

Some where on Sherbrooke

Sara Mizanoghechi

I moved to Montreal on a sweltering August afternoon.

There are anthologies detailing Montreal's streets and ruelles that explore the historical and personal connections to the city.

I had yet to have an understanding of Montreal, beyond roadtrips and the traffic around Sainte-Catherine.

The best way to understand a city is to walk through it.

You can understand it more deeply than when it's just symbols floating on a map. It becomes tangible.

For example, I quickly discovered that I could get anywhere I needed to go through Sherbrooke.

The second-longest street on the island was the baseline of every other destination.

My mom said it reminded her of the street outside of our old apartment in Iran.

Moving to Montreal presented another novelty: it was my first time moving out and living on my own.

The quiet of an empty apartment was more immense than I'd expected.

At first, the walks were without a destination;

the point was to navigate an unfamiliar city.

When classes started, I went out more with others, following their routes instead of leading.

Through fall strolls, I glued together the fragments of Montreal using street names that were starting to become memorable.

Walking became a solution to adjusting and an escape from time alone.

With the metro map as my guide, I walked from...

Namur to Snowdon

EXHUSTED

BANK

HONK

I live in this banker city.

Vendôme to Jean-Talon

although I wouldn't remember where they were until walking by them months later.

Sometimes, the walks would end in friendship.

Each walk embroidered new memories onto the city landscape...

CALL notes

In November, Montreal felt less overwhelming. With navigation now somewhat easier and the loneliness less intrusive, the anthologies about the city's charm were starting to make sense.



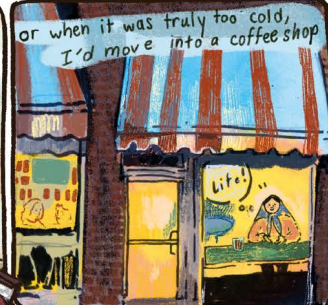
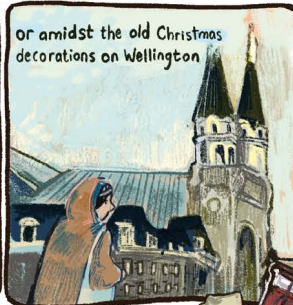
Winter on Sherbrooke came in waves that year. The city's temperament fluctuated between



When there was snow fall, I had to be outside experiencing it.



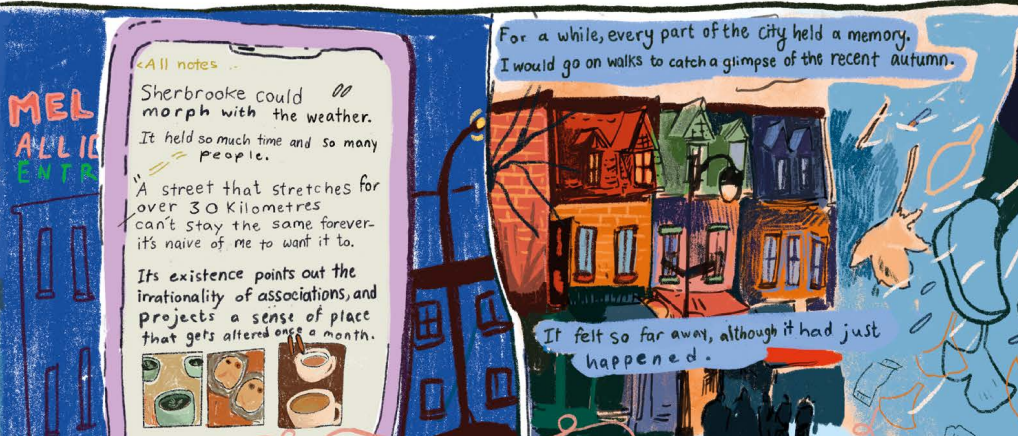
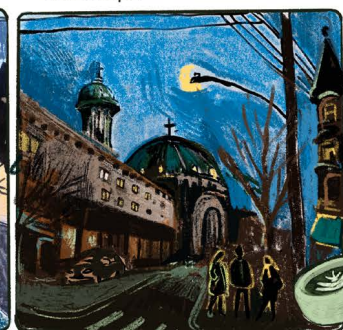
In the winter, everything felt more intense. Staying at home felt even more lonesome when the sun started to set at four. I had to be outside...



I walked the same paths in repetition.



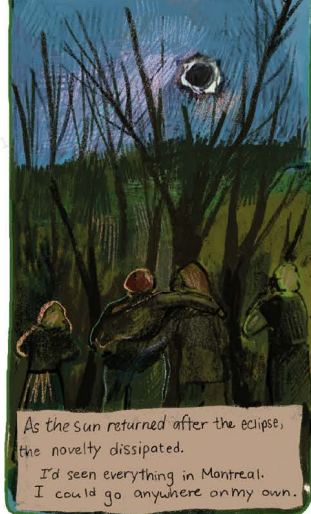
Across the avenues, I find traces of people and time etched onto buildings and landmarks. The roads by McGill are a reminder of Sunday walks with Jennifer. Saint-Viateur is an ode to early friendships. Complexe Desjardins is a monument to Nuit Blanche.



With time, memories fade in intensity, blending together to become ordinary

In an April and May spent

That's what happened in the spring



As the sun returned after the eclipse, the novelty dissipated. I'd seen everything in Montreal. I could go anywhere on my own.

biking across Rachel,



and running across the city, the details blurred.



Walking through downpours



There were so many memories that only a few still stood out as significant.



I had traversed the same routes so many times, that I understood the connectedness of it all.



Nothing was new except Montreal's version of the suburban neighborhood that I'd left behind. Along the highway by IKEA, I was reminded of silence, and of why I didn't miss home.



When I missed the bus, I biked from Montréal-Est to the Olympic Stadium, going between views of the river and of port containers. The serenity and the smell of barbecuing mixed with grass reminded me of an Ottawa I'd barely seen since August.

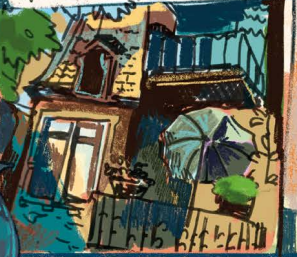
Call notes

Trying to recapture November or March felt pointless after a July storm. The Montreal of the past stays alive through playlists, notes app entries and sketches that don't feel particularly realistic any more, despite being so honest.



I can never have that sense of place back. The anxiety and magic of novelty withered, replaced with comfort and an ordinariness.

When did I realize I had changed, too?



Was it after the bike ride?

Was it while riding through Cité du Haïre, when I understood that a lot of what I was scared of seems meaningless now?



Despite shedding its identity regularly, Sherbrooke still feels magical.



It's a portal between the life I might have lived in Iran, the undergraduate years my friends experienced in other cities and the eleven months spent on my own.

Most of the meanings I had attached to the city mean nothing now, but I'm glad I wrote them down, drew them out and let myself experience them as loudly as possible, instead of cowering behind their meaninglessness.

