of being safe at home. Our on-campus housing in Galway did not give me that warm, loving feeling I craved. Strangely, I found that feeling walking the streets of Galway, as though the city had opened its arms to me.

I felt comfortable and supported among all the history and art and beauty, like there was a place for me. I saw things more clearly when I was alone. The little houses were so beautiful, so welcoming. I could imagine living in one, present and future stretching out to meet one another. Alone, I had the time to enjoy experiencing things.

That's how it felt at the cliffs.

I was filled with their wonder along with my own feelings of worry. I realized I would likely never see them again, and I missed the cliffs before I even left. That kept happening to me; I missed Galway throughout my time there. I wanted to go to my physical home so badly; I was tired of living out of a suitcase, but I also wanted to experience everything fully.

Every time I thought about the fact that all these moments were fleeting, I started to panic a little. I found myself standing in one spot in front of the cliffs, really trying to soak it all in. There were so many moments

where things felt so big, so important. I had no way to collect them all and save them for later.

There was one night, where my friends and I went to a traditional storytelling session followed by traditional music, that I think I came close to collecting a moment. The small second floor of the bar was crowded, people packing in to have a chance to listen to the music. An old man joined the musicians, someone who my friends told me hadn't been there the week before. At first he just sat there and sang along, and it seemed that the group of three women in their thirties sitting next to him was his family. They had special seats near him, and they kept taking videos of him, pride shining bright on their faces.

One of the musicians handed him a guitar, and he started to play "Can't Help Falling in Love." Sound surrounded me, something I hadn't expected. The entire crowd had begun to sing too. It was warm and people were crying, but we sang the entire song together. I took a video, not to post or share but just for myself. I wanted to be able to watch it back and feel the warmth and support I felt in the song. The video still brings me right back to that moment.

The thing is, all of the magic of the cliffs comes from being faced with them directly. Seeing the cliffs once the fog had completely lifted only enhanced their magic more. The sky was so clear, just a brilliant summer day. The cliffs unfolded before me like an accordion. We had explored those curves earlier, but from here, they folded in on each other and out to sea. There was no way to capture this image on my phone or in my head.

I was happy to spot Miles walking up to me, who we'd lost somewhere along the way when he stopped at a food truck for a hot dog, but he made his way back to my exact spot somehow. The hot dog was good, apparently. We leaned on the railing and looked out at the cliffs together. A busker nearby played an accordion.

"It's crazy to think we might never see this again," he said.

I sighed. "I can't imagine never experiencing this again. I'm just glad the cliffs came out from the fog, though. I was worried we wouldn't see them."

Miles laughed. "Yeah, I could tell."

"I probably need to be medicated," I said, laughing too.

"Yeah, man. That might help." Understatement of the century.

The whole trip had brought out things in me that I hadn't realized before. I got out of my comfort zone and learned I could have fun there, but then I also found my limits. There were many, and they were powerful. My mood swing by the cliffs earlier was only further evidence of that. Getting out of my comfort zone was fun, but discovering my limits was decidedly not.

I didn't find myself regretting any of it, though. These were lessons I needed to learn, and I was, at least, grateful for what they taught me.

Conversation somehow turned to our girlfriends. I honestly only remember snippets of our conversation by the cliffs that day; I was far too wrapped up in their silent beauty to fully remember anything.

"My girlfriend's still out in California," he said, "but it'd be nice to take her here someday."

I nodded. "I get it. My girlfriend is looking at grad schools, and I kind of want to make her come out here."

"It'd be nice to live out here, get away from it all."

Things did seem simpler here. I felt closer to nature here, closer to a slower and more deliberate way of life. There was something so simple yet essential bottled up in the flight of the sea birds swooping in and out of the cliffside. They moved in a circular motion, white shapes soaring swiftly above the sea. I could have stood there forever and just watched them.

"I don't want to go to grad school," I said, "but I would if it would help me live here."

Miles nodded. "I get that."

"This trip has been harder than I thought," I admitted.

He laughed. "Tell me about it."

Miles got Covid on the first or second day here. It meant that he missed a week of classes, a week to get acclimated to the city. I hadn't really gotten to spend much time with him until now, which had been disappointing. At least we were here now, talking together along the cliffside.

He sighed. "This can't be the last time I see this."

I nodded. In the moment, it felt like I'd have to come back, like there wasn't a possibility that I wouldn't make my way back to Ireland. But I knew I was lucky to be here at all.

I looked at my phone. "It's almost time to get back to the bus."

"Getting left behind here wouldn't be so bad, I could pitch a tent right there," Miles said, pointing to a flat spot just beyond the safety railings. "Can you imagine waking up to this?"

I breathed out, long and slow. "It wouldn't be so bad."

"We should go," he said.

"Okay. One last look."

We both took a deep breath in, trying to soak everything up. I looked out at the cliffs and the brilliant blue sky and was overcome by a feeling of loss.

How could I know if I would feel like this again? Was it possible for the rest of the trip to feel this good, or would nothing compare? Had I reached the peak?

I looked at the birds again and thought about how amazing it must feel to swoop between these cliffs searching for fish to catch. I thought about what it'd be like to live in one of the beautiful places I'd seen so far, what it'd be like for this to be normal. If you could feel something divine in nature, this was it. Something so big that it affirmed the existence of something bigger, a system of animals and plants and water and air that depended on each other. I couldn't hold all of it in my body. I felt too small for all these emotions, too small for this understanding.

