

1971. We were stuck.

Stuck in Europe, stuck in Germany, stuck in missiles, stuck for two years with curling rivers, half-ruined castles, beers in mugs, gas stamps and cars with dents and clicking motors. We were stuck driving narrow roads that trundled on to the Alps, Paris and Amsterdam. We were stuck in civil rights battles over music and holidays and issues of equality, a microcosm of street wars in the states. We were stuck in uniform. God, we were so stuck. For two years, stuck. We were so stuck, we talked about how much time we had left—how “short” we were—on a constant basis. But, in the meantime, in the grooves of all our stuckness, we felt a lot of things. We saw a lot of things. We loved each other. We became different people.

Having no television and no doorway to news, we went to bed early and read books to each other. Over the weeks, we'd slip into Hemingway's *Moveable Feast*, Willy Morris' *North Toward Home*, LeCarré's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. Words, and how they were used, crawled into our time together, filling down moments with longings and dreams, and hopes for a better world. We co-imagined a geography of hurtiness saved by words.

Hemingway wrote: *All of the sadness of the city came suddenly with the first cold rains of winter, and there were no more tops to the high white houses as you walked but only the wet blackness of the street and the closed doors of the small shops, the herb sellers, the stationery and the newspaper shops, the midwife—second class—and the hotel where Verlaine had died where I had a room on the top floor where I worked.*

We would read that to each other, and I would wonder about "high white houses" and "the wet blackness of streets" and why those words carried the weight they did and whether Hemingway meant to have two "wheres." Words meant something then, whispered to each other in bed under a fingernail moon, in the midst of a larger thing called "the Cold War."

---