

UNDER UNFAMILIAR SKIES

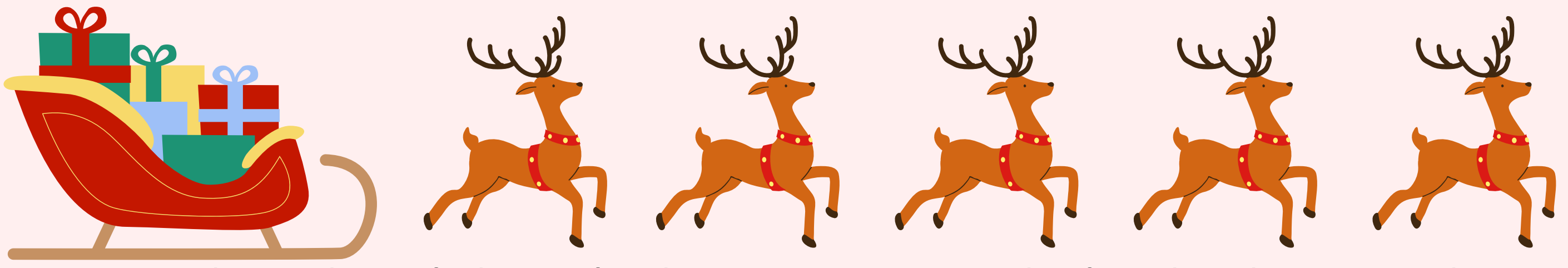
On my 13th birthday my best friend gave me a simple silver necklace with a yacht on it. By the time this is published, I will be 16 and will have worn it for three years straight; I wore it the first time I ever sailed a tall ship, and the first time I ever sailed on the Alex. It has been with me through every high and low, and in a way, so has she. Along with my other best friend, she has become my family and I can no longer imagine my life without her in it. Moving halfway around the world as a 15 year old is no small feat, but I couldn't've prepared for how strange this experience actually is.

I am disorientated. In fact I don't think I have ever felt more lost in my life. Usually I can find north standing on my head with my eyes closed. These days, I'm just trying to find my way into wearing my shirt the right way round. It has been a big adjustment for everyone changing into a life lived on a tall ship, but I think in a different way it has been a big adjustment for me. To me, life on a tall ship isn't that unusual. In fact, from the last two years it has really become quite ordinary. Don't get me wrong; it is still so beautiful out there on the open ocean and I am so grateful to have these opportunities. it's just that my feet found the places to walk and my sleep schedule adapted a bit quicker. Before I left, my aunt wished me "Fair winds and following seas" and despite everything I knew, I found myself thinking that apart from the German, it would be like sailing my ship back home. In short, it really, really wasn't. The closest I can come to describing it is like moving house; it is still so intrinsically linked with the same spirit you are used to, but alien in all aspects of looks.

I found myself waiting for a 'whole world meeting' to be called, or for some good old Australian rock to be played for wake ups, and yet it wasn't. I think I would've adjusted quicker if everything wasn't so eerily similar, but we played the same games, and had the same routine, only this time, it was halfway around the world.

Harder than that was the very nature of the sailing. It is strange to know everything that is going on, but be unable to apply any of your knowledge. The ship works like it does back home; the lines do the same thing, only with a completely different name. To have to learn these words that I do not understand, and yet could easily teach in English, has become one of the harder lessons I have had to learn here. Back home, I would be calling sailing commands and explaining most theory with ease, climbing the rigging, and fixing nearly every issue we had up there. Here I find myself waiting for someone to repeat instructions in the language I understand. It has gotten better over the last few weeks, and now I am able to be in charge of setting a sail all in German, and despite that being something I have done a hundred times back home, I feel a great pride in knowing I have begun to understand this unfamiliar language.