With a deep breath, we seared the image of the cliffs into our minds. We turned around and didn't look back. I was scared that if I looked again, I'd be rooted to the spot, drawn away by mystical sirens in the sea.

We walked back to the bus with a better understanding of each other, I think. That's the power of beautiful things; they can bring people together. Everyone piled back on the bus, sharing stories of relief. We all felt extra grateful to have glimpsed the cliffs that I put in my headphones and looked out the window.

We passed rolling hills and farms and a group of women having a garden party on their front lawn. They lived on a main road, sure, but they were surrounded by beautiful mountains and green, green grass. They danced to unheard music, their hips moving like an Irish road.

It all felt important in a way I couldn't quite articulate. Things felt difficult, but they also felt special. Joy lay in the small things, in the checkered pattern of the table of the garden party, in the sea birds on the cliff, in the trinkets in the gift shop. If I could, I would have stopped time and collected all these things, gems to line my pockets with. I think, then, I would have felt full.

Acropolis of Athens

Kara Boub

Taken in Athens, Greece





Buttercups
Kaitlyn McHale

Taken in Glencoe, Scotland

THE THINGS INSIDE A LUGGAGE

Jena Lui

The Scots tell me about the Kelpies on a bus ride.
 By the window,
 I am falling asleep,
 falling in love,
 falling down to new ground on a flight.
 You think horse,
 I think cautionary tales and never falling for temptations.

On this bus, I was a stranger to the Kelpies and their
 shapeshifting, unable to touch them or else my flesh
 becomes theirs.

But I too am becoming a shapeshifter in Scotland.

I fell into Scotland without my belongings.
 Seven hours to Dublin,
 another hour to a union of highlands, midlands, lowlands.
 Everything is new, touched by Scotland.

It does not mean I am not scared.
 Before arrival, we are cautioned—
 I'll stay away from people with religious signs

because I feared the conspiracists from America.
I'll stay away from men with shoeboxes to sell things at night
because I feared that they will sell me drugs.
I'll stay away from people asking for money
because I feared the same men that mugged my grandpa in New York City.

The world becomes bigger than what my hands can touch.
I have known the America I was born into and the
China that my parents told me about.
I am loud laughter during conversations with other Americans.
I am praying to my grandparents at their altar with incense.
I have bold American audacity
and the Chinese pride in family and community.

My mental compass told me to follow the crowd, and I'd be alright.
I followed it, lost my baggage,
and gave my foreign identity away to the customer service.

It didn't help that I could only count the Asians around me
in just two fingerful hands.
It didn't help that I was still loud in my normal voice.
The Scots spoke in whispers.
It didn't help that my Cantonese had no place in this country,
nor could my ears access the Scottish tongue.
It didn't help that part of me missed big portions of food,
but I wasn't here for just food—
just a feeling of home.

I molded this place in my mind as haggis,
fish and chips, and the bag pipes.
By the time I got my bags back from a one-man operating delivery service,
I knew Scotland as dogs without leashes,
cobblestone roads, golf's origin,

uneven steps on preserved history, tartan pride,
a happy hangman lurking in his tower,
the IRN BRU they praised,
the hope to not forget my umbrella or coat,
a night at the bar with the best friends I never thought I'd have,
the way Tunnock's tea cakes melted in my mouth.
And the way the present has given away its past.

These are people with pride.
They welcome us with homey food and their stories.
They are humor wrapped around some dirty joke.
They see magic beyond witchery,
sending myths and legends down to their descendants.
Nessie will find her peace, knowing she will never be forgotten.

I gave my first kiss to my new self on a public train in Scotland.
I am bold, a navigation system transcended.
There are days, I use my phone a little less,
focusing on every uneven step I take up Wallace Monument.
Google Maps, I know where I am going now.

I look back at where I first started,
a girl without her luggage.
I look back at my home in America
and see what it has missed when I packed my bags.
When I must begin packing my bags back home,
I'll drop the entitlement,
the warning signs of being a tourist,
but I'll bring back stories:

How the Abertarff House serves as a memory
for Inverness's stinky past.
How dogs still feel the trauma on train rides
because of their past in dogfights.

How a man gave his food away to the old man on the streets
who I saw in the same clothes every day.
How stores close earlier than in America
to give its workers a life outside their jobs.
How the joy in everyone's eyes lit up more than the lights in the bar.
How plastic bagless stores me ans the environment can be saved.
How three men watched over me and my friend
when we were approached by a strange man at night.
And here I let my new life in Scotland begin to be made.

Say "cheers" to the waiter in a kilt
because that is a sincere form of thanks.
Let gestures be a choice of words too.
Find adventure on the top deck of the buses.
Avoid the highland cows during mating season.
Join a group dance during the ceilidh to celebrate good times.
Roam around libraries with Scottish literature.
Get lost before feeling found by another trail,
I'll keep going.

I'm not a traveler anymore, not an explorer of a world so vast,
but I am someone who has touch the land of Scotland,
hugged their childhood by hugging the Gruffalo statue,
cleansed my breath while sitting on a log,
felt the way nature touched the soul.
I was homesick at first.
But with every morsal of experience I inhaled,
I found myself to be my real home.



