**Finding My Exoskeleton**

It’s Sunday, January 18th, 2015 and I’m in my room, wearing what I remember to be a dirty, sweaty shirt with the word “Slacker” on it in bold, red font, hung over an image of Snoopy, the dog from the comic strip Peanuts, laying on his dog house. In addition to my sweaty upper wear is a pair of black, ripped boxers. I have not left my room all day, and it is nearing 7pm at night. I mentally acknowledge my surroundings, knowing that behind me are two, large, rectangular yellow-orange plywood closets shoved together against a wall, leaking papers and clothing to the floor and I can’t remember the last time I closed their doors. Opposite them lies a bed made of the same material with broken drawers under the mattress, a shoddy stained piece of surplus covered by a very nice foam pad and wrapped in stained, shoddy grey sheets. Atop those covers I’ve coveted for four years is a red and white comforter with a sharpie stain on the white side that I mistakenly did my freshman year, along with my girlfriend’s pillow I stole from her almost a year ago with one of those quirky motivational statements.

The floor is littered with clothes: some black sweatpants covered in grime from exercises at the gym but could probably go for another use, more torn, brightly colored boxer briefs (I have a knack for ruining my favorite underpants), two or three shirts that I’ve worn multiple times this week, and a pair of jeans that I reuse daily for my morning shift at the late-night café just ten minutes south of my dormitory. The rest of the room is pretty Spartan in nature, to the left of my desk adorned with a desktop computer is a bookshelf stuffed with pleasure-reading (such as Bruce Lee, or some choice science fantasy), a few textbooks I begrudgingly bought for my senior year, and even more papers. Next to that is a micro fridge topped with a coffee bean grinder and a coffee pot, kind of like my very own crack pipe, as the coffee pot is rarely empty.

A *ping* comes from my speakers notifying me that someone replied to my comment on a Facebook post about the NFC Championship game. I grew up about 40 minutes from Seattle and I’m proud to say (at least at this time) that I’m the farthest thing from being a Seahawks fan. So, in my secret desire to be an asshole, I get on the Internet, log onto Facebook, and get into shit-fests with people about how all of the current Seahawks fans are bandwagoners.

I didn’t choose the thug life, it chose me.

My stomach growls a smidge as I’m typing up yet another four to five paragraph retort, having not read anything my opponent said, and I distinctly remember I haven’t eaten since the oatmeal around breakfast. Instead of mentally acknowledging anything, I physically look around my room and think *It never changes, my life never changes, does it? I do this every weekend, sit on my computer and screw around, alone, in my room.*

It’s true, I suppose, I don’t get out much. I’ve never even been around downtown Pullman, and its my senior year. Don’t people usually go out, eat, get drunk, get laid and do… normal people things? I can’t say that I’m entirely introverted, especially when I’ve lived in Stimson Hall for four years, the building that caused my social aptitude to flower. But I notice I don’t have the strongest friendships with other guys in this all-male monument to brotherhood as much as others do. Even I, whom likes to pretend that he’s all humble and selfless, has to admit that I’ve grown at least a little since my freshman year. And I remember how it all started, pulling up to Stimson Hall in August of 2011, as “Danger Zone” by Kenny Loggins blared out of box speakers into the parking lot…

*I was only nineteen*, chubby, shaggy-haired and quiet. My blonde hair often covered my forehead, the back of my hair going down my neck like a mullet, my ears being covered in a lion’s mane, but only a lion on the face. I was sitting in the back-seat of my dad’s Ford Flex, a deep candy apple red, my mother in the passenger seat with her curly, bright blond hair, a Lifeguard sweatshirt from Chelan, Washington, and my father in the driver’s seat sporting business casual, his slightly greying yet full hair in a trimmed cut with large, round spectacles like Clark Griswold from the *Vacation* movies. I was daydreaming, probably about Star Wars, probably about my future college experiences, but actually about Star Wars. The previous night on the ride from Issaquah (a medium-sized town 40 minutes from Seattle) to Spokane for our hotel, I had told my parents I was going to act like the rebel in the Green Day song “Horseshoes and Handgrenades” did; that I was going to be just like my father and “Drink, Fight and Fuck”, despite having little experience in those categories.

Nevertheless, as we drove down the looming hill into the valley of Pullman, the large, brick Washington State University center greeting us at the bottom of the hill, I worry. Will I magically change overnight into someone that isn’t afraid of people? Someone that can hold a conversation with another person and not go into flop-sweat as I have nothing to discuss besides the weather and Star Wars? Or will I remain the same old Mack as I’ve always been? As if my parents can read my thoughts, a tactic that could’ve been useful two years earlier, they say these *classic* parenting lines:

“Sweetie, you’re going to love college so much!” My mother has cut the cord. She cut it before I went to kindergarten.