On slow night watches, I find myself looking at the sky and every time I am reminded just how far 20 000km actually is. While my eyes seek out familiar constellations such as the southern cross and the seven sisters, I find myself gazing upon a complex map I have no chance of understanding. I do have to thank my watch, who over a few days taught me how to find Orion's Belt, and the Big and Little Dipper. Despite my absolute love of how organised yet out of control everything is on the sea, having these waypoints up in the vast sky reminds me of hiking and sailing back home with my friends. I think what the next few months are about for me is finding comfort in a Coraline-style existence; where everything is so similar except for small yet significant details, such as how summer is in June, sailing commands are given in German, and even the stars have changed their skin. While the feeling of inarticulability is jarring and can make me feel inadequate at times, I wouldn't trade this experience for the world. Everything I learn here is so unique to this very moment that no experience in all of my lifetime will be able to replace it. I know a lot of the floaties here are struggling with being away from home and their family, and despite the generally positive attitude I keep it's not always easy for me either; I just think it's difficult in a different way. I know I said basically the same thing at the start, but allow me to restate it in a different way now. I love my friends and family like everyone else onboard, but unlike a lot of my peers, I do not wish to go home because to me, I've never left it.

Despite the fact that the walls and ceilings I stare at to fall asleep have changed, the people who love me haven't, the circumstances in which I'm loved stay the same, and as always my home is where the anchor falls. I know I will never be satisfied if I don't live my life the way I wish to. In a way, I don't miss my friends and family so desperately because I am so in love with every aspect of the sea that a part of my home never leaves me. I also have the warm memories I hold in my little silver necklace. You see, what I think my best friend hasn't realised is how important that tiny symbol is to me; no matter where I am, my family is with me. Maybe that is why I never fear venturing out into this wide open world we have; maybe it is the people I meet along the way that keep me going, but maybe, just maybe, and this is what i hope, it is the truly intoxicating freedom of being under such unfamiliar skies.

— Claire Cuddihy





AND THE WORLD REMAINED SILENT

We were daring children
we rode bikes and danced in the rain
But we were scared also
Scared of the monsters that came
in cars in the night
on foot in the day
they came down quickly
and they stole us away

We were scared children then
we ran to our beds
so they took to our families
Left them with holes in their heads
we spoke not after that
of the street we call home
we spoke not after that
of their pearly white bones

We were broken children then
we jutted out on angles
Praying for bread
while another body dangled
we left after that
not with our bodies of course
but if you looked in our eyes
there were simply no thoughts

We were broken children still
we now understood pain
Welcomed it even
if it meant a new brain
one not cursed with horrors seen
that didn't think like we did
not aware of the places
that hadn't done so when we hid

We were ghosts before death
We shuffled along
Marching in time
To our final haunting song
And as the nights grew cold
We could now see the fire
and burn would we burn
Up there on the pyre

We were witches by then
our persecution better
we believed it ourselves
and then did we shatter
they came after that
once we were truly broken
they'd seemed too kind
their hearts too open

We were a ghost story then
a child's forwarning
knights that killed kings
and then fell to their mourning
but still did we sing
of teapots and owls
The song's final ring
No longer matched ours

We were free after that
free to do what we like
free to think things and say things
free to act alike
but we did not trust it
And yet we couldn't go back
we had to move forward
into the vast empty black

We were children once more once finally freed
but our pain did not stop, we continued to bleed
So we sat on our beds, our head in our hands
and prayed that the monsters had stayed in their
land

we spoke not of what happened
not the pain we felt
we spoke not of what happened
not the pain they dealt

We stayed stagnant for years
With our pain held silent
without bruises or tears
From the wrath of tyrants
and then we got angry
that's angry not violent
because we remembered the pain
when the world remained silent.
- Claire Cuddihy

*The poem you have just read was written as a
memorial piece for the Holocaust after reflection
on Elie Wiesel's Night*





OLYMPIA

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The whole room was filled with gorgeous paintings. Portraits, still lifes, scenery. But I couldn't pull my eyes away from this one picture. It's a woman. A prostitute. Lying on a bed with only heels on her feet and a ribbon around her neck. She's staring at you in a confronting way. A calm expression is painted onto her face. Her black servant is giving her flowers. A gift from a client. She ignores them. Olympia. That's her name (and the name of the painting). My eyes dart to every corner of the muted colors. As I stared, I had pretty much one looming thought: "This couldn't have gone over well." I mean, it's a portrait of a woman making her own money, rejecting the power of man, and embracing sexuality. The presence of a black man, challenging the racial hierarchy, is just the cherry on top. As it turns out it was pretty controversial (shocker). Some people even wanted to burn it. How dare someone depict women in such a domineering way? Completely unheard of. It was also made by Édouard Manet. A pretty well hated artist. Famously part of the Artist Reject Club (AKA The Impressionists).



