On September 19, I gave my mom a hug as the car idled in the driveway. She looked up at me, teary-eyed, and gave me the only thing in her hand: a paper clip. "Here," she said, sniffing. "I don’t know why." I took it, and climbed into the car. "It’s funny," I laughed. "I’ll see you much sooner than if I were going back to Claremont for a semester!" She handed me a mound of Whole Foods paraphernalia, as though the success of my trip would be directly proportional to the amount of Clif Bars I ate on the plane. I rolled down the window and we drove away, my boyfriend who is no longer my boyfriend and I, in my tiger t-shirt that I no longer own, clutching a camera and laptop that no longer function, with a state of mind that I no longer have, for seven weeks in Southeast Asia.

Seven months later, I’m still here.
Prompt: What is destiny?

I've tried to compose this final blog entry a million and one times already... in my head, mostly, or on oily napkins squirreled away from countless warung tables. It's my last day in Bali and my brain is rebelling. Sometimes, I wake myself up in the middle of the night to record tiny notes in my phone; which, in a space of 70 characters or less, usually come out something like "u r anticipation jnkie; memry olivia cakra choc smr." I rub my eyes in the morning and try to make sense of my sleep-ahed brain, wondering what part of me felt it wouldn't be able to drift away until I could digitalize that One Moment in Time.

Sometimes my mind breaks into song, like the night I heard "True" by Spandau Ballet on the radio, and proceeded to cry like a baby at the assortment of people who paraded through my heart... people I will miss desperately, people who—one year ago—I had no idea existed. People I love.
Sometimes, inexplicably weird thoughts enter my head before I have a chance to screen them for propriety; thoughts like, *will God love me any less if I have acne?* or *how many licks does it take to get to the center of a human?* and I count my steps as I count my blessings, steps that take me through the Monkey Forest pathway and in and out of dreams.

Sometimes, most times, I realize that there is nothing I could ever say or do. Love, according to Barthes, is the most solitary of states; it is to be inside one’s head, that most solitary of places. Lucky for me, in that most solitary of places, the sun is just beginning to set over the ridge;

![Image](image-url)

the rice paddies lit from the inside out, glowing with millions of waking dreams.
Bali,
Have I already pared you down to a series of color photographs, each one looking better than the last when viewed in slideshow format? I can attempt to recreate you, but it would be a futile effort. Bali has never been kind to electronics, nor to paper. Too much humidity for that sort of thing.

Instead, I have this. Destiny: the feeling that something bigger than you has brought you here, ka-plunked you into becoming the person you were always meant to be.

**Prompt: In seven months or less, expand upon the reoccurring theme of loneliness and its relationship to individual growth.**

I recently spent an afternoon reading over old journal entries, generally considered to be a colossal mistake by most who do it. I say journal, not diary, because let’s face it: it just sounds cooler, and quite frankly, I could use all the cool points I can get... seeing as not one but TWO of my ‘journal’ entries begin with, “Are you there, God? It’s me, Kermit the Frog.” Tropical heat plays funny games with the brain. Anyhow, the interesting thing about reading these entries was what they gave me: comfort, not pain. I tracked myself through the airport in Taipei all the way to Slukat, where I spent the first weekend crying in bed, alone and afraid that I would never like Bali. Everything smelled. EVERYTHING. My clothes stuck to my skin, my skin stuck to the starchy sheets, and I longed to feel something other than alienation from the world around me. Only now, looking back on it, am I able to see how firmly I was still planted in the world I’d left behind; it’s no wonder I felt isolated from Bali. But lo! Attempting to traverse Jalan Hanoman, I was hit by a motorbike and healed by a guru; my elbow stuck out at a weird angle, and his fingers spidered up
and down my tingling arm as he spoke. "You've been sleeping in your home country," he told me. "This Bali telling you to wake up."

"WAKE UP!"

And wake I did, with a sling and a new perspective on what it means to look both ways before crossing.

