

My Life As a City

Sunny San Diego: Land of Broken Dreams

Kim Eastlake

A Place Story

People always talk about San Diego as a paradise, a vacation resort, a city rich in culture, fashion, and parties. They were right about the party part. But what I never knew is how broken this seemingly beautiful city would leave me. When I was 18 years old I ran away from home with my then boyfriend to his hometown of San Diego. I expected the place to be full of beaches, palm trees, and beautiful people. When I arrived, I was on the South Side of downtown San Diego. A place that no one wants to visit. It was full of homeless, urban poor and only a 30 minute car ride to the border to Mexico. This was a place that drugs and people were trafficked and a place where dreams went to die. Over the bridge from where I was staying I could almost taste the sea breeze and smell the perfume of the partying beautiful elite in La Jolla Beach. That was where middle-aged men came to cheat on their wives; where surfer dudes with no job or direction spent their days in the water; where beautiful blondes with legs for days carrying Birkin bags bought by these rich men tanned themselves. But that was just a dream of mine. I would never reach that place. I was trapped behind the gates of Lincoln Park. That was where gangs shot each other up on the block; where gaggles of men stood outside in house shoes sipping forties, shooting dice, and whistling at any female that walked by; where unsupervised children vandalized and bullied whatever they could get their hands on. This was the San Diego I knew. And all I wanted to do was get out, as fast as I could. It's ironic that by running away from my problems I found myself with a whole new set of problems I wanted to run away from.

Imagining this Story as a film:

The story begins with a female and male character getting off the plane. They traveled from Philadelphia to San Diego which is shown on the sign at the airport.

The film is in slow motion when the female gets off the plane; you can hear her scared and nervous breathing and her shifty and unsure glances. Then you hear her take in a sharp breath and "Ride" by Lana del Rey starts playing which is about a girl who lives too fast for her own good.

The film evokes feelings of uncertainty, fear, and fettering dissonance. When the boyfriend character emerges from the plane and grabs her arm you see a single tear slide down her cheek which shows the abuse and drama of the situation.

The audience can tell that it is late at night when this is occurring when the camera shifts perspective. The shot makes the foreground of her face blurry and the background clear so you can see the clock at the gate reads 3 am which is an eerie time; in fact, it is in the witching hour in some movies.

The second scene shows a taxi driver loading two suitcases into a taxi. The suitcases do not look big enough to possibly hold the lives of these two which insinuates their rushed and sudden departure.

As the taxi is driving down the freeway the music continues and the streetlights illuminate the water where you see ships lined up along the docks and palm trees (imagery that is indicative to San Diego). The freeway signs flash on the screen and the nearby towns and cities to give the audience an idea where the setting takes place. For example, one sign reads: Los Angeles 120 mi. Then the viewer sees a sign for the San Diego Zoo so the setting is finally confirmed for sure. During the traveling montage, the San Diego skyline is shown with all its buildings and glamour glittering against the water. The skyline is a symbol for the place that she dreams of getting to and can see it right in front of her but she can't reach it.

Finally, they pull up to a seedy apartment in the projects. The audience is able to tell it is in a bad neighborhood because there is a homeless man sipping a bottle out of a brown paper bag at the front of the neighborhood and there is a gate in the front so the taxi cannot enter completely. Every neighborhood in this community is gated to protect against the copious amounts of crime and drugs. As the boyfriend character goes to pay, the girl character empties her pockets and finds nothing but a chapstick to insinuate how penniless and dependent she is on him.

The themes associated with this film include lack of protection, safety, and comfort. She is leaving her home for a place all the way across the country and has no family or security blanket in her new home. Every place she goes to in this city is public, for she is sleeping on other people's couches and floors. Because of this lack of home and privacy, there is no separation of public vs. private space in this film.

The story covers only 20 minute long car ride but during that ride it is articulated to the viewer the fear of the girl, the control of the man, and the devastating beauty but also horrifying collapse of this great city of San Diego. To know how much time has passed at its conclusion you see the clock in the taxi cab as the man hands the cab driver the fare and they get out and slowly depart into their new home.

Narration in the background:

When the people I used to know found out what I had been doing, how I'd been living, they asked me why - but there's no use in talking to people who have home.

They have no idea what it's like to seek safety in other people - for home to be wherever you lay your head.

I was always an unusual girl.

My mother told me I had a chameleon soul, no moral compass pointing due north, no fixed personality; just an inner indecisiveness that was as wide and as wavering as the ocean...

And if I said I didn't plan for it to turn out this way I'd be lying...

Because I was born to be the other woman.

Who belonged to no one, who belonged to everyone.

Who had nothing, who wanted everything, with a fire for every experience and an obsession for freedom that terrified me to the point that I couldn't even talk about it, and pushed me to a nomadic point of madness that both dazzled and dizzied me.