

2. The Place I Feel Connected to

In this world of war, hate, destruction, it is hard to find a safe place, a haven, a connection. My haven is unlike any other. A hidden treasure smothered with magic. My connection is my grandparents' house, Rocqueberg.

Rocqueberg is crowned with regal authority, a gem on the azure coast of St Clements. The majestic house towers over the hidden driveway, the manicured flower beds, and the immaculate front lawn where children played - where I played. In the immense garden, I regarded the quintessential old mansion, awe plastered onto my little face. I would lie on the chartreuse green grass, fastidiously making daisy chains, nonchalant to the outside world. Now, I see it differently, it is no longer just Rocqueberg, it is like a second home - I grew up there.

The history behind this idyllic house is fascinating. The oblivious past is encrusted with stories, some real, some just legends. All I know is, that this house is precious, and endearing.

Rocqueberg's gardens are always abundant with aromatic, cheerful flowers. The skies are always blue. The sun always shines. Everything is perfect.

Many places are less fortunate. Some places have skies strewn with black clouds. Almost like pathetic fallacy. Some places, peace is unknown. Places are engulfed with heinous actions of terrorists.

Bombs rain down on the city of Kabul. They spark hell as houses are blitzed. Some empty, some present with not only people scarred both physically and emotionally, but also with the putrescent smell of fear and despair. Families hide away, shivering mothers cling to their children. They sleep in heaps to provide a glimpse of warmth. These piles turn quickly to skeletons, some alive, some not. Mournful cries resonate throughout the city.

What was once an amicable, vibrant city, is now the city of blood. The city of death. The city of trepidation.

The streets are shrouded with tribulation, like a mourning veil drawn over a blanched face. Unlike the vibrant flowers at Rocqueberg, the ones here in Kabul wither, fade away. They disappear one by one, a little glimmer of hope disappearing at each forlorn death.

At dusk, gunshots ricochet against cracked walls. Warnings, but the people are waiting. Waiting for the moment, when they can rise up and defeat the enemy. Hours pass silently, as people wait in angst for sunrise.

In the distance, above amber mountains, caressed by the sun, clouds move in shoals. The sky is different dimensions of blue, and a chorus of greys, streaked with silver and gold, as the sun starts to appear on the horizon.

Heads pop nervously out of makeshift cardboard windows, speculating. Is it time? Men boldly step out, lining up opposite menacing guns. Women prevail. More step out as each second passes. A few youngsters step out, unaware of the danger. They are pushed back by elders, determined for some to have a future.

Senses sharpen with adrenaline, people hold their breath, straining to hear with every ounce of concentration. Not quite silent. The cool air whispers. It whispers death. Suddenly, an ear-splitting bang sounds.

The bullet spits out of a gun. It hits. A man is propelled backwards. Red is unmistakable in the mist. He falls into a sea of enraged people. Momentarily, he looks up at the paint splattered sky, trying to admire it, one last time. The people charge. Men and women emerge, fuelled with anger: they are willing to die for their freedom.

With courage and hope, these people overcome their oppressors. With pure determination they gain their freedom, a prize greater than any other. They are victorious, because they fight as

one. They connect, not only with each other, but also with Kabul. This is a city of suffering. It is also the city of victory and freedom.

It is once again an amicable, vibrant city. To many people, it is the place they feel connected to, where they lived, breathed, survived.

This incredible city of Kabul is where many inhabitants feel connected. It bears history that is seared into hearts. Just like the place I connect to. Rocqueberg will forever be a connection to peace, which is why I love it. I grew up admiring it, and as I continue to grow, my admiration will too. I will forever feel a connection. Maybe not as powerful as wartime survivors in Kabul, but it will forever bear one succulent mango among the apples on my tree of life.

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