That was a turning point. When I tell people about the different eras of my time in Bali, I often compare it to the Room of Requirement in *Harry Potter*: one, because one should never pass up an opportunity to reference *Harry Potter*, and two, because it is the only way to accurately describe how intentional each chapter has felt. When I first arrived, I needed to be shocked out of my stupor. I got hit.

Next, I needed to feel useful; enter Slukat, and a daily teaching schedule that allowed me to plan and dream and share excitement with a group of the most incredible children in the world.
When my California life fell apart and I needed to be surrounded by good girlfriends, Sanne, Vera, Mayke, and Judith rallied around me with love and M&Ms and the promise that things would get better. And they did, each day, through sunset trips to Nusa Lembongan,

Sunrise hikes of Gunung Batur,
and countless evenings spent curled in the arms of someone who truly cares whether you wake yourself crying in the middle of the night.

Somewhere around the middle of October, I did sleep through the night, and I woke feeling like I’d just been born.
September 23: “A tough day, lonely and disorienting at first... but inspiring and lovely by the end. I’m starting to feel like I can settle in here. Yes, I’m out in the world--but when are we ever not out in the world?”

Before flying to Thailand at the end of October, I spent a weekend alone at Ubud Aura Retreat Centre. I sat in restaurants without the armor of a telephone or a book, stared at the good-looking yoga couples with their stretchy pants and cashew nuts, and went to my very first ecstatic dance at Yoga Barn. There, surrounded by yogis and non-yogis alike, I shook out my demons and let the world fall around me in a pool of sweat. Sitting hand in hand, we were asked to say a word—any word that came to mind. Mine was ‘ready.’ For what, I didn’t know; but two weeks later, on a plane that sank closer and closer toward the Indian Ocean, inching into Bali’s green for the second time, I was flooded with anticipation. I felt home. As the wheels bumped into the tarmac—the suspension of flight morphing once again into awareness of velocity, pure and gravelly—I remember feeling as though I was hurtling toward something, like a giant hand was pulling back on the seat of my suspenders, ready to snap the elastic and send me flinging outward at the speed of sound. I’ve never felt anything like it before or since.

October 20: "Sitting at Soma, on my way to meet a woman named Alicia and her daughter, Olivia. I’m so confused I can barely sit still. Can this possibly be my life? Is this my destiny? T-minus thirty minutes ’til my interview, so I guess I can consider this the official last time that I won’t know the answer to the question: am I meant to stay?"
Memories of Olivia come at me in a mosaic of color and light. I remember walking to meet her, moments after completing the above journal entry, seeing her helmeted head just barely bobbing over the top of her mom’s motorbike. We walked to Sari Organik, hand in hand, and she opened a packet of ‘treasures’ that she kept tied around her neck for occasions such as these.

“This one’s for you,” she told me, handing me a plastic purple oval. I still have it.
In Balian, she danced through the tall grass with her fingers outstretched; absorbing every bit of green it had to offer.

We made dribble castles in the sand and pretended to be mermaids, sunning our tails in the 1:30 heat, right before the afternoon thunderstorms unfurled from above.
When I close my eyes, I can still see her.

Olivia with her just-woken-up hair, all wonky and spastic, glowering at me with an obvious need for calories.

Olivia jumping in the pool, one leg flailing after another, with her goggles strapped tight over her puffer-fish cheeks.

Olivia curling into my lap for an afternoon performance of 'Cakra and the Chocolate Factory,' the rain pounding the walls of the Puppet and Mask Museum, smearing dark chocolate all over her face as colorful bodies spun in aerial silks over our heads.

Olivia.
Often Loud In front of a Very Interesting Asterisk

Organizing Love In Various Integrated Awe

Only Lonely Inside Virtually Incomprehensible Amazement.

Many people come to Bali to find their guru. Me too! She's five, and her favorite flavor of toothpaste is bubble gum.

