

Story for performance #952
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Source: Edmund Andrews and John Kifner, 'Dead at 82: Palestinian Marxist who took terrorism to the sky', *New York Times* in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 28/01/08.

Tags: [child/parent](#), [travel](#)
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We live by an airport. It sort of feels international, but isn't. You can't deny us proximity. If you timed it, I bet we could fill the jug, set it to boil, grab our bags and be at that airport just as it was boiling. That's on push bikes, okay? If you made us walk or run it, with say, one backpack each, you're looking at twenty minutes, which lessens the 'wow' factor somewhat, but is still not to be sneezed at. You get to be a minor expert on planes living here, and let me tell you there are airlines I never knew existed. There are planes coloured electric pink with bananas painted on the wings from God knows where that are cruising into land as we speak. There's a certain sense of excitement living where we do. It's the constant arrivals and departures, the ebb and flow of life, isn't it? Plus, the house was cheaper.

So, that's where we live. You asked me to talk about 'Us, now' well, that's the practical side of things. Maria found this place, and we moved in a month later. It all happens so quickly, doesn't it? You turn around and someone's made a huge decision. Maria's mother was not impressed. She seemed to know more about this suburb than we did, or knew people whose relatives were mugged or attacked somewhere around here and so wore a face like thunder when she first came to visit. She called the front steps 'suspect' and started coughing dramatically in the hallway. 'Damp,' she declared. Maria's much better at ignoring this than I am. She remained smiling and offered her mother a cup of tea. Maria's mother then said something quickly to Maria in Polish, which I interpreted as disapproval. But then she sat, drank the tea and looked out at our view.

'Planes,' she said.

'Yeah,' I said. 'No expensive taxi rides to the airport for us. We could go on holiday in five minutes.'

Maria's mother murmured something. Sometimes she looks at me but isn't looking at me at all. She's had a hard life, I'm not denying that, and she's been a widow for most of it. Early on in the piece Maria told me her mother thought I looked like the kind of man who would never have any children.

'Is that good or bad?' I joked.

'Oh, bad,' said Maria, 'definitely bad.'

'Well she's wrong. I do have some, actually,' I said. And so I had to spill the beans to Maria about my old life and my ex-wife and all those angular, necessary facts that seem welded on, now. That was our first date. I had picked her up at her mother's house. I had decided I probably loved her by then. It wasn't a spontaneous, wave of affection that flooded my heart like some people will paint it, but a decision to love her. Maria was calm. Maria was twenty-five. She smiled at things I liked, and seemed patient with other things I liked. She listened to my story about my other marriage, and the children I hardly saw.

'Where are your kids now?' she asked.

'They're miles away,' I said. 'In Wales.'

'Wow. That's almost the exact opposite of us on the globe.'

'I know,' I said. In my mind a big, plastic globe spun like crazy.

'When do you see them?'

I was about to say 'once a year' but it seems more often than that. 'Well I see them in my dreams,' I said.

I actually said that to Maria on our first date and she understood. 'I saw them last night and we were all at a local beach, having fun. You know, doing normal family stuff.' Half of me wanted to go into more detail about this dream with my kids, but the other half of me, the more sensible half who was on a first date took over, and said 'You know your hair is the exact colour of corn on the cob.' Thank you, other half. Maria smiled and said, 'I dye my hair.' I told her I wore contacts and had a fear of butterflies. We started confessing. We leaned in together like conspirators. And I decided I loved her.

So that was us, then, two years ago. Before the small house by the airport. Last week I had a phone call from my ex-wife. The conversation didn't flow, but something had shifted, or had softened. It was easier to talk. She said her new therapist had made a huge impact on her and she'd been re-thinking the situation. 'Go on,' I said, my heart starting to beat faster because I was hoping, hoping so hard.

'I'm sending the kids back to New Zealand for a visit...is that alright?'

'Yes,' I said. 'Yes.'

I put the phone down. My hands were wobbly, my heart was skipping. Maria's shadow moved on the floor. She'd been listening to the radio in the lounge but had turned it right down when I answered the phone. I told her the news.

'So when are they coming?'

'In a week. She's letting them come over for their school holidays.' Maria looked like she might cry. 'I'm sorry,' she said, 'that's wonderful news.' We cracked open a bottle of sparkling wine Maria's work had given her for Christmas. We made a toast: to new beginnings, to starting afresh and anew, you know, future stuff.

Later I wake up and Maria is standing by our bedroom window. The moonlight is stark like painted milk, but it's warm, a late summer night. 'Are you alright?' I ask.

'I'm waiting for the last plane to take off for Melbourne, the 12:45 flight. I can't sleep till that last plane leaves.'

I hadn't noticed that before now, but I let her get back into bed. She has a wet face. The noise of the last plane makes us relax. That's us, now.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Gabe McDonnell.