Royalty

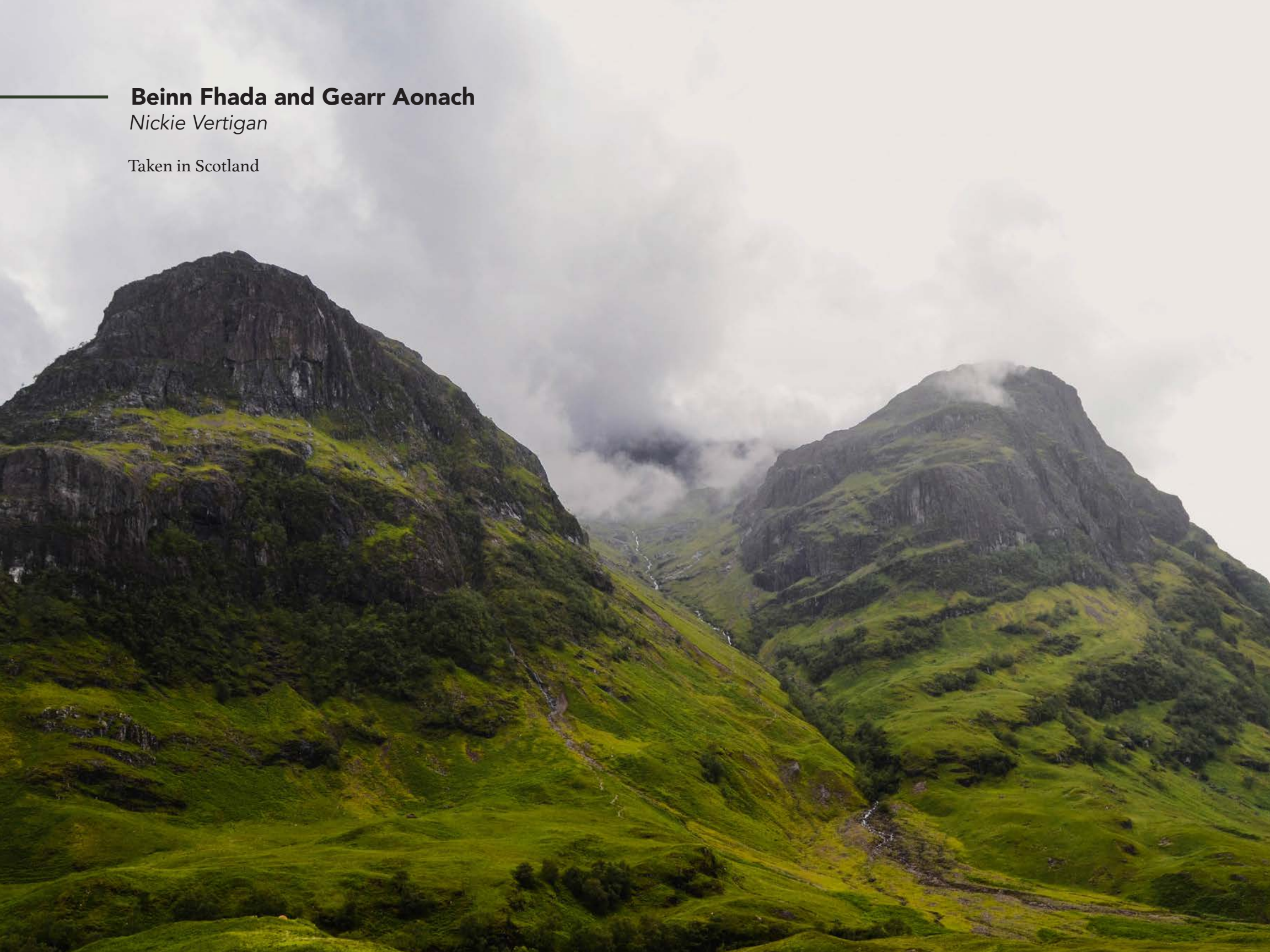
Caitlin Johannes

Taken in London, United Kingdom

Beinn Fhada and Gearr Aonach

Nickie Vertigan

Taken in Scotland



LONGITUDE: 5.447427 / LATITUDE: 43.529742

Gabrielle Grinaway

At home street maps lineup with creased palms.
Spill into coleslaw; soak placemats at Triplets Diner.
Flow along twenty-two in river rafts on the Delaware.

Parental figures smack tree sap between chapped lips.
Our language is tongue-biting, mopped-licking before utterance.
Knowledge soil leaches off rubber soles;
 transportation wears down memory.
Here, streets don't match, they zig-zag. Dodge brick and mortar off Cours Mirabeau.
Meet for coffee at Le Darius and eat spoonfuls of salt over dirtied ashtrays.
It is bitterly-grounded coffee-bean soil staining enamel
 to be remembered when I return home.

Cobblestone musings when vodka rocks burn my throat.
See fountain water seepage over cherries burning in moonlight.
Coated in cigarette smoke and sooted tar.

Glow, embers soaked in jus de cerise, pits tucked in cheeks.
Spit on street corners, piss-stained.
Grounded in dirt and glass bottles, splintered underfoot.
Follow the streets home. Palms crack. Coal pressurized.