On Thanksgiving Day in Balian Beach, we gathered in the yoga room for a 2 hour pranyama meditation on gratitude. Lying with my stomach spilled over a bolster, I remember understanding the definition of loneliness for the first time: it was a beautifully contradictory feeling, not here nor there but everywhere, a wash of silvery solitude that was at once joyous and incomprehensibly sad. The Room of Requirement had answered once again: all my life, I had needed to sink my teeth into this feeling, to fully appreciate that bliss and sadness are stocked in the same aisle. I felt
overwhelmed with gratitude for myself, that moment, and the fact that I was completely alone. Then I hugged the bolster tighter... and realized it had been a very, very long time since I had been held.

I didn’t doubt, though, that it was coming. I could already see it in my mind’s eye.

In•fat•u•at•ed [adj., n. in-fach-oo-it, -eyt ed] 1. to inspire or possess with foolish or unreasoning passion, as of love.

The first time we met Orin, Olivia slitted her eyes at him from between her Go Fish cards. Earlier that week, an interaction with a Russian surfer had revealed her premature twitterpation with the opposite sex; and though
inconceivable to the naked eye, I could tell she was beside herself. "It's okay," I smiled at her. "Sometimes boys and girls get nervous around each other." She digested this for a moment, then put down her cards. "Are you nervous around Jenna?" she asked him, pointing to me—and I visited at least twelve shades on the spectrum of Beet Red. "No," he laughed, "I'm not." Then he looked at me. "But we just met."

It wasn't long before life took a thumb and smudged the line between dreams and reality.

Memory mosaic number two: holiday season in Ubud, and an assortment of silver-tipped Christmas trees dotting the restaurants on Jalan Raya. Gaya gelato and walking through museums, after hours, our tongues sweet with coconut milk and our hands full of each other. Food remained on plates because my mouth, slick with nerves, could only process one bite at a time. Biting the air as it whooshes past 3 o'clock in the morning, 3 o'clock in the afternoon, endless time because time is relative when you've known someone for as long as you've been able to dream. An elevator climbing down the cliff into midnight, New Year's Eve, candles flickering along the beach spelling out the passage of the old into the new. I remember holding a paper bag filled with pigeons in my lap, squirming as the motorbike hugged each turn and dropped down beneath the hanging branches.

Did that really happen?
For as long as I’ve been in Bali, I’ve had the craziest assortment of dreams; dreams so potent that they leave a metallic taste in my mouth, dreams that have me convinced that our sleeping minds have a secret walkie-talkie to a call center in our hearts.

It’s not always this way; say you dream of Chewbacca in a bathing suit, making empanadas in your grandma’s kitchen. That’s one thing. It’s another thing entirely when you bring something into being, imagine it for so long that—by the time it actually happens—you find yourself in that delicate place between fantasy and reality, the soft spot where the brain meets the skull, where you can’t remember which came first: the chicken or the dream? I remember lying in bed as a symphony of bugs squeaked overhead, my breath rising and falling underneath the sleeping hand draped across my stomach. I untucked myself slowly, parting the mosquito net so my feet could reach the cool floor below, walking to the edge of the room; the night air soft against my bare skin, gazing out the lack of wall toward the Ayung.
I felt it there, the mouth of the room open in silent song to the river below: a moment so perfect in its déjá vu that it surpassed the feeling of having been there already. I stopped counting the times that reminded me of reverie, and began counting everything as a stone in the river of dreams. "You're like a bird," he told me, my breath centimeters away from his shoulder. "In a cage. It doesn't realize that the door behind it is open." Well that sucks, I told him. Rain crashed against the water below. "No," he said. "It's that moment. The moment right before it turns around."
Timing is everything. He told me that when you meet someone's 'I want to be loved' with 'I want to love you,' it works.

However.