“Mack, you’re going to do great, you’re a smart young man and you’ll be fine”. Dad likes to lie to me.

While I had all the worry in the world over women and winning friends and influencing people, I wasn’t worried about life. I had a single room in my new dormitory, Stimson Hall, I was going to rush SAE (though I didn’t know how one “rushed”, it was something I expected I would just do), and I would try to lose weight. The car pulled down Main Street, as I saw what I expected in a small town, small shops with dim lights and nothing aesthetically sexy or pleasing.

I was a bit of a building snob at that age.

More twists and turns through the roads as we finally crossed the bridge to the entrance to the campus, one short jaunt up one hill, a left turn, and then another dash up a second hill, as we passed Waller Hall, a building with a classical look to it, red brick, white wood, a copula. And then we turned into Stimson Hall, into a question mark shaped parking lot before a small green hill that held a fountain and a basketball court. As Dad parked the car, I got out and heard my favorite song from when I was a kid, blaring from speakers situated behind windows in a similarly structured building as Waller, but somehow smoother and more refined. “Danger Zone” by Kenny Loggins was playing, and I got excited, my nervousness left me in a few waves, *it was time to check in…*

I swirled around in my chair, my pants-less legs chafed against the brown wool of the swivel seat, the wheels moving away from my desk. Hunger pains finally sat in, the kind of hunger pains that stab you like a petulant child with a sharp-nailed finger, “Feed me, feed me” he whines and protests. When I get those hunger pains, I know I should probably eat. I look at my books, untouched throughout the weekend, and remember *Oh crap, I have a project to do!* Said project is a writing expose on life in Pullman, something that I’ve never truly experienced. I sit up and feel my ass muscles unclench as my leg muscles surge blood through them for the first time in hours, and I decide I’ll use this as an excuse to eat.

I sift through the dirty clothes on my floor: blue jeans with grease stains on the knees from work, check, I’m wearing a ratty t-shirt I don’t mind wearing out, check, my brown plaid workman’s jacket, check, hiking shoes, not boots, to symbolize my expedition, check. In manners of pulling and throwing on, I assemble a half-decent outfit worthy of sarcastic praise, as my girlfriend would often say to me with a smile on her face and baby-voice in her lungs:

“Did Mack put clothing on? Yes he did, yes he did!” She loves to patronize me, but it’s okay as I have no idea how I pulled a beautiful woman like her.

The questionable girlfriend in question gives me a big smile and a kiss as I return in kind and log off of Skype, our only means of heart-to-heart connection in a long-distance relationship. I look at my door, a heavy yellow-brown wooden door with a round metal handle, sigh, and pull it open to the hallway outside. The halls are plain white with an offset spotted grey and light grey carpet, with light fixtures on the top of the sides, long and rectangular. Their pure white lights would go off precisely at 9:58pm every night, and illuminate at 7 in the morning each morning.

These lights were on now, as the time was now 7:30, as I had wasted a few more minutes arguing on Facebook. I close the door to my room and hit a few times with my closed fist, my knuckles go slightly red from the impact. I do this every time I close my door, whether morning, noon or night, I have a fear that my door isn’t locked and that someone will sneak in and steal my precious stuff. I love my stuff, its my only friend, I can’t let some… person go and take all of my friends away. That’s happened before and I don’t want it to happen again.

I jiggle the lock a few times to make sure the door is locked and I turn left down the hallway. I pass a few 8x11’’ paper posters advertising games nights, sexual assault awareness programs, and old posters that need removal. Past the same wooden doors that guard my room, adorned with name tags matched with images of video game characters and music symbols I walk, around the curved end of the hallway to the west wing, down past the community bathroom with the bathtub no-one uses, to the rectangular stairwell with the peach blush tiled stairs and matching railing. I descend these stairs as I’ve done repeatedly often in my more youthful days, until I reach the basement floor and break out into the night sky.

The fresh air, the night sky, all old friends of a boy that likes to be alone, yes I’ve taken night walks before, contemplating life and high school drama, a good walk is all I need to make even the worst day into a decent one. I move down the cement steps to the question shaped parking lot, imagining all the times I’ve been in this parking lot with friends, going to the late-night café, going to meet my lover, or just going out. I cross the road and head down the sidewalk opposite of Waller, pass a red-brick structure, the Health and Wellness center, until I reach the intersection just a few yards away. Then I move down the hill, when Valentine’s Day comes to my mind, the dreaded day of romantics.

