

NODES OF RANVIER

A story begins its life as an etching. Into metal plate. As the story is retold it forms patterns in the listeners' brain; dendritic, tree-like patterns etched into a now malleable surface. Each version flavoured by the tellers' unique menu of words. It's this transference of patterns that shapes and propels stories, and it's this flow of patterns that parallels the tangible physical world. Rain into rivers, rivers into the sea. Thoughts into patterns into memories.

It's in this story that I am Solomon. Solomon "Irrelevant". I was drawn to detail. I noticed changes. The movement of birds, the drift of clouds, the whisper of plants and the mood of things. But I became disrupted by love. My love of Mya.

Falling like summer rain. Rain in the temperate zone. Where was I, to not read the signs? Here I am drying off and drying up. No blueprint to this.

I was a lawyer on autopilot. Had been for the last three years. I sorted people's dilemmas for large sums of money. My knowledge of the law and my ability to construct stories beneficial to my clients provided my butter, which spread along the runways of rural towns, my bread.

On an innocent Saturday morning in January, in a backstreet Bondi café, I met Mya. The café was quirky without being too contrived. It was reminiscent of my grandmother's house, with her mantelpiece collection of ornamental dogs and pearlescent vases, contrasted with light varnished plywood and potted succulents. The coffee and food outshone the décor.

The last available seat was on a large, narrow wooden table next to her. We watched designer dogs and their designer owners saunter past, inserted between locals and tourists. I could see she was amused by this typical Bondi activity.

She started the conversation. "Excuse me, are you a local?"

"Yes, I was born in Sydney and I have lived in Bondi for, mmm, 12 years. I'm Solomon." I smiled but didn't offer my hand due to the awkwardness of our seating positions.

"I'm Mya, from Perth. Fremantle, actually. I'm on a week's holiday. This is my first time in Sydney. I've visited a couple of my mum's aunts so far and I'm staying up this road. Tell me about Bondi – places to go," she replied, smiling.

"Hmmm. I just have a few favourite places that are back from the beach. Like here. I'll jot them down for you," I offered.

"Great," answered Mya.

I managed a list of seven cafés, bars and restaurants in the local area. She dug out her map and I plotted them on. We then scattered our words with polite restraint over long macs, her politically correct smashed avocado and poached eggs, and my Moroccan baked eggs.

I bought us both a second coffee. We had warmed to each other and filled in the gaps – family, profession, interests and dislikes.

"In my flat – an Airbnb apartment – the toilet outlet is wrapped in masking tape!" she mused. "It seems people here spend more on shoes than plumbing. In the West, we would have used gaffer tape. More durable!" she jibed. "But I do love it here. There's such a buzz. Such a contrast to home," she added.

"I agree about the state of buildings here. They're worth millions but aren't well maintained, generally. But there's always somewhere to go. Life is on the street," I said.

I suggested a swim. Mya agreed to meet me again at the café after she changed in her apartment. I was thankful it was Saturday.

We swam. We frolicked in the surf like five year olds, then collapsed on our towels, the midday sun tempting us into the ocean again. In and out we went, until sunburn dictated our moves. Then home, with shared phone numbers, and my promise of dinner at 6.30pm.

Mya's blue eyes were soft, kind and deep, guarded by her thick, light lashes, dancing under her wide, curious brows. Her lips peaked, alluding to a bird in flight, while her soft brown hair swept around her face with her animated conversation.

And me, well, there was nothing outstanding – average height, stocky and hairy, all concealed by my long-sleeved T-shirt. My eyes are brown, I have a distinctive, slightly Roman nose – without any Italian ancestry – and large ears, full lips and dark curly hair. People say I'm ugly. I think we're all just a result of nature's lucky dip. Luck favoured my brain. My more obscure interests are neuroscience, antiques and graphene. I pursued my interests with passion, but now, looking into Mya's face, their importance is irrelevant, edging towards non-existent. I'm swept into her, an electron shower with no end. Her beauty won't leave me alone.

"I'll meet you at five – no, six. I've lost the number. No, I've lost the time. What time was it?" I bumbled.

She smiled at my stumbling words. "Sometimes it's hard to believe you're a lawyer. Are you making it up?" she quizzed humorously.

"No, I think it's you distracting me. I'm stuck in the Nodes of Ranvier. Sorry, I'll listen and not speak," I returned mockingly.

"Please speak. We meet at 6.30pm. Where are the Nodes of whatever?" Mya asked.

"Ah, mmm, basically they're the gaps in the myelin sheath on the neuron's axon, which is like a branch off the neuron's cell body. I'll explain later, as I feel stuck there, right now. Sounds reasonable, doesn't it?" I retorted.

"Mmm, sounds exotic. Meet me there sometime," replied Mya.

Smiling widely, I responded, "We can meet there whenever we're both thinking of each other."

Our conversations were unrestrained, flowing, bouncing and real. We then met daily – before, in-between and after work. Our moments together slipped away painfully quickly. We eventually kissed and then did so every time we met. I held onto our moments, like plate-glass windows to her sky. She left on a Tuesday. We made plans to meet again, on 11 May. I would visit Fremantle for 12 days.

