



WORDS AND ART by JASON LAU

# Knots

Just over three years ago, I bought a bracelet from a Peruvian shaman. He told me that it would provide me with good luck on my journeys ahead.

**We had just performed** a *Pago* ceremony, a ritual dedicated to the offering of gifts for *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) and the *Apus* (mountain spirits) before our expedition. I found myself standing by the hillside, admiring the emergence of the sun from behind the clouds at that very moment – it was magical, as if *Pachamama* and the *Apus* were actually acknowledging our offerings. I wrapped the bracelet around my left wrist, and asked a kind friend to help me tie a firm knot to secure it. For the next three years, this bracelet would become a part of me, always reminding me of all the lessons I'd learned in Peru – held in place by a simple but strong knot.

However, these sorts of knots aren't the only ones that move around with and become a part of us as we live through our years.

We are riddled with a different kind of knots: knots created by events in life that throw you in a loop, and drag you back through it when you least expect it. Some knots are created by people – those who have knots themselves, who are simply finding a way to untie theirs by practicing on your strings. Perhaps there is a reason why they call them “heartstrings”. These openings to our inner psyche are so open to being tugged and torn and tied – the epitome of our vulnerability. It's no surprise that over the years we also find ourselves running around in circles, chasing our own tails, and getting all tied up, all in search of what we're all about.

But oftentimes we don't ever find out.

And all we're left with are these knots. Sometimes these knots plague us for the rest of our lives, weighing down our hearts and stopping anyone from reaching in once more, afraid that the knots will only grow tighter and tighter until we cease to feel anything at all.

I have spent the duration of this Peruvian bracelet's life, and particularly the past couple of months, attempting to undo

some of these knots. I have spent days wondering where I am supposed to go next, evenings spilling the contents of my heart to others and nights thinking about how all of these knots managed to become so ingrained into who I've become.

But aren't knots supposed to make us stronger and able to hold on more? Aren't knots the very thing that can save our lives as we climb up the towering rocky hillside to find ourselves unable to hang on any longer? Is it not the only response we can turn to as someone pushes us off that cliffside and all you can think of is to not hit rock bottom? The figure eight knot, tied into an infinity of security, is able to withstand our greatest tensions. Even the Inca used knots to write the story of their civilization, keeping records to preserve their history and further their economy.

So this begs the question: what's the point of knots? Do we have any reason to make it a life's mission to untie every single knot we've accumulated through our years?

Just about a month ago, I discovered that my bracelet was becoming untied during a time when I was constantly leaving people and places behind in search of my next destination. It was a difficult time. Was the luck of my journey now running out? Will I now lose touch with all of those souls who've helped tie my bracelet? Every time I asked another friend to tie my bracelet back, I would keep discovering it to be untied on its own, despite how strongly it was tied.

It isn't until I find myself standing at a train station in Sheffield that it all starts to unravel. I ask my friend Chris to help me tie my bracelet back up again using a strong knot he learned from climbing, since I don't know much about knots. He ties it, but leaves me with some of the most profound words I'd heard in a while. “*One thing I know about knots is that they always come undone.*” ▀