What could I get for Kasey? I’ve done flowers, she has still hasn’t finished the copious amounts of chocolate I gave her for Christmas, but I’ll send her some Valentine’s edition truffles from Godiva, she loves those. No matter what I get her, or what she gets me, however, will take away the pain of my sophomore year…

*The Sponsors of Stimson*, our Resident Advisors with a unique title and a historical background to how they are to uphold the traditions of Stimson, are probably the reason I stayed for my freshman year. I’m sitting in room 332, a much larger room than 313B. Due in part to the motivation from my first Sponsor, Tristan, a man with a smile that reminds you of childlike joy with an aura of political authority and slicked black hair, brought me into Hall Government, which in turn led to my election as Secretary at the end of the first year in Stimson.

Now its' my sophomore year, Valentine’s Day, another day to remind lonely men like me how alone we are. I’m sitting in my room, a large rectangular room with my bed situated at the back wall, the window resting to the left of my feet when I go to bed at night, my desk perpendicular to the head of my bed. I had just ordered delivery, cheese tortellini with Alfredo sauce and meatballs, with a pair of breadsticks. I heard a commotion outside, and I opened the door to see my friends Alex and Jordan, the latter whom was also my Sponsor, having a conversation of solemn concern.

Jordan is my hero, the Stimsonite (the name for men of Stimson), and one of the best Sponsors I have ever known. Though I had taken room 313B at the beginning of the year, when Jordan offered a room in his section, I immediately took up the offer, and moved all of my stuff at the end of Semester break. As our rooms were connected by the community washroom, we shared a bathroom and a few stories, though I was afraid to talk to him, how can you approach your idol without fear of looking like a fool? My appearance into the hallway caused him to look at me.

“What’s going on?” I asked, feeling the air in my lungs seize up. Something was wrong.

He looked at me with a quiet pause, shrugged his shoulders as if nothing was going on, and then said

“I’m getting fired”.

I almost broke down in tears, my rinsed out jar of preservatives that I used as a water glass nearly snapped in my hands. Jordan had been a part of Stimson since his freshman year, a Sponsor in his second semester, and had done his job upholding the value of strong friendship and brotherhood for nearly four years.

As a freshman, I had said an off-key remark to him to counter one of his, and when I apologized, feeling bad for talking out of turn to a senior man, he put his hand on my shoulder and smiled, saying

“No Mack, you were right, I shouldn’t have said what I did”.

He apologized, the first time that anyone that ever bullied me has ever apologized; Jordan didn’t even bully, he just said something that triggered a response in my head. Combined with that and his counsel during my suicidal thoughts near the end of my freshman year, Jordan was the man I looked up to, the man I wanted to be for Stimson.

This was his last year, his last semester, and he was getting fired. Being fired from Residence Life is a goddamn death sentence to a person’s friendships, stability, and even academics. Jordan, along with Taylor, a fellow Sponsor, had forty-eight hours to pack up their stuff and leave Stimson, with a trespass ban for the rest of the year. I walked out into the hallway as Jordan called an emergency section meeting, reading the letter he had received from Residence Life. I nearly threw my glass against a wall in anger.

His brother Jansen and some other residents that looked up to Jordan all met together later that night and conspired to meet with William, the man with the answers. Nobody knew who made the final call, but he could lead us to whom. The next morning, in front of the white door to his office, the purity of the color smudged with his transgressions that the seven men, some wearing their special Stimson shirts that Jordan had given them, a deep blue with the word “Stimson” in lime green, myself included, waited for William to arrive for his office hours.

This less-than-man man approached with a coffee cup and a smug, surprised look on his face, his fuckhead-bearded, impotent smile, hipster trim cut, stupid, lying, cheating, deceiving, whining piece of shit he is, opened the door. My arms were crossed, and he would later comment to Jansen that I looked ready to ‘flip over a table’, Jansen’s response was:

“He was! But Mack is smarter than that”.

At 7pm on February 14th, 2012, I found out Jordan and Taylor, dedicated Sponsors both, had been fired from their position, and the next three months would become civil war between *the residents of Stimson…*

Setting foot on the bridge adorned with Cougar statues at the far end on both sides of the railing, I chuckled, thinking I’m probably still on the blacklist for Residence Life. Though my close friends and I had acted well within policy, some had not, and that affected everyone. The Sponsor system was thrown out the window, as residents from within the hall usually took positions, such an occurrence would not happen next year and perhaps for the year afterward, or years. My hands were deep in my jean pockets, pushing the bad thoughts out of my mind, focusing on what I wanted to eat for dinner. Mandarin House, a Chinese restaurant, sounded delicious, but cautious.

I pulled my hands out of my pockets and softly rubbed my cheeks, reaching the middle of the bridge, a chill from the wind tossing my hair around slightly, my self-consciousness returning as I felt the swelling. I had gotten double jaw surgery barely a month ago, and I was still healing from the nice Jewish surgeon pull my lower jaw forward and push my upper jaw backward after removing my wisdom teeth from their sockets. Talking to people was technically easier, but no less nerve-wracking. The civil war helped pull me out of my shell even more than government did, as I had to balance friendships on both sides of the issue. Having to juggle between loyalty and idolization taught me when to speak, and when to listen.

