



all  
alone  
in  
st. kilda

a love letter to  
melbourne

by kathleen murdock

MELBOURNE WAS AN EXPERIENCE IN  
BOTH BELONGING AND LONELINESS.  
SOME PLACES ARE MEANT TO  
BE SHARED.

**M**My soul is equal parts idealistic and cynical; life is all about balance. I can be realistic and skeptical to a fault... but sometimes I am wide-eyed and full of wonder, staring up at a pretty pedestal. I make sure to choose my pedestal subjects carefully. First, there was Conor Oberst. At age 12, listening to his deeply depressing lyrics, I felt understood. I loved him. To me, he was The Greatest Songwriter of All Time. This is not a story where I recount my adolescent obsession with embarrassment after having realized that he is a mere human... 16 years later, he is still my favourite musician. His lyrics are actually tattooed onto my skin, across my left ribcage. Last year, I flew from my home in Vancouver to Los Angeles to see him perform live. To me, he *is* the Greatest of All Time. I know the commitment I am getting myself into when I place someone—or something—on a pedestal. I don't do it very often. But sometimes, a thing is so amazing it demands its spot in the idealism exhibit of my memory museum.

# Melbourne Australia

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA,  
EARNED ITS SPOT THERE.

I went to Melbourne in 2016 for a solo travel adventure. I had started dating the love of my life months prior, and we were now in a long-distance relationship. He was on a year-long solo trip to Europe, and I was back home in Vancouver. Rather than visit him, I went on the eight-week trip to Australia that I had been planning for years before we met. I was a self-proclaimed Independent Woman and had decided that I'd be fine in Australia alone.

When I arrived in Melbourne in the third week of my trip, I had just spent time in the coastal town Surfer's Paradise. The beach town did not feel like the place for me. While I enjoyed the hot beaches, the city lacked a culture I could connect with. People with leathery skin bummed around on the beach in their flip flops and cooked in the sun. A local bar advertised that the rapper Chingy was headlining a show there. I tried to remember the last time I heard a song by Chingy. 2007, maybe? Surfer's Paradise seemed like paradise for someone content to drink cold brew coffee, get brunch, and soak in the sauna-like heat for the rest of their lives. I need a little something more.

Once I arrived at Melbourne airport, I absorbed my surroundings as I emerged to catch a bus into the city. I saw something that made me feel like home: hipsters. Hipsters lined the streets in skinny jeans, black beanies, and tailored jackets. I breathed in the fresh air; the weather was warm

but less humid. I could have been convinced I was in a slightly sunnier than usual Vancouver. I watched out the window of the bus with pure excitement. Coffee shops dominated the busy streets, and diverse people chatted over pastries on patios. Museums and art centres or galleries seemed to appear on every block. It was immediately apparent to me that art, culture, and fashion define the city. Nearly everywhere I looked, I saw art; art even covered many local trams and buildings. Bright, elegant graffiti covered the brick walls of alleyways. "Everything has beauty," one graffiti scrawl read, "but not everyone can see it." It was the most thoughtful graffiti I have ever seen.

As I explored the city over the next few days, the weather displayed great diversity. When it was hot, I peeled off layers. When it rained, the air chilled me to the bone. I went to Phillips Island to see the penguins rise out of the water to make their nightly walk across the island. Rain and wind knocked the little penguins down over and over again before they finished their journey. The weather fascinated me. I enjoyed the variety. I felt at home here; I had found my place in Australia.

One morning, I stepped onto one of the convenient trams that were part of Melbourne's incredible transit system. I wanted to see St. Kilda beach. I marvelled at how I could be in the heart of the city one minute and on the beautiful seaside



ST. KILDA SKIES BY MADDI BAZZOCCO



KANGAROOS IN MELBOURNE BY ETHAN BROOKE



THE CITY BY TIFF NG

of St. Kilda the next. I soon realized that Melbourne was simply perfect. My eyes were wide. I desperately wanted to remember everything about it. I decided that I could live here one day. As I walked through the museums and malls, I craved connection. I struck up conversations with servers and salespeople, realizing that, for the first time in my life, I felt lonely. I had felt discomfort in the past when people expressed their loneliness; it was a feeling that was truly foreign to me. But I felt it now in my bones.

At St. Kilda beach, the shoreline was aggressively decorated with palm trees, as well as patios filled with happy guests laughing together. I walked along the boardwalk that reached out over the ocean; it led to a rocky path along the breakwater. From the rocks, I stared at the bright, blue water, the bobbing boats, and the sun-drenched city skyline. The view was stunning; I wished I could share it. The loneliness I felt was undeniable now. I wanted to walk along this boardwalk with my mum, the woman who has always told me that I am never alone in this life. I always told her, how could I ever feel alone with a mother like her? I thought of my partner and my friends back home who would be happy to experience the beauty of this incredible city with

## THE LONELINESS I FELT WAS UNDENIABLE NOW.

me. I felt overwhelmed with emotion, witnessing the most beautiful view I had ever seen, alone.

Conor Oberst's lyrics melted into my ears. *When everything is lonely, I can be my own best friend.* Right now, I couldn't relate. Was I less of an Independent Woman now? My eyes filled with tears, but my lips curled into a smile. Perhaps I was simply lucky to care so genuinely about the people in my life that it hurt this much to be here on my own.

Now, years later, I tell each person I meet that Melbourne is my favourite city with great enthusiasm. My partner and I live together in a small apartment in Vancouver, but we do talk about moving to Melbourne one day. I imagine that I could be the cultured, fashionable, sun-kissed Melbournian of my dreams, sharing my favourite part of the world with someone who means the world to me.

But maybe instead, I'll never go back again but will continue to talk about it as a wild, whimsical, and wonderful place. I'll gaze lovingly at photos of St. Kilda's boardwalk. I'll let myself miss it with longing as I longed for my partner all those months we spent apart. I'll remember it as I remember it now: it will be crystallized in my memory as perfect... forever. Maybe that option sounds more like me. 🌊



SHAPES IN THE WATER BY MWANGI GATHECA

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MAYBE MELBOURNE WILL  
STAY PERFECT IN MY MIND  
*FOREVER.*