One thing that made Olympia so entrancing for me was how real she looked. She looked like women I had seen. Her body and her face were beautiful, but she looked so alive. Like a real person. Her position expresses nudity not in a sexual way, but just as a state that she's in. She has no insecurity for the things people try to deem as flaws.

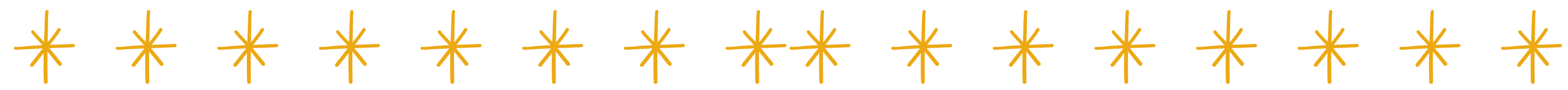
Eagerly I dig through my bag. I find a pen and an old receipt stuffed at the bottom. Before I know it, my pen is scratching furiously against the paper. My knees hurt as I kneel. I try desperately to capture every detail in her face but I can't. I try to take a picture but when I look back it doesn't even begin to capture any aspect of the painting. Stubbornly, I stay. People weave around me to snap pictures and then leave. But if I leave. I'll never see her again. I pick at my fingers anxiously. I try to memorize every detail. The flower tucked behind her hidden ear. The funny looking black cat in the corner. It's all so purposeful. Each detail a small symbol of femininity and liveliness. A tap on my shoulder makes me turn face to face with a short old woman. Her gray, wispy hair is pinned back, and she's wearing a striped dress on her stout figure. She smells like baby powder and musky perfume. Reddish purple lipstick is painted on her thin wrinkled lips. She starts to speak to me in French, looking quite excited and enthusiastic. I shuffle in place, clenching my hands. Wondering how to inform her of my lack of bilingualism. She stops mid-sentence.

"Do you like this painting." I nod. "Why?" She asks. Her accent is still mixed into the English words that roll off her tongue. It makes me smile.

"I don't know," I laugh, "It's very realistic." She gives an exaggerated surprised look.

"Realistic? How?"

"Olympia. She's not so glamorized. And she is feminine but in some very powerful and real way." I nervously fiddle with my fingers. I watch as the old woman decides if my answer is worthy or not. She squints her eyes and purses her lips. All I do is watch her closer. She seems to be some mystical being. Appearing to guide my mind to a revelation.



