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TEXT prose

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Green-eyed monster diary

A woman scans my forehead's temperature at the drive-through border of northern and southern Cyprus. I'm on foot, walking past signs saying 'United Nations Buffer Zone: Keep Out' and queued-up cars travelling from the Turkish to Greek side. This is the only border point currently open, far from the city centre, all the other crossings were closed in the last week. A man in his car yells at me for skipping past the vehicles, so I let his seat-belted family through first. The passport control officer gives me a flyer: 'Attention: Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)'.

City centre of Nicosia, the world's last divided capital. At the shut Ledra Palace border, protests are going on about all the closures. I've met up with my mate and his Cypriot girlfriend who say that people in the south can't access cheap oil and cigarettes now. They stay back as I edge forward. Around us individuals and families are chanting. Signs with peace symbols and words in languages I don't understand. Elderly gazing down from their balconies with coffee in hand. Policemen in helmets dividing the two populations, amid EU and Cypriot flags, and the Turkish further down. YOUR WALL CANNOT DIVIDE US, the signs say.

We meet his girlfriend's three friends at a cafe. Frappes turn into beers, at least for my mate and me. One friend says the north is an internationally unrecognised state, only acknowledged by Turkey who's illegally occupied it

since the 1974 war. Later at a bar, an Iranian girl I've just met frustrates me, going on about how we must be so careful with this virus, while we drink poison. She says she's worried about her family at home, where hundreds are getting infected or dying each day. What brings you joy in life? I ask.

I'm walking along the harbour of Kyrenia, on the upper coast of Northern Cyprus. The castle makes me wonder if there's time to visit Othello's Castle to the east within my limited days on the island. In Shakespeare's play, the Venetians sent Othello here on a ship to help watch the Turks who were up to no good. Five hundred years later, not much has changed in the region. It's night time now and a British girl who's half Turkish talks about the Greeks being the aggressors, and I joke about stealing a boat and sailing beyond the horizon together. The two of us sit and drink Corona beers on the rock wall, teasing each other and making out under the Mediterranean full moon.

Othello murdered his wife out of jealousy, the green-eyed monster. But the British girl's ex simply screamed and they stayed friends till they weren't. Now we walk to her car and drive around and pull over somewhere quiet to hook up. Later she drops me home but the next night, my last night, she decides she's too busy. My appetite wanes and perhaps I'm a little envious of the person I could be.

In Famagusta the next day, I stampede through the town trying to find Othello's Castle, laptop and clothes bouncing around my backpack. 55 minutes till my bus to the airport leaves. Only now I realise the entire old town is contained within the castle. But old Othello's got a tower here somewhere. Touristy shops. Doner durum kebab. European retirees sipping Efes beer wondering how to spend the rest of their time. Othello Meze Restaurant is closed and a German tour group congregates around an old church. At the saved Google Maps location for Othello's Tower, nothing exists and I'm spinning around and got no internet. 40 minutes. A map on a sign was way back at the castle entrance. I run back. 30 minutes. Knowing where to go now, I sprint past the Efes-drinking boomers who'll probably gossip later about this guy running from trouble, weave through the Germans and their guide past the Othello restaurant, and find the damn tower. 20 minutes.

A bronze statue of Shakespeare's head. The tower is cast-off on the castle's edge, away from the centre where the churches get all the glory. No one cares about Shakespeare anymore, I guess. There's *Game of Thrones*, reclining cinema seats, Netflix. Elizabethan English just doesn't make sense these days.

But a year ago, I had bronchitis in China and on the worst day I could barely breathe. Euthanising myself off my 14th-storey balcony was a valid solution. But Shakespeare's words in *Macbeth* helped me through: 'Present fears are less than horrible imaginings.' If I could get through this one day coughing my lungs out in bed, it was nothing in the bigger picture and others had it much worse.

15 minutes. The tower ticket guy takes his sweet time as no one else is in sight and my feet are tapping and I try not to tell him to hurry the fuck up. No time to appreciate the rooms and courtyard and rooftop that I blast through. I guess Iago felt this same stress in his jealousy of Othello and Cassio. Or Othello's trembling when he's tricked into thinking his wife cheated on him. Images of the play's wine-fuelled sword fight come to life, and memories re-surface of watching the performance live in Australia with an ex too, stems of red wine glasses between our fingers but our swords loosely kept at bay for the meantime. Ships and containers are docked in numbers. A crane's screeching is Othello's cries of regret. And sweat drips down my limbs outside the bus with two minutes to spare.

The words I write in my diary involve so many other words I don't understand. Placards, signs, chanting, theatre speeches, whispers in the back seats of cars...

When the British girl asks if I'm still in Cyprus, it's too late. I'm gone, back to Alanya on the Turkish mainland. I suggest returning soon if she's up for it, but she says Cyprus has now banned all entry for non-citizens.

In my apartment, news videos show Australians almost killing each other in supermarkets, jealous of those hoarding more toilet paper. Sure, it'll wipe shit off their asses but it won't help to clean up the mess of romance. Only a dagger to the green-eyed monster will do that.

On Alanya beach, the few sunbakers avoid the cold water. Kyrenia harbour is over 100km away beyond the mist. I should've taken more swimming lessons.

Dean's tales are often internationally focused, touching on travel, religion/faith, history/culture and dating, appearing in the Bangalore Review, Allegory Ridge, Global Hobo, ABC Open and Flourish. He's been involved in literary groups and

events in Australia, China, Georgia and Bali, and is a member of Asia Pacific Writers & Translators. He commences his first novel in 2020 as part of a PhD at Griffith University.