The Old and New *Nickie Vertigan*

Taken in Scotland

Rolling Green Hills

Joy Tushek

Taken in Scotland



A QUIET CORONA NIGHT IN SCOTLAND

Cara Weaver

It's a quiet Friday night,
 bar the footsteps seeping through the ceiling.
They are the mark of students running,
 having fun,
 getting ready,
 to take advantage of being in a new place.
They are doing everything
 that I am not allowed to do.

I am stuck in my room.
What once felt so big in comparison to the ones back home
 now shrinks around me,
 confining me.
I am reminded just how little space I have.

10 days:
 6 down,
 4 to go.

But I am not so sure I will survive this one.

My phone buzzes on top of my duvet,
 buried beneath a tossed sweatshirt.
It is my boyfriend's,
 and I brought it for comfort,
 but it no longer smells like him.
It no longer smells like anything resembling home.

I talk to him that night,
 followed by my mom,
 then my sister.
Yet the loneliness I feel
 has rooted too deeply to be dug up,
 to be resurfaced,
 and rid of.

I write poetry,
 and watch Friends.
Again,
 because it feels normal.

I try not to think
 about the country right outside my window,
 the one that I have still yet to explore.

Cloudy Skies and Clear Waters

Joy Tushek

Taken in Scotland



THE JOURNEY TO HOGWARTS

Megan Kelly

If there's one thing I remember most clearly about my short trip to London, it's the feeling it gave me. When I look back at the photos I took during those two days, I'm reminded of the city's streets, the architecture, and the weather we endured. I don't need any photos to recall the feeling though. That, I think, will stick with me for years—maybe my whole life. I will carry that feeling with me across the stage at graduation and into the so-called real world; it sits tucked next to my heart in its own chest pocket, ready to be drawn out and spread across my skin like a suit of armor.

Toward the end of my semester abroad, two of my friends and I took a two-day trip to London. It was our last side adventure together before we had to go back home to the states, so we knew we had to make it really count. We planned our days out ahead of time. For the first day, we bought tickets for a hop-on hop-off bus tour around the city, the famous Madame Tussauds wax museum, and the Shrek Adventure next to the London Eye, of all things. For the second day, I got tickets to the Harry Potter Studio Tour at Warner Brothers Studio with my friend who was studying in London for the semester. I was excited to see the sets, props, and costumes from the series that owned so much of my teenage years, but I was even more excited to see her.

The only problem was that the friends who I had been traveling with didn't have tickets for the tour. They instead planned to visit other landmarks in London that we didn't have time for the previous day. This meant that I would have to get to the studio—or wherever my London friend and I decided to meet—by myself. I'd never traveled anywhere by myself, not really. I'd always had at least one of my travel friends with me. I hadn't even gone to study abroad in Scotland by myself.

The night before, I flitted around the Airbnb we were staying in—a small apartment-style living space in the attic of a shared building with a slanted ceiling that made me duck on the walk to and from the bathroom—packing and looking at the tube lines on Google Maps. My heart was racing, and my stomach was turning sour with the thought of the following morning. My London friend wasn't answering her phone (at least not as quickly as my anxiety was begging her to), I realized we needed to take the tube, the train, and a bus, I was confused about the stations (is London Euston the same station as Euston Square?), and I had to bring my packed backpack with me because I was flying back to Scotland that afternoon.

After what felt like the longest hour of my life, we figured out that we would meet at Euston Square in order to take the train to Watford Junction, which had the shuttle bus to the studio. (Thanks to Google Maps, I learned that London Euston was in fact a different place than Euston Square.) That meant that I just had to take the tube with one line switch by myself.

I could do that. Right?

Sleep was futile that night. I was worried about everything; there wasn't a single part of the day that I wasn't nervous about going wrong. What if I got on the wrong tube line? What if I couldn't find my London friend? What if we couldn't find the shuttle bus? What if the tickets to the tour didn't work? What if I couldn't find my travel friends afterward? What if we missed our flight? When my alarm went off bright and early, I was up in an instant with an erratic heart, a headache, and bags under my eyes.

My travel friends slept while I dressed for the day, turned my bed back into a couch, and triple-checked that I hadn't left anything behind. I texted my London friend as a final step before heading out.

**I'm getting ready to leave now, I'm gonna go to London Euston,
on google maps it says it's a 6 min walk from Euston Square so
I'll just hang in that area until you text, let me know when
you're leaving/getting there/where you are to meet up!**

Sixteen minutes went by before she answered, and each one left me checking my phone and rubbing the sweat off my palms. Finally, she soothed all my worries with a response.

Word!! I'm gonna leave shortly :)

Well, maybe not *all* my worries... shouldn't she have left already? I tried to remind myself that she'd been studying in London for three months, and she knew the city better than I did. Surely she'd be fine. I didn't respond, just

continued on my way. My rides on the tube had gone fine so far; I'd managed to get on the right trains and switch to the right line. All I had to do was get to Euston Square, and then my London friend would be there, and I'd have her as a guide for the rest of it. I could do this. I *was* doing this.

My phone lit up with another text from my London friend twenty minutes later.