Say you meet someone's loneliness with your loneliness, cradle their head in your hands, decide to be hungry when they take their lunch break; sometimes that's everything it needs to be, and it can work too, for a while. Other times, memories are like a hard candy clacking away at the inside of your teeth before they can finally fade, slowly dissolve, melt away into the next current of dreams. I stood on Alicia's balcony one night, a comforter wrapped around my shoulders despite the smoldering humidity, staring out at a lightning storm as it flashed purple and gold over the rice fields. In that moment, I realized that Bali would give me everything I needed and more; softness and romance when I wanted to be held, and a return to solitude when I was ready to dip back into my inner strength.

I remember standing there and crying, tears running down my face in sheer joy for where I was and where I'd been, where I was going, saying *I love you* over and over again to the electric air; to nothing and no one in particular, only to Bali and the lightning storm and the perfect wonder of being alive.

*January 17:* "There are so many things ahead of me. I feel like my life is open—like perhaps the stringing together of adventures and marvelous people is what it's really all about, and it can all fall together naturally. I believe in myself, in my abilities, more than I have before. I am learning how to bless every situation. I feel open like the wind, ready to fly. These travels have set me free. This chapter in my life is one I will never forget. But more than a chapter, I see it as the beginning—the beginning of new love and new experiences and the soft, green, fertile land that is the start of the life I am supposed to live."
I read the funniest thing in a travel book the other day.

In a story about the dying art of exploration, the author broke people down into three categories: explorer, traveler, and tourist. He also talks about something called the 'reluctant tourist,' or tourists who throw all of their energy into passing judgment on the Hawaiian-shirted contingent, doing their damndest to blend in with the local flavor by attempting the language, favoring less typical restaurants, avoiding the Parthenon, etc. Immediately, my mind flew to what Julie calls the 'beautiful people': Ubud’s expatriate scene, in all their Yoga Barn-ing, Warung Sopa-favoring, Bahasa-butchered glory. I thought of the times I felt warm and fuzzy inside for having rubbed elbows with these people, joining in their story circles or taking small sips of the proverbial Kool Aid. Secretly, I’ve wanted to be them without actually wanting to be them; in a way, I fell even further into the category of reluctant tourist, telling myself that because I went weeks without much water or electricity that I was a ‘real traveler.’ In reality, though, we’re all the same. We’re visitors here, each of us; we can only bow toward Bali for letting us borrow its magic and hope that some of it seeps underneath the sheen of sweat, incubates there, and radiates out of our pores when we return——

if we return——

to the place that gave us leave in the first place.
I hope I can keep a few of the quirks I’ve acquired here. I hope that I continue to bumble in a pidgin of hand gestures and languages so that one day, when I have children of my own, they roll their eyes in embarrassment and say, “Oh that? That’s something she picked up when she lived in Bali.”

We should all be so lucky. I hope that home treats me gently, rocks me back into its rhythm before I can worry whether I’ve changed enough to find my balance. My last few days in Ubud, I contemplated launching into a serious retail binge; but luckily, realized that no amount of rose quartz bracelets—no amount of batik tulis, nor wooden earrings, nor Bali Buddha chocolate—can say what I already feel, what my heart is already telling me to be true. I have changed. The rest is gravy.

Sometimes when I think about leaving, I feel like a small animal is chewing on my insides.

Sometimes life is so beautiful I can barely stand it.

“And the past and the future? Nothing but an only child with two different masks.” (Billy Collins)
Prompt: A Brief Musical Interlude
(curtain rises)

Tohk-SEE! tOHk-SEE! Yes please transpORT transpORT transpORT! Maaaahhhhh....SAAAhG!
Maaahssaaaagge! You want maaassssaaaagge? MaaaSAAAAAAAhG! Yespleaseeoookeeeenglooookeeee eeenlookeeeenng! Yes pleeeese, lookeeeeng!
Tohk-SEE tohk-SEE.... tohk-SEE!

Maaaybee tomotho?

(applause)
Surya Namaskara (IPA: [suːrja nɐməskɐː]; Sanskrit: सूर्यनमस्कार; IAST: Sūrya Namaskāra) also known in English as Sun Salutation (lit. "salute to the sun").

