

Nostalgia

By Olivia Lowrey

I'm at that weird dumpling place on Sydney road, with its strange, relentless odours and tacky décor. It's a room full of clamorous chatter, suspicious brown sauce stains and dirty china, littered across the tables. The table I sit at is painted an offensive bright yellow. Funnily enough, this place used to be a favourite of mine. It was cheap, and close enough to walk to from both our places, so Lewis and I used to come here on a Monday night. A little ritual of ours. There we were... Oversized jumpers. Holding hands. Scuffed shoes. A skateboard tucked under his arm. Effortless love. A little bit gross, but stupidly sweet.

I feel abruptly transported as I prod at my dumplings. It's all flooding back. It would have been about 5 years ago I'd say? I'd just cut myself a wonky fringe and had moved out of home. A dodgy terraced place on Lygon St, with cracks in the walls and shitty lighting. I thought it was perfect. Even, when the stove wouldn't work or the power went out. I was blissfully clueless. I'd boldly decided I was ready to navigate "adult life" and move out, get a job in the city and start trying to grow up, at only 18. It was all thrilling, and I had little fear of the unknown.

I had only just met Lewis. A friend of a friend. I'd told the friend I thought he was cool. I liked his long, matted hair, and his "broody stoner" aesthetic. He had a slouched posture and looked unkept always, the beginnings of stubble scattered across his jaw and poorly fitted trousers that grazed the floor a little. But I found something about him endearing. He kept to himself, but seemed to have a lot of friends. People gravitated towards him, and he hardly needed to try. I remember being so transfixed the first time he'd nodded hello in my direction. A word had barely uttered from his mouth but he had simply smiled, and I wanted to know more. He looked nothing like the boys I'd known in school, who were very put together, well-groomed and dull. My interest grew.

Daisy was our mutual friend. Daisy was a loud, slightly obnoxious, quirky red-head and always an over-sharer. And so, it didn't take her long to inform Daisy about my not-so-secret crush. I never see her anymore, but I could never fault her matchmaking skills. Her other talents included stealing groceries, sneaking into movies and rolling ciggies one-handed. We both couldn't really decide if we liked her or if we were scared of her, but she made us laugh.

It wasn't long before he was riding his bike to my house most days. Beers at the park, limited responsibility, laughter and affection. A first love. We went out for ice cream on our first date, and I got it spattered all over my new floral dress, but I didn't care. We spent the whole night grinning, chatting for hours, as though we had no time to waste. I was fidgety, picking at grass and avoiding eye contact where I could. I remember feeling unrehearsed. There was nothing effortless about speaking to boys. We were eaten alive by mozzies and the grass made my legs itch, but we couldn't bring ourselves to budge from our little spot under that tree in Carlton gardens. I insisted that I didn't need to be walked home, but he walked me the whole way, even if it meant missing his last tram.

Our second "date" I cut his hair. I had lied and said I'd done it before because I wanted to see him again. I bugged it up completely, and we laughed about it until our faces hurt. I met his housemate that night, Arthur with the goofy nasal laugh and thick eyebrows, an engineering student who seemed dopey as all hell, but was kicking goals behind the scenes. I liked his humility and his kindness. They shared this quality. The three of us drank several bottles of cheap 'Gossips' wine that night and watched Star Wars until 2am.

I sift through so many memories. Moments that I treasure. But as time goes by, my memories become fewer, and fonder. All of the fights, problems, bad days, panicking, jealousy and questions seem to diminish the older I get and the romantic colourful memories prevail.

I often forget about the night he told me he needed to be alone, while he sweated over his

degree, and meeting the expectations of his parents. I used to sit and dwell on the time I cried on my musky, carpeted bedroom floor. It was New Years Eve and he chose to spend it with other friends, and not with me. I cried for hours, snotty, with mascara stained cheeks. It's funny that this no longer a reoccurring memory for me. There was also that time we hadn't spoken in weeks so I composed a sappy handwritten letter and delivered it by foot to his door. It had scribbles all over it and it was written in a very un-romantic, blotchy blue pen on lined exercise paper. It took me weeks to pluck up the courage to give it to him. I thought I'd nailed the whole romance thing with my bold gesture.

Our end wasn't an angry eruption or a melancholy tale of heartbreak. It was a fairly normal summers afternoon. We were sat on my porch, atop of a couple little plastic crates that we'd nicked and used as "deck chairs". We sat for an hour or so, people watching and talking about the future. We had both started to realise that we were headed in different directions, even if we were too young to articulate it properly. As much as I liked have a companion, someone I could care for and who cared for me in return, I truthfully had no idea who I was, or what I was destined for. I felt like I needed to figure it out on my own, even if I would stumble and make stupid mistakes on the way. I felt comfortable with Lewis, and I yearned for discomfort. Comfort was boring to me, and if I'm honest, it still does bore me a little. Perhaps that part of me will never change?

I remember a moment of awkward silence on that porch. It would have only been a short moment, but it felt like a painfully long time.

He gave me a quick kiss on the cheek beside my front gate and walked home. I noticed he was dragging his feet a little more than usual as he walked away, and I filled with sadness.

When I reflect on it now, I think, God, how was I supposed to love another person when I couldn't even get the stove going or pay my rent on time? Moving on was easy, but that's because independence was dreamy to me. I wanted to learn to do things on my own. The boring adult things like calling the plumber, budgeting, learning to cook. And doing all these things without having to call my mum in a flustered panic. These things have lost

their charm as I've grown, but I miss the excitement I felt about responsibility and independence, and entering a new chapter of life.

The memories grow distant, and that lovely "broody stoner boy" that lived down the road, is a fuzzy thought and my silly crooked fringe has grown. Now I live in a clean apartment that isn't falling apart. I cook and look after myself, and pay rent on time. I've been on blind dates, enjoyed brief romances and definitely made some poor choices. But truthfully, I secretly loved the nervous ice-cream sharing, and hand-written love letters between Lewis and I.

He doesn't purely encapsulate a feeling, but a time of life. So here I am, sat at this smelly dumpling place, which I've realised, isn't that good after all. I'm smiling like an idiot on the table we'd frequent. Relishing in a moment. I fear that one day I'll forget this. The memories that are intimately my own, and that shape who I am now, as I sit here.

I don't know whether these are memories worth keeping, but I'm suddenly inspired to preserve them.

I pick up a pen and write.