**Hey! I just missed my train and usually there are trains
every few minutes but this won't come until 10 mins
I'll be a bit late sorry!**

Shit. I read the text over and over, trying to figure out if I was reading it wrong. She couldn't have missed her train. If she missed her train, then what was I supposed to do? I read it again, but it didn't change. She missed her train, and she was going to be late to our meeting point. Late, but she'd still be there. Late was okay, late was manageable. Late meant I had to slow down my walking pace to get to Euston Square and sit there for a bit longer. That's all. We would still make the 9:24 train to Watford Junction.

Euston Square was not a six-minute walk from London Euston. London Euston was the underground train, and Euston Square was the overground train, but they were in the same building. I found a bench outside the station by a Pret A Manger and texted her that I'd be there waiting. A woman next to me lit a cigarette. The wind carried each puff of smoke right into my face, but I sat there dutifully.

Out of an irrational fear that they'd disappeared, I checked the tickets on my phone. I read the fine print and my stomach dropped. Aim to arrive 20 minutes before your entry time. Our entry time was 10:00, and even by catching the 9:24 train we wouldn't get to the studio until at least 10 on the dot. Why hadn't I read that yesterday? Why hadn't we planned more of a time buffer? I texted my friend again, and we both tried to convince one another that as long as we got there within a few minutes of our entry time, they had to let us in. It would be fine. She texted again.

GRRR each stop the train is being held for red signals

Well, fuck.

At that point, it was 9:07 and I felt in my guts that she wasn't going to make it in time for the 9:24 train. There was no way, not if she wasn't even on her train to Euston Square yet. So, we made the decision to just meet at the studio. Though we were never actually together, we were officially splitting up. Somehow, it felt like a huge change. I was struck then with the realization that I'd never used the overground train in London, I'd never been in this station, and I didn't even know if my Oyster Card would work or if I needed to get a ticket first.

It was 9:10.

I stood up, sucked in a steadying breath, and walked inside. The station was huge. There was a wall full of giant screens with train times, platforms, and destinations on it in big gold, quickly changing letters. God, why were there so many? I made my way through the mass of people to find mine. Birmingham... Manchester... Liverpool... Stafford...

When I finally found my train, I thought that the words "Watford Junction" had never looked so glorious. 9:24 was my favorite time because it was there, and it was beautiful. Platform 10, the screen told me, I just needed to find Platform 10. Thankfully, the station was clearly organized and labeled (I could kiss whoever was responsible), and so finding the sign with a giant arrow that said Platform 10 was easy. In fact, it was right below the departure board. But did I need to buy a train ticket?

Something that I hate doing is talking to strangers. I'm just no good at it, and it's never felt comfortable or easy. I'll avoid eye contact with talkative looking strangers, google things that I know at least twelve people on the street around me know the answer to. Standing there in the heart of the train station with only ten minutes until my train was departing, I knew that I had no choice but to ask someone for help. I glanced around, spotted a window for buying tickets, and made my way towards it with no hesitation. If there's one thing that will trump my anxiety of talking to strangers, it's my anxiety of being late.

"Hi, I need to get on the 9:24 train to Watford Junction, do I need to buy a ticket or will my Oyster card work?"

I felt stupid as I asked it. I could feel my face heat up. Everyone here on this Wednesday morning was on a mission and knew how to get where they were going, and here I was clueless about something as basic as how train tickets worked. I hoped the lady working at the window took my American accent as explanation enough and brushed past it. Luckily, she did—or maybe my question wasn't as crazy or stupid as I thought—and she told me kindly that my Oyster card would work. Thank God. I thanked her and hurried off in the direction of Platform 10.

Though she told me it would work, I still held my breath as I placed my Oyster card on the scanner and waited for the small mechanical doors to open and let me pass through. The green that glowed from the machine as the doors slid open seemed to bathe the entire hallway in a neon blessing. I could see Platform 10, and as I made my way towards it, I only let one brief joke about Platform 9 ³/₄ pass through my mind. As I made my way onto the train and sat in the first open seat I could find, I checked my phone one more

time to see if my friend had arrived by some miracle and would make this train. Instead, I found messages confirming she would have to catch the 9:49 train instead, and that she'd meet me at the studio. She said she might not get there until 10:30, and she hoped they'd still let her in. I promised that I'd vouch for her as soon as I got there.

The train to Watford Junction was equal parts blissful and stressful. I was starting to feel proud of myself for making it this far on my own, all while the fact that I was on my way to yet another train station I was unfamiliar with hung over my head like a storm cloud. There was supposed to be a shuttle bus to take anyone with tickets to the studio, but the day had already been so stressful I started looking into how much an Uber would cost instead, because fuck that. Wandering around outside a train station trying to find one specific bus sounded like hell.

By the time the train reached the station, I had the Uber app pulled up on my phone, ready to put in the studio's address and hit the order button, but I ended up not needing it at all. By some stroke of cosmic karma-induced luck, the Harry Potter studio shuttle bus was sitting directly outside the exit. I knew it was the right bus because it had a giant still of Daniel Radcliffe as Harry Potter taking up the entire side that was visible to me, not to mention I could already see two people in Hogwarts robes and Gryffindor scarves making their way towards it. By God, I could have thrown my bag to the ground and done a celebratory dance right then and there—my journey was over. All I had to do was board this bus, and I would be delivered right to the studio.

