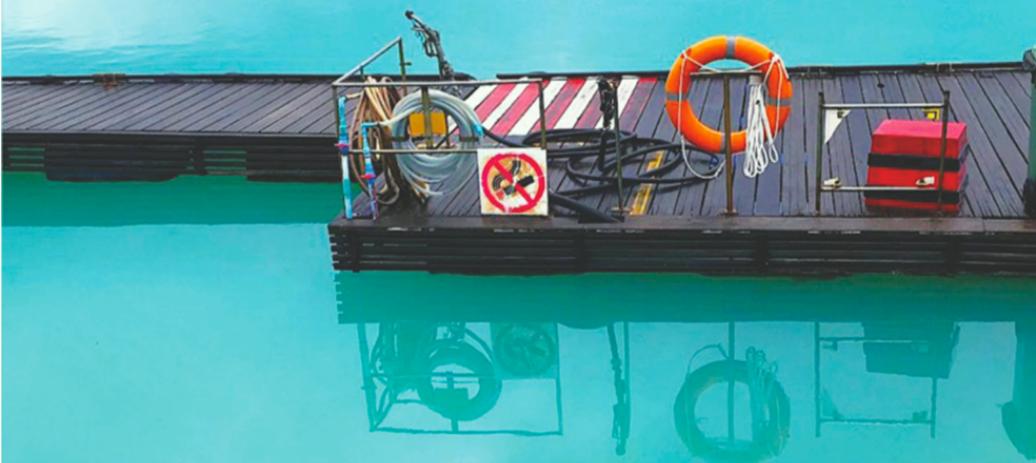


PREVIEW



UNSETTLED

aditi babel

u n s e t t l e d

a d i t i b a b e l

PREVIEW

disclaimer

Unsettled *by Aditi Babel*

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a selection of haikus (i)

#1 (I)

you overwhelm me
I will keep my cool; I am
spellbound but steady

#2 (Like)

our hearts are restless
we have both been parched for years
I am your first sip

#3 (You)

maybe it's too soon
but your lips are candy hearts
and I am starving

questions for a first date

what are the titles of the books on your shelf?

what do you think are your greatest flaws?

what do you do on the days you hate yourself?

or do you never feel that way at all?

if I fell for you:

would you fall with me too?

chemistry

I turned up the heat
to increase our collision frequency

I mixed in a catalyst
but you still don't know I exist

I want to bond with you
but I'm burning in your oxygen

where is home?

is it your birth place?

is it your city of residence?

is it your country of citizenship?

is it where you have spent

eight years of your life

in an immigrant bubble

in a city that never truly felt

like it belonged to you?

is it where Mom is from?

is it where Dad is from?

is it the language you speak?

I think
home is a feeling

I think
it is the overwhelming reminiscence
looking out of an airplane window
as you

d
e
s
c
e
n d

onto
land
you

have lived
and loved
on before

some leaves

some leaves

they are greener than others

some trees

they are taller than their mothers

but all seeds: round or square

photosynthesize the same air

some skies

they are lighter than others

some stars

they are brighter than their brothers

but all skies: night or day

rain and shine the same way

and we don't point our fingers
at the leaves; we don't curse at the sky
we do not ask them why they are as they are

we do not sit them down on dirty chairs
in detention rooms in crowded airports
and make them feel inferior;

no. we tell our children:

climb trees.

reach for the sky.

we accept strong wind and summer breeze;
why do we discriminate against our own species?

unsettled

growing up; the world was a tablecloth
upon which countries were set like place mats
and I played Musical Chairs around the dinner table

it feels strange that I did not find it strange
that 'first days' at new schools and changing bedrooms
transpired and elapsed like Leap Days

now I have been a resident of a
small English city for four years and
here even the strangers are familiar

I am settled and it is unsettling

I forget most days

that I traveled to twenty-six countries
before I was twenty

that I sat in class and ate cafeteria lunch
with people from sixty nations

that I learned about Apartheid
from my South-African literature teacher

that I studied Epistemology and devoted
my summative presentation

to questioning a concept that seemed
so complex to my restless mind:

“how do you know you’re *home*?”

(I never came to a conclusion)

((I got a 20/20 from my American examiner who
felt more at home in China than he did in California))

but when my friends talk about their travel plans
when they mention India, or Indonesia, or Israel
I remember in fragmented flashbacks:

that summer in Nepal when I was fifteen
we hiked the Annapurna trail and drank chai and
played Antakshari to bollywood songs with the sherpas

that spring break in Christchurch in 2011 before
driving around the New Zealand south islands when
we got caught in the midst of a 5.3 magnitude earthquake

that cross-country race in Kuala Lumpur before which
I ate breakfast omelettes with chopsticks with
my Japanese host family

that choir festival in Dhaka where we sang
in Bengali with school kids from London

that literature festival in Bali where I wrote
a poem with a Maltese poet about a money tree

that drama festival in Shanghai when I encountered
my first winter. we stayed at *Motel 368* without heating

that day we were stuck in school in China
the Air Pollution Index hit 612. “Hazardous”
I walked to the bus choking on air-borne carbon

my Arabic tutor in Dubai from Damascus
that boy in my homeroom who now lives in North Korea
my Armenian-Russian friend who studies in Australia

I don't know where *home* is. I do not know which place I liked best. people ask me if I felt sad to leave those schools behind: those people behind.

I have never known anything else.

my friends ask me if I will feel sad to leave them behind; if I will miss them when I move away.

I have never known anything else.

people ask:

“what's the most *exciting* thing you've ever done?”

I don't know what to say. I do not know which parts of my ordinary life they will find extraordinary.

people ask:

“but what was it *like*?”

it was ordinary and overwhelming.

it was expected and exceptional.

it was plain and phenomenal.

the moments I miss most:

eating Mie Goreng with scrambled eggs
in my Indonesian-American friend's bedroom

drinking Chai and studying Organic Chemistry
in my Indian neighbor's dining room

running through kampungs. the metropolitan
night sky pink with pollution

but I don't know if these are *exciting* enough. I still
do not know which parts of my ordinary life
they will find extraordinary.

so I tell them instead:

the stories will leak out over time

**END OF
PREVIEW**

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