For all the people I've met. For the bit parts, the comic reliefs, the teachers, the true loves. On an inhale, reach your arms up to the sky:

Fold forward. To Wayan, Ade, Agung, Novy, and the whole Slukat team; for waiting for me at the airport, for carefully writing our names on our dinners, and for giving me the gift of teaching.

Inhale, come half way up onto fingertips with a flat back. To Sanne, Mayke, Judith, Vera, and the rest of the volunteers; for laughing hugely, listening boldly, loving toughly, and caring wholeheartedly.
Exhale, fold forward, uttanasana. To Bronwen in Thailand, for starting FaaSai; to Ronja, Alex, Charlie, and Paul, for filling it with wicked humor and the smell of freshly baked cake; and to Max, for playing Bob Dylan and wanting to write me letters, for telling me he didn’t want to kiss me because that would spoil it, and for doing it anyways.

Inhale, jump back to plank pose. To all the YogaWorks students on Balian Beach, for teaching me that it’s okay to go upside down.
Exhale, lower, chaturanga dandasana. To Alicia, Oliver, and Olivia; for bringing me into their home, for keeping me here, for trusting me and helping me learn how to trust myself.

Inhale, cobra pose, bhujangasana. To Therese, for putting the almond in my rice pudding; to Alik, for drinking his lychee vodkas strong; to Sofi, for being New York, for singing the blues, and for being a friend.

Exhale, push back to downward facing dog, adho mukha svanasana. To Elora and Rajiv; for treating me like family, for being what true love looks like, and for reminding me to follow it... onto any subway, to any career, toward any work that makes the world a better place.
Inhale, bend the knees and look forward toward the fingertips. To Orin, in all his confusion; for his perfect sarcasm and full-faced laugh, for his childlike wonder at prayers and plants, for our homemade tacos and rides through the rain and countless little stories. For showing me a part of myself that I had forgotten existed.

Exhale, jump forward to meet the hands. To Seamus, for falling head over heels for Indonesia, for always carrying a Pocari Sweat; to Kevin, for East of Eden; to Tomi, Pak Man, Meme, and the villagers of Keramas for being the most generous people I know.

Inhale, come halfway up. To Celine; for rocking cornrows, for being my Valentine, for unlocking her spirit and heart.
Exhale, lower all the way, uttanasana. To Julie and Lara; for being brave, for being so brave. For blossoming. For being there no matter what.

Exhale, hands in front of the heart, anjali mudra. To Ubud, the beautiful friends I've found, and to John; for smiling all the way up to his eyebrows, for telling me that our souls had agreed to meet here, and for reminding me to give fully. That is what we are meant to do. As human beings, that is what we are supposed to be:

Inhale, come all the way up, palms together overhead. To Margret, Made, Sebastian, and Jiwa Damai; for giving me space within the jungle, within my own heart, to breathe fully. To the Russian women, searching fiercely for themselves, for believing in our ever-present ability to change.
Prompt: Compare and contrast the thousand ways to say goodbye.

During my last couple weeks in Bali, I saw 6 friends from California, watched Tyra Banks drink a smoothie, and went bra shopping with Ibu Robin. A series of seemingly unrelated events highlighting the strangeness of life, suggesting (perhaps) that my imminent departure has created a wormhole over the Island of the Gods. Or perhaps I’m still sleeping?
On Wednesday night, I went to a birthday celebration on the outskirts of town. We arrived early and were immediately ushered into a ‘Cacao Ceremony,’ taking our seats in a throng of beautifully fabricked people holding hands around a pot of raw chocolate. After being blessed with a stick of incense and a long, mysterious feather, we were instructed to go around the circle and say two things; one, something we love about ourselves, and two, something we forgive ourselves for. Amidst the deep breathing and the occasional jokesters, but more often than not, variations on a theme of “I love everything about myself, and I forgive myself for the times when I forget not to love everything about myself,” I lifted the small cup to my lips. When it was my turn, I inhaled sharply. I love myself for coming to Bali for seven weeks, and staying for seven months.