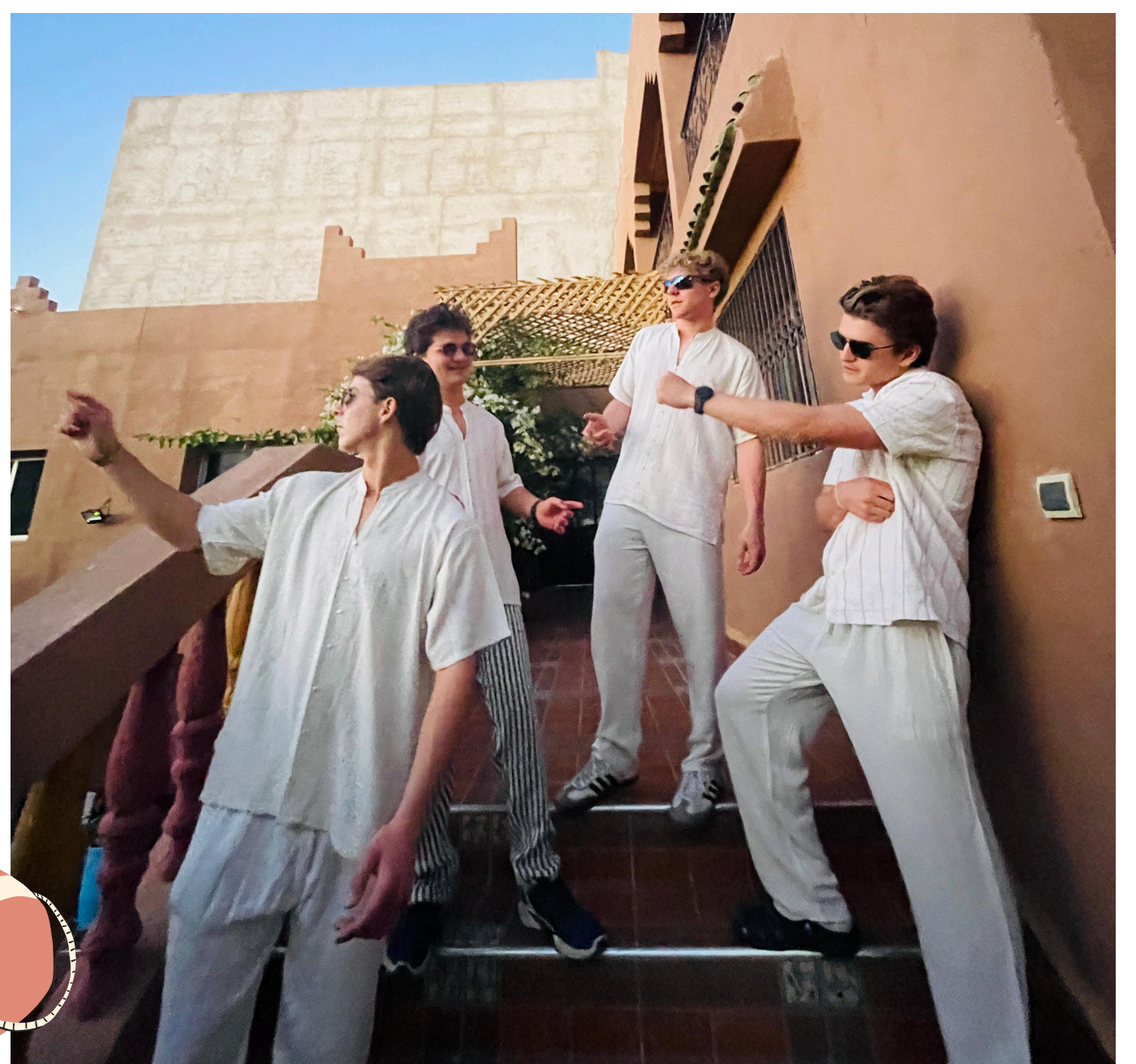
"I see—" she spreads her hands out in front of her like she's making the painting appear before me, "A misunderstood woman. People judged her a lot, I think. I don't think that's fair. Do you think that's fair?" She turns to face me. A few seconds tick by before I realize she was genuinely asking me.

"Oh, I don't know," an inevitable smile creeps onto my lips and I have to try not to laugh. "Probably not." Who is this woman? It feels like she knows Manet himself. The way she studies the painting and talks about it makes me think Manet is possessing her from beyond the grave. Maybe I hallucinated her. Or maybe she is Manet. We stand there for a few seconds. Her hands are clasped in front of her, and her head is tilted back to look at the complex brushstrokes. My eyes jump between the painting and her. Maybe she was the woman posing, Victorine Meurent, who actually became a well-known artist later on. Maybe she owns the Musee D'Orsay (where I currently am). Or maybe she was just an old lady. I don't know. But what I do know is I've never known a painting to embody such a story as this one. If the woman is right, and Olympia herself was judged, I pity those ignorant souls. Olympia is so much more than a face and body, or her nakedness. Her character shines through the two-dimensional boundary to anyone willing (or brave enough) to stop and lock eyes with her. Because it's only when I stopped and looked that I started to see every detail come together to make more than a painting. But a work of fiction.

— Nezy Foxe-Robertson



"Neon Morocco" by River Dury





QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“I LONG, AS
DOES EVERY
HUMAN BEING,
TO BE AT
HOME
WHEREVER I FIND
MYSELF.”
- MAYA
ANGELOU



OUR JOURNEY SO FAR

Time: 1225 UTC

Date: 01.12.2025

Weather: 20 degrees Celsius, partly cloudy

Sea State: 1

Wind: 1kn

Location: Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain

Sailing Status: At berth

Kms Travelled: 2120

NM Travelled: 5188

Days till Graduation: 176



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO...

- Émeric, who turned 19
- Ali, who turned 18
- Max, who turned 18
- Claire, who turned 16
- Anna, who is our fabulous facilities manager

