

# TITLE

Adrienne Buckingham (Entry 1-04)

## Honourable Mention:

Stepping off the airplane at 4am with two bags, the heat struck me first, then the cigarette smoke and then a wash of foreign tongues- Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, Filipino. Kuwait has a way to make a lifetime of only minutes. After 19 months, I am embedded in the Sunday to Thursday work week and 47 degrees Celsius has become routine.

The Call to Prayer, once an exotic alarm clock, now filters into my sleep. I am comforted by tones of words I do not understand.

The nasal, Arabic cry for Kuwait from my students has quickly replaced the morning routines of apathy I had come to expect from teenagers in other teaching jobs.

The dusty peach buildings and grey satellites are starting to be differentiated in my mind- bakalas and laundry mats are becoming more distinct. I know the difference between OK Laundry and OK Landry in Salmiya. It's not just a type-o; it's the cost, quality and direction I leave the apartment in.

Next door, the short, balding man at the bakala speaks little English: "Hello", "Fifty", "One hundred", "Okay, okay, okay." He scans non-alcoholic beer and cartons of feta but I'm certain he invents the price of eggs and green apples.

Down the road, the Lebanese man who runs the 'Vegetabel' shop tells me of his wife, a beautician and his two children who go to the local Indian School- he can't afford the tuition at the British or American Schools. He tells me of the apartment where they live, with his wife's brother and his family. He tells me his wife wants to return to Lebanon because she worries about her parents, but the money and opportunities for their children are here. He feeds me thimbles of Arabic coffee when I come with my husband.

Cats jump out of the dumpsters as I walk home. Manky and disfigured, with weeping wounds and missing eyes. This doesn't startle me anymore. I walk through the rubble and garbage on my street- no grass, no trees, no lawns, no houses even.

Kuwait is in a constant state of destruction and construction. Buildings go down over night, collapsing in on themselves with the help of time, heat and human interference. New structures appear in their place, looking lopsided in their rickety, wooden scaffolding. Open air welding sparks on side roads and at the top of cement roofs- fireworks any night of the week!

I, too, have been reconstructed. I speak in a medley of languages now- English peppered with Arabic, rearranging my verbs like a second language speaker to make myself understood. I wake before dawn to jog down the waterfront while getting honked at by passing cars. I sleep in heat of the afternoon and I eat dinner well past dark. The hours of my days rearranged like children's building blocks.

I'm leaving Kuwait this year and as my time in here ticks away, I listen to the sounds of Mosque more carefully. I watch my students more closely. I argue less with the bald man at the bakala over the prices of KDD ice cream sandwiches. I spend more time with my Lebanese friend at the 'Vegetabel' shop. I leave water out for the street cats more often and I leave more money with the cleaners in the bathrooms.

I leave Kuwait not knowing what impression I have left in country. I leave with two bags, what I've learned and how I have changed but unsure of what I will retain once I'm gone. I leave thinking, "Wow. Kuwait. That was pretty cool."