We talked daily, texted, sent emails and even the odd letter (from me).

It was now April. I had my half-yearly journey to an outback Queensland town to fulfil, fuelled by XXXX beer and flies. I was on my way there when a cyclone crossed the coast north-east of the town. It was downgraded to a category 2, and predicted to diminish to a low before it reached my destination.

I got off the light plane and stepped into the wet dust. The sky's warning signs had turned into beautiful, wasteful butterflies flouncing between warm runway puddles. My mind was with Mya on the dry side. I didn't want to let her out of my thoughts in case I couldn't imagine her back. I was so attached to these musings and so detached from my current situation.

I went to the town office and then made a home visit. Seventeen kilometres south of town, where a river barely flows faster than saliva, I was to meet with Clarence, 86, to update his will. The road was familiar, even in this rain. Rain, persistent as Commonwealth income tax legislation, lost in meaning, due to velocity. The sparse paddocks were losing their circuit-board appearance under the massage of water. The road was clear, with no sign of flooding, until around 1km from Clarence's place.

I'd visited Clarence for business purposes numerous times over the last few years. He was tough, but I was concerned for his welfare, so I

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kept driving the robust work four-wheel drive through the low-lying flood waters (the water usually only reached about the height of a beer can up the wheels).

Clarence will need my help, I thought. I needed to know he was okay and to get him back to town. This rain, now a minor flooding, wasn't predicted. None of this was on my radar. Only Mya and the 11th of May, 2017.

The brown eucalyptus water flowed like changing moods. Calmness merged sideways into streams, eddies and whirlpools, all littered with floating debris. I was guided by the posts on the side of the road. The water was at about half-wheel height now, with Clarence's house 20 metres ahead, situated between two fenced paddocks. I parked, waded to his open front door and called out his name as I went in.

A search of the rooms under thigh-deep water indicated he wasn't there. Benign panic sent my thoughts to the outhouses and shed. The large shed was first, then the outhouses. No, he wasn't there either. Good. But was he safe?

Suddenly, walking in the rising water became difficult. I waded back to the four-wheel drive. Water was flowing past the bottom of the door. I climbed in and drove towards the direction I came from, with only the protruding, weathered fence posts to guide me. Stuff began floating inside, including my beloved belongings, and the vehicle lost traction and eventually stalled. I climbed on top of the cabin roof. The situation was critical – the water was three-quarters up the car windows and rising.

I focused on the near horizon. A swirling, brown horizon showing the upper segments of buildings and waterlogged treetops. Angled rain began pelting down. I scanned the scene and calculated my options against the rising tide. The safest place was the roof of the house or that of the outbuildings. The water

was flowing perpendicular to those objects and my position. It would be extremely tricky but I had no viable option other than to swim.

If I failed to reach the house, the outbuildings and shed were further down the current. After that, trees were my only refuge and there were few of those in the paddocks.

I removed my shoes and jacket and pushed off the doorframe of the vehicle, into the watery mass. I was quickly swallowed up and became part of the current. I grabbed a large floating branch and soon realised that reaching the house or sheds was not now possible. Faith was all I had but fate was all there was.

I remembered Mya joking about the Nodes of Ranvier. Although shivering and bruised with objects torn from farms, I smiled and imagined meeting Mya at the Nodes of Ranvier. "Mya, I'm calling like rain falling. Meet me at the Nodes of Ranvier ..."

I saw the two of us in this small gap, halting time on a synaptic current, as close as closeness could ever be, and held onto the image, as a kind of protection from what was happening. My branch and I were tussled and shaken as we were carried down the endless sea of brown water, now reaching above the height of houses.

I gripped the branch with my arms and legs, my fingers numb, cold and blue. The scenery was lost on me. I was part of it, in this cauldron of furious nature, destroying itself. I was no more relevant than the branch I clung to. I had to make this experience mine. I focused more intensely on Mya. I held tight in that mind space. Mya and I in our shared Node of Ranvier, insulated from the world and its fatal chaos. We were warm, we were close, her blue eyes and my brown. I felt myself expanding into her. No identity, no points of reference, no past, no future, no present, just a pureness without reason. There was no effort, just expansion defying description.

My silhouette lost strength and merged with the sulking, tearful sky. With heavy-handed seduction, the water lured me into her tannin-stained heart.

Helped along by nature's artefacts and the dislodged passengers of the current, I succumbed. Like rain in the temperate zone, rain falling closer to home.

I was gone. 

AUTHOR MARIE-LOUISE ANASTAS

In 1977, Anastas had her first essay published in the school yearbook at John XXIII College, Perth. In 1993, after university, five kids and chaos, she started writing song lyrics with musicians and, in 2002, won the Pilbara Literacy prize for poetry. While in Karratha, Anastas wrote a one-act play, *Love in the Classifieds*, which was performed by Black Swan State Theatre Company. Today, Anastas is studying at university and continues to write lyrics with musicians.



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