

Angel Ibarra
California State University, Los Angeles

Hachiko Syndrome

Abstract

Angel Ibarra is a first-generation college student who experienced traveling and studying abroad for the first time. Journaling from a self-perspective, Ibarra narrates the found feelings and struggles that foreigners face in a place that is not theirs. The experience leads Ibarra to discover a new piece of himself, reinvigorating his desire for life. If only he weren't trapped in obligation, he would stay. It seems as though Paris has claimed another.

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ANGEL IBARRA

Hachiko Syndrome

I am still waiting; I don't know if I can stand here for much longer. The security officer is looking at me weirdly, and I can't help but feel obligated to move—the worst part being that I don't know French. The only words that come out of my mouth with a faint, but permanent accent is *bonjour, bonsoir, avoir, merci, and parlez-vous Anglais* (Do you speak English)?

I never thought I would be here despite the many months of planning and excitement. It all felt like fantasy, like something that was never going to leave that room. I was not even supposed to end up in Paris. Originally, it was supposed to be two short weeks in the English countryside, but I ended up getting an additional two weeks added to my trip by my dad. He said he wanted to get rid of me for as long as possible.

Traveling alone is weird, especially since you are not there to do the touristy things: experience the nightlife or go to the Olympics. Instead, you imagine what your life would be like if you lived here. I had always done that; imagine what my life would be like if I lived there. Sometimes, I would go somewhere, and all I could think about was how much I wanted to return and stay. That was Paris for me. It was the first of four long, exhausting, beautiful weeks I will never forget. It was my favorite place out of all the places I have ever wanted to live. The champion of champions, the city of love that I do love, Gay Parie, and trust me, I was Gay in Paire.

The subway lines were magical; I could get from one end of the city to the other in minutes, and they came every three. Beautiful buildings that had lived longer than their tenants and the plethora of art in which the city was just dripping in—it was as if Paris went to go fill its pails and had slipped in, emerging just soaked in beauty and culture. The way that you could throw a rock and just know that wherever it landed, it was beautiful, and the one time I was not made to feel different, because I did not look like a certain type of American. But the best part that I still think of today, and every day since that day, is the Seine (despite its disturbing color). The way it would look in the setting sun, a simple background to French life. It felt like home.

I think that is what I have been doing for years: whenever I traveled outside of my little bubble, all I wanted was to get away. I grew up feeling like a monster because sometimes I would come off as rude or condescending, but the French have a stereotype of being just that. I dreamed of good public transit, and the French gave me that. I dreamed of a place where I could be by water (a strange but comforting thing); the French built their capital city around a river. It seemed like for everything I wanted or felt insecure about, the French comforted me.

Have you ever chased after a dream for so long, not even fully aware of what exactly that dream was, until you achieved it? A dream that makes you question whether your other dreams are still your dreams, or if they have become fantasies—embellished versions of themselves that have grown ten feet tall, covered in pixie dust glued on, with pieces of fabric

that are not even draped right. A dream that makes you question everything you have built thus far, and yet makes you happier than ever?

I went to Paris for the first time (it will not be the last), and I kick myself for not doing more. For experiencing the city the way I was supposed to: for only going to tourist places, getting drunk with people who possibly did not know my language, and becoming friends with two random people I met in a bar. No, what I was doing was a moment in which I still cry over. I was taking a long stroll along the Seine. I crossed this bridge to get back toward my hotel, and I was walking through this park right next to the river where they had these little theaters that would go down to little stages surrounded by stairs/seats on one side and the seine on the other. A person played music from a boombox that looked like a set piece from an 80s movie. It was playing music that people could slow-dance to, and they were. All I could remember was the faces of the people judging me for looking at them, thinking I was judging them, but all I wanted was someone to slowly dance with.

At that moment, I thought about the life that I would eventually have in this found home. I would be gray and old, coming from the market with my old, gray French lover I had married decades ago. We would be walking along the water because I demanded to have an apartment overlooking the Seine. We would have a little dog named Simone, named after a dog I saw in my favorite show, trying to keep up with its little legs and getting us to feed it more of the bread that we just got from the market. We would hear this music, and he would grab my arm, and we would slow-dance, too.

When I got home after a few days of rest, I wanted to book my return flight to Paris. I wanted to learn French to get to know the people you need to fight with before they become sweet. I wanted to try my darndest to justify living there despite my dreams that might as well be set in stone. The thing is, I am in another life. Gosh, how exhausted I am from saying, “In another life.” Constantly having to talk myself off that ledge and return to where I am expected to be. How much I wish I could just be like everyone else.

I am tired of waiting. I'm tired of saying “in another life.” What about this one? I'm tired of feeling trapped in my dreams, and waiting for when I get to take a break from them and return. I'm tired of constantly holding myself to this higher standard that I and everyone around me have created. Why do I have to work so hard while others get to have fun and have their cheeky little fantasies come to reality? Or worse, blame their life circumstances on everyone around them except themselves.

But no, I must be ambitious. I have to aspire to greatness because I have been told since I was young “If there is anyone who is capable of doing anything, it's you.” Because I'm still waiting for that praise, that validation—the sign of a good job done. I told myself for years to wait for them to come around, for an escape, a savior, or for the window to open itself. I'm tired of waiting for that day. It doesn't matter if it's a door, a train station, or an envelope in the mail. Standing solid and tall, I am sick and tired of being compared to the tower. Why am I waiting for something that is not guaranteed to arrive? I see all of these versions of me walking around: the one who stayed, the one who ran away, and the one who fell in love. All I ever do is wait.

It will never arrive, will it? That dumb train carrying all my hopes and dreams that whisk me away so I can finally have my filmic ending, which makes us feel good but grow up believing in a fantasy. I don't care if I look manic in this train station anymore. I don't want to care anymore, but I do. I still show up every morning with the same underlying hope of a

result, finding ways to pass the time, find comfort, and move up the line. But it doesn't matter. I could change everything I do but still arrive at the same result. Cause I am waiting. I am still waiting.

Do I even have a ticket? Am I supposed to even get on that train?

I'm not saying I want to run away; I simply wish I had the option. So it won't feel an immense heartbreak every time I have to say to something I want now: "in another life." The only person to blame for my heartbreak appears to be myself, covered in my blood. I'm the one who is supposed to get out. The golden child, the brat who got everything and yet still finds something to complain about. Am I still compared to that damned tower, tethered to it, and I am in some way waiting in it? If so, I guess I'm waiting for me to save me. Still wanting that good boy even though he will never come.

There was so much pressure, so many expectations, and for once, I felt them all melt away. A trip across the pond and eight hours ahead fully made me feel independent and free. Something changed in me over there; I don't know if it's some foreign bug; let's hope not. But it's changed the way that I want my life to look. I still want the same things, but I want them differently.

The web is like a city. I don't know if I fell prey to its whimsy or simply found another home; regardless, I found comfort and peace in it. Instead of dying there, something was born there. There with the view of the tower, the train, and the river. It's still there, and I must remind myself it will always be. It will only be a connection through the city of stars, a transfer to a red eye with an elbow in your side, and a short cab ride away. It will be there standing tall waiting for me, not me waiting for it.

La pauvre petite créature allait à la gare tous les jours. Pour eux, c'était un nouveau jour, mais c'était aussi un autre jour perdu. En attendant le jour où ils reviendront en espérant que ce sera bientôt. Voulant que ce soit bientôt.