I forgive myself for being unsure about what’s coming next.

I forgive myself for holding on too tightly, sometimes, to the things I love.

My heart spoke up, then, with the whisperiest sigh. And a circle of strangers, of delicious human beings... well, for a moment there, they closed ’round me and heard.

Then they jumped in the pool, juggled fire, played the didgeridoo, and ate durian cake.
On Thursday, walking the path toward Sari Organik, my friend Ketut called out like he'd done approximately eight jillion times before. "Yes, holy spring? Tre-king? Tre-king?" And for the first time in eight jillion, I spun on my heel and turned back. Ok FINE. "Sure," I told him. "Why not. Let's go."

I followed along a tiny, muddy pathway, struggling in my stupid flip-flops, as the rice fields dipped down toward the river. Ketut kept stopping in honor of a Kodak Moment for which I had no camera other than my brain, a prospect that genuinely confused him. Finally, after delivering offerings at the small altar and splashing its sacred water on my face, I parked myself on a small rock at the water’s edge. "You want swimming?" he asked me, gesturing toward the pool. "It's okay," I said. "I'd like to stay here and sit for a while." Then, after disappearing behind a rock, Ketut emerged--naked as the day he was born--and flung himself into the river. Life is too funny sometimes not to be real.
Which got me thinking, again, about the nature of dreams. I sat with my knees hugged into my chest, feeling the spirits ebb and flow off the river as they had so many nights before, my heart on fire for the era now drawing to a close.

I took a moment to look at myself as a child; for the girl that used to sit on the edge of the playground, twirling stray pieces of grass between her fingers, humming the theme to *Neverending Story* and dreaming of an adventure that would one day take her away and into the clouds. It occurred to me then, the air alight with the sound of rushing water, that this has been the journey I’ve always dreamed of. This was it. But no matter how much I dreamed it into being—no matter how many moments felt like my soul was meeting an old friend—the actuality of what has happened has surpassed anything I could have hoped for.

In my wildest dreams, I never could have imagined you.
So. If I could say anything to that girl on the playground—or maybe the girl getting into the car that day, back in September, with her hair cropped close—what would I say?

That this world is more wonderful than words can describe, and that one day I’d be sitting in an internet café with sweat running down the backs of my legs and tears running down the sides of my face, trying to figure out how to say goodbye?

In Avalon, they have it on all the sweatshirts: You Never Leave a Place You Love.

You do, though. You do leave. Seasons change, planes roar up and down, and people filter in and out like sand falling through open fingertips; and it’s better, somehow, that they do. When I look back on this chapter in my life—because it is a chapter, one that is about to end—I see it like one might watch a graduation procession march down a hill: with a mixture of sadness, pride, and compassion for what has been and what will never again be.

You do leave a place you love... but it’s okay, in the end. It’s part of the beautiful sadness of loving in the first place.
October 6: “There was a moment on Batur—right when we were almost to the top and the sun was just beginning to crown—that I felt completely free. Incendiary. Sleepless endorphins, I’m sure, but it was more than that... it was magic, and it made it all worth it. I can tell that I’m getting close to something, that if I can only let myself, then I’ll be there. I don’t know what it is, but I can feel it now. I’m close.”
I'm not worried about Bali, and Bali's not worried about me. It's sending me out, now, with a wink and a prayer and a handful of dreams to distribute across a new, less green but no less virescent, future. I have no doubt that I'll return; I can feel it in my bones, the way Bali trusts me to be able to find my way back. And when I do, when I do come back,

I will know it the way a ship knows to move toward the light.

Like coming home.
A most heartfelt thanks to the people of Bali and Thailand for their boundless generosity, and to Hostelling International for allowing me to take this incredible journey.

Terimakasih, terimakasih, terimakasih!