I was on a high for the rest of my solo journey. I sat back and relaxed and watched the video of the cast talking about the sets and props that played on the screens at the front of the bus. I joked with the security guard who had to search my overstuffed, Russian-doll backpack and the bags inside it as well. I found a desk with people behind it, walked right up without a second thought, and explained that my friend was running late due to the trains being delayed.

"Will she still be able to get in even though our tickets are for 10:00?"

"Of course," one of the women said, smiling. "The tickets allow entry for the entire day."

I thanked her and walked away with a smile, though I was really wondering why the fuck there's a time slot on the ticket with instructions to arrive twenty minutes early if they're good for the whole day. I texted my friend the good news and made my way into the main area of the entrance. Instantly, I noticed two things: the giant dragon figure that was hanging over the entire room, and

a Starbucks. I went on to have one of the best thirty minutes I've ever had, and I did absolutely nothing. With a coffee in hand, I found a table to sit at and wait.

Maybe all of this has seemed entirely anticlimactic. Maybe having to navigate one morning's worth of trains and talking to a few strangers all while in distress doesn't seem that life-changing or story-worthy to anyone else, and that's okay. For me, it was everything. That morning was power, it was independence, it was freedom. It was a breath I didn't know I'd been holding let go at last. My heart went on a Tower of Terror style elevator ride between my stomach and its rightful place in my chest, but I'd managed to carry on and find my way. I've never felt as trusting of myself than during that morning, and I've never felt as proud of myself as I did afterwards. If I could navigate London and its trains by myself, what couldn't I do? I felt like I was on top of the world.

Looking back, I've thought that it was ironic how I found myself confused and overwhelmed in a train station, nearly running late to my platform on my way to a Harry Potter exhibit of all places. My London friend missing her train felt like Hagrid dropping me off at King's Cross without telling me how to find Platform 9 ³/₄. But I'd figured it out, and I'd made it to Hogwarts anyway. All by myself.

So, when I look back at my time abroad and the trips I took with friends, London has a special place in my heart. London is where I really felt a change in myself for the first time, though I know that change had been building all semester. As dramatic or cheesy as it sounds, the me that flew back to Scotland later that day was a different me than the one that had flown to London just two days earlier. Though it felt like a curse at the time, I'm so glad that my travel friends made other plans, and that my London friend missed her train. I gained something priceless during that morning of anxiety-filled chaos. I was confident in a way I'd never felt before; I had a newfound sureness and a faith in myself. I respected myself and all that I was capable of, and that respect has lasted to this day.

I hope it will last forever.

Sorrentine Scenery

Krissy Moncelsi

Taken in Sorrento, Italy



GREEN IN SCOTLAND IS FOREVER

Cara Weaver

What I remember most about that morning is how green it was.

I remember the way each shade had its own section on the hill, blending together to create the illusion that the land went on forever. Then again, maybe it actually did.

Maybe forever actually existed in Scotland.

Sage

The base of the hill and the start of my journey up the trail are smothered in **sage**.

Grass mixes with the dirt and stones and who knows what else, but manages to look clean and prepared for my arrival. Everything feels intentional.

I listen to the birds chirp, ignoring my own panting as I climb higher. I watch the hue shift in the distance and grow excited to move to the next, but feel a pang of sadness at the thought of leaving sage behind.

I breathe in the air, crisp. There isn't even a touch of humidity and I wonder if the weather at home feels like this.

Has air always been this captivating?

Emerald

It looks edited, that is my first thought.

It is 5:30 AM in Stirling and I am standing on top of the first lookout point of

Dumyat Hill. I look out to the land below, the castle on the campus I currently call home to my right, even more mountains to my left. Directly in front of me is **emerald**.

The structures lose their shape as the green beneath them takes over. I picture it rising up the sides, conquering the artificial and returning everything to a state of nature.

I wonder if someone has painted each blade of grass in order for it to look the way it does, because it is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. The wind nips at me and I ignore it.

I've always loved the cold.

Forest

At the top, I can see other mountains, or maybe they're hills. They roll for miles, whispering enticing invitations to explore their **forest** depths.

They are backlit by the peeking sunrise, pronounced and dark.

They are unapologetic. They look untouched.

I have a new distaste for anything man-made.

Seaweed

I lower into a sitting position, noticing that tufts of grass riddle the dirt below me.

They're softer than I'm expecting, and I think of how different they are from other things sharing their **seaweed** color. No slime, or even dew, coats them.

I let myself be at peace in their presence.

It is the first gift I have given myself in a long time.

Fern

I brought flowers up the hill with me, and the stems stand out against the earth when I lay them down on it. I step back to observe, hoping that the roots will regrow, dig their way back into the soil and plant themselves once more.

Buying flowers has always been bittersweet.

I am hoping they can become a part of the land, stay here forever since I can't.

They stay still. They are stark in their **fern** hue. They look almost manufactured, but not in a way that feels wrong.

I think about that for a while.

Pear

I walk toward the other hills, hoping I never have to turn back.

They seem to keep going and going, so why shouldn't I?

There is something captivating about them, drawing me closer. I wonder who else has been in this position, who has experienced the earth up close.

The grass is a warmer tone now, **pear**, standing out against my black sneakers that trample over it. I feel bad, but there is no uncovered path to take.

I must crush some form of green in order to see more of it.

It makes me feel powerful in a way I don't enjoy.

Sage

The familiar tone greets me as I make my regretful return. **Sage** feels like home, even in a place this foreign.

I stop to take it in, hoping that I can impress the image into my brain.

I decide that I want to paint my future home this color.

I decide to make forever exist even when I return from Scotland.



Tree of Life

Courtney Smith

Taken in Mexico

Hairy Coo
Nickie Vertigan

Taken in Scotland





Barren

Courtney Smith

Taken in Mexico

WINE ON CAIS DA RIBEIRA

Syd Vincent

I read Dorian Gray
until I got drunk on port wine
and tonic water.
I paid —
I only had a 50 —
I felt bad.
They were busy enough,
but I handed her the bill.
I think her name was Isabel
but she wasn't speaking Portuguese.
What was her native country?

The Douro breeze kept me awake,
otherwise I would have passed out
on the wobbly table.

There was a guy selling sunglasses,
weaving between tables.
I put on my own so he wouldn't bother me.

An American family sat next to me
and they laughed along
with the munch of their fries.
Two French women on the other side
complaining about their food being late.
They had to be somewhere to be
at 3pm — 15h if you're European
and it makes sense.
Why sit down at a busy restaurant
if you have to be somewhere?
Insufferable retirees.

Isabel came back with two 20s
and a euro.
I love how cheap Portugal is.
I used one of the 20s to pay for
my laundry later.
A pair of clean jeans at dinner,

what is better?



Florence From Beneath
Krissy Monclesi

Taken in Florence, Italy

FOR THE LAST DAYS WHERE YOU BELONG

Grace Shelton

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday

Stay at Residencia Campus del Mar near Barceloneta Beach. See the sunrise every morning. Take the yellow line from Barceloneta back to the Jaume I stop, before the rush, and stare at the metro map with your hands and arms blocking all exposed pockets. The city is a waffle. Each block forms a crisp, toasted square. Buy an overpriced chai latte at a tourist trap in El Born and beg to use the bathroom. These are the best days of your life.

Monday

Leave the hostel. The sunrise will be sometime around 5:30am, so make Elias come with you. He works at a restaurant in the El Prat airport from nine to five most days—he takes the purple line from Tetuán to Universitat, then the red line from Universitat to Plaça Espanya, then the airport shuttle from Plaça Espanya to there. He loves you. Make him use his day off to drag your stuff down Carrer de Girona and Carrer de Diputació. Turn right on Carrer de Bailén. Happiness awaits you in number 49, apartment 3/2. Go on. Let Elias's sister make you cow stomach soup.

Tuesday

Barcelona forms a giant grid, knife-sliced into manageable bites by Avinguda del Paral·lel. With the dot. You've become a regular in a writing group at a Belgian bar on that street. Don't wait around—take the purple line from Tetuán to Paral·lel with the dot and follow the avenue a little ways until you see the yellow “IMPRFCTO” sign. Catalogue every moment. Memorize the glint in Elias's eyes when he looks over at you. Drink some *Ladrón de Manzanas* and say *voy a pagar con tarjeta, por favor* when the bartender gives you your total in English. You'll need to take the purple line home before it closes at midnight.

Wednesday

Leave before Elias's sister wakes up, *con cuidado, ¿ya sabes?* Elias will already be at work. Take the yellow line from Girona to Alfons X, then walk Travassera de Dalt. There are a ton of good cafes on that street if you know where to find them, so buy a gourmet waffle and beg to use the bathroom. Biblioteca Jaume Fuster is at the end, and you have your own library card to access the WiFi for free. Waste some time. Wait for Elias to text you he's almost home before taking the green line from Lesseps to Passiege de Gràcia. It's three toasted blocks back to love from there.

Thursday, Friday, Saturday

Use the six purple line stops from Tetuán to Sant Martí as your meditation. Don't even look at your GPS; you don't need it. The city is yours to handle as you please, yours to drench in syrup and consume, sickly sweet. Biblioteca de Sant Martí has a sunroom and a hammock to read on, and you have a slightly problematic lesbian romance on your Kindle, so stick around there until Elias gets off. Smile at every text he sends you. He's at Plaça Espanya, now he's at Universitat, now he's at the Tetuán stop where the Bracafe is. He's tracing the map back to you.

Sunday

It's your birthday. Elias will take off to stay with you. Go to Mercadona and get the gummy candies in the blue package that says *Colours*—those are the good shit. Elias isn't going to get you a present, because he's paying rent in the center of a waffle-cut city *y bueno, no tienes que llevar más a tu casita*. The Ben and Jerry's Chunky Monkey ice cream in Barcelona has chocolate pieces shaped like bananas in it. Share a pint with Elias. When the sky goes dark, pull back the curtains on his apartment windows and watch the city lights paint the clouds burnt orange.

Monday

It's your last night in Barcelona. Miss your family, dread the flight, miss Elias, dread spending any longer in a place without air-conditioning. Turn left from the apartment entryway, take Carrer de Bailén to its first corner, and get Rooq, your favorite chicken restaurant, for lunch. You might feel the urge to get on the metro again at the Girona station. This is normal. You might want to take the purple line to Sagrada Família, then the blue line to Hospital Clinic. But don't. Instead, stare at the metro map with your arm blocking the pickpockets from your bag. You are leaving tomorrow. The city is dozens of perfect squares toasting in the summer sun. Get an ache in the pit of your stomach that you can't get rid of or comprehend, and then get a UTI. Consider them synonymous.



A Trio

Caitlin Johannes

Taken in Chester, United Kingdom

Kaitlyn McHale

was born and raised in Elysburg, PA. She is a senior at Susquehanna University with a double major in graphic design and psychology and a minor in art history. In her free time, she enjoys drawing, oil painting, and photography. After graduation, she is looking to put her design skills to work and earn a full-time job in the creative field as a graphic designer.

Calli DeSerio Lambard

is an environmental studies and creative writing dual major from the Philadelphia suburbs. Her fiction has appeared in RiverCraft and her nonfiction has appeared in The Daily Item and The Ginkgo. You'll probably find Calli crocheting, reading, or crying to a Phoebe Bridgers song in her free time.

Kara Boub

is a senior publishing and editing major with a double minor in French studies and creative writing. She is from Wyoming, Pennsylvania. Kara dreams of a career that allows her to travel and read books. She loves to attend concerts of her favorite musicians and scream her lungs out to every lyric.

Jena Lui

is an undergraduate from Susquehanna University studying creative writing and publishing and editing. She is a writer and editor for Susquehanna University's chapter of Her Campus. Additionally, she is an editor for Apprentice Writer and The Lit Mug. Her poetry can be found in Quarantine Literary, Omnivisum Press, and the Santa Fe Writers Project.

Caitlin Johannes

is a creative writing, publishing and editing double major with a minor in photography at Susquehanna University. She's from Long Island, New York. She's an active member on campus and works as a student assistant for the Office of Residence Life on campus. Caitlin's photography consists of creative visions of the world. Her photos have been published in an online exhibit, on-campus magazines, and she was chosen to be a part of on-campus competitions, showcases and exhibits in both high school and college. In her free time, she likes to browse bookstores, draw, watch movies and binge watch TV shows with her dog Charlie.

Nickie Vertigan

is a senior graphic design major with minors in photography, journalism, and digital content. During her four years at Susquehanna, she has been able to explore her passions for graphic design, photography, and journalism. When she's not doing design work, you can find her behind the camera chasing the action at sporting events or photographing nature. After graduation, Nickie is looking forward to heading into the design world and is looking forward to a lifelong career in the creative field.

Gabrielle Grinaway

is a poet from Poconos, Pennsylvania. Her recent work is grounded in place and what it comes to represent. She recently had poetry published in the literary magazine Moondial in 2022.

Joy Tushek

is an environmental studies major from Gettysburg, PA. Some of her absolute favorite types of photography are of animals and of landscapes. She hopes to one day visit all the National Parks in the United States and to travel to the United Kingdom and Ireland. She hopes to one day return to Scotland to visit the landmarks that she missed the first time.

Cara Weaver

is a current senior creative writing and publishing and editing major with a woman and gender studies minor at Susquehanna University from Baldwinsville, New York. She believes that everyone has a story and loves being a part of encouraging them to tell it. Cara studied abroad at the University of Stirling in Scotland in 2022 and captured the experience through poetry.

Megan Kelly

is a senior creative writing and publishing & editing double major from Bel Air, Maryland. While she favors writing fiction, her study abroad experience inspired personal growth and writing in all forms, including her featured piece, "The Journey to Hogwarts." She hopes to continue to feel inspired by and write about the world around her and the experiences it grants her.

Krissy Moncelsi

is a junior graphic design major with a photography minor. She's been taking photos since middle school—ever since her parents took her on her very first road trip. Over the years, she's traveled the country and even made it overseas, capturing photos along the way to preserve the beautiful memories of the places she gets to explore. This summer, she plans to travel to New Zealand and expand her cultural experiences even further across the globe before graduating from Susquehanna next spring.

Courtney Smith

is a senior triple major in publishing and editing, english-literature, and Spanish with an honors minor. She studied abroad in Mexico in the Spring of 2022, and it only proved to her more how much she loves to travel. She has plenty of places in mind for next trip, and she plans to let her love for travel take her around the globe.

Syd Vincent

is a creative writing and publishing and editing double major with a minor in International Studies at Susquehanna University, graduating in spring of 2023. She was born and raised in Poconos, Pennsylvania with two rowdy older brothers and spent plenty of time outdoors. She has been published in multiple magazines including the Oakland Arts Review and the Loomings Literary Journal, and was a featured writer in The Ethicist, an interfaith literary magazine. In her free time, she enjoys listening to The Backseat Lovers, watching horror movies, and spending time outside.

Grace Shelton

is a senior creative writing and Spanish major from Dover, Pennsylvania, where she gains inspiration from late nights and music played on a loop. Her work has appeared in The Lumiere Review, Rougarou, and Rivercraft, among others, and her first chapbook was published by Treehouse Editions in 2022. She spent this past summer in Barcelona, teaching a creative nonfiction course as part of Catnova's Abriendo Caminos program.

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Mexico — Scotland — Spain
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