But no amount of social experience could take away my self-consciousness, feeling the bumps and chubby cheeks of a post-op wallflower. My self-consciousness kept me away in my room, away from forming friendships, away from having fun, and here I was, walking to Mandarin House, alone on a Sunday night.

I entered the drag that lead to Main Street, a confusing as hell one-way road if you don’t know what you’re doing. This is one of the most metropolitan areas of Pullman, with buildings sporting new-age architecture and lovely shades of silver-grey and grey silver, with the older, white-tan buildings past them, their style stuck in the late eighties. Past the “hip and trendy” coffee shop Thomas Hammer, the home of the best drip in town, but that’s just my opinion, is the only Taco Del Mar for miles, then a few niche art galleries and Mom and Pop boutiques, to the Daily Grind, the place where English majors and literary snobs go in the morning for coffee. Just past that is Rico’s Pub, where English majors and literary snobs go in the evening for liquor. As I pass the glass windows of Rico’s, each pane sporting bold golden text like “Burgers and Fries” and “Fish and Chips”, a bald man with five o’clock shadow and round glasses eyes me from the indoors.

His gaze is the exact reason why I don’t go out; people downright frighten me, as his eyes give a stabbing glare into my soul. He thinks I’m a delinquent, I guess, and I probably am with my unwashed lion’s mane. I hurriedly cross the road to Mandarin House, and I enter the brightly lit establishment, encompassing just an eighth of a block, a small restaurant. I enter in through the glass door and up the red carpeted ramp, a small, black wooden shelf cuts off a dart to the side and forces me to go up to the hostess’ desk. The friendly waitress, an older woman, early forties perhaps, with a bob of black hair and a smile, approaches me and notices my solitude endeavor.

“Hi, would you like to order to-go?”

Well shit, that didn’t go to plan. I could feel myself blushing as I asked for a menu to look through, and took a seat in one of the red-cushioned metal chairs. I noticed a kitty good luck charm on the hostess’ desk, with a individually sectioned shelving unit cut from the same black wood at the desk by the entrance. The light made the orange-brown wallpaper emit a warm glow. I look over to the arrangement of chairs and tables, black-table cloths to fit the darker color scheme of the restaurant, and as I glance through the menu, reading the descriptions of all the crispy, crunchy, fried meat and seafood dishes I cannot eat yet due to my teeth, I remember the last time I came in here. It was junior year, my friends Alex and Steven went here for dinner, and I joined for company, as it was two months into my beloved girlfriend’s stay in a mental health clinic, and I was lonely.

I smile, thinking that I should’ve taken her here last November, when she came for our one year anniversary, the longest and most stable relationship that I’ve ever had in my life, which was saying a lot for how roller coaster of a year it was, and to think, it all started with Bicardi 151…

*In the movie lounge of Stimson*, my tired muscles sunk into the torn and stained leather couch in front of a large, flat-screen television. The room was divided into three levels, with the floor rising up three feet per each level, and each one had a matching, equally torn couch. A white carbon to-go box sat on the round, blue wooden table in front of me, inside were two breakfast sandwiches: sausage, egg and cheese topped with chipotle mayonnaise in between two square croissants. I figured I had earned it with the previous two-hour long karate class, where I was kicked, thrown, and punched around for sport. On my phone, using Facebook’s messaging application, Kasey messaged me little jokes and comments. I had gotten to know her during her brief stay at Washington State University before she took medical withdrawal; she was a creamy olive skinned blonde-brunette with a perfectly white and toothy smile, the kind of smile you get weak in the knees for, the kind of smile that sets a person apart from others.

My mind buzzed as it tried to comprehend both the action on screen, an episode of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* was playing, the Halloween episode to be precise, as well as the in-depth conversation about alcohol and coffee I was sharing with Kasey. Though we talked about vanilla vodka with coffee ice cubes, near-gasoline was coursing through my system, confusing my brain to think “Hey, let’s tell this girl that I like her”. This might’ve been the one time in my life that I picked up on flirting, but I digress.

“Hey Kasey… I want you to know… I like you”. Boom, can’t take it back now. My heart pounded along with my drunken state as I awaited her response.

“I like you too… But… what about the distance?” Fuck formality and courtship, this girl knew what she wanted, and I assume that she wanted me.

“Fuck distance, we’ll make it work”.

One week later, on November 7th, I officially asked Kasey to be my girlfriend. Though I had assumed from the start that we were together, since we both liked each other, something that I would’ve never guessed, she was an old-fashioned gal, and wanted to be asked out properly. So I called her up and said “Do you want to be my girlfriend?” Her “Yes!” was all I needed to know is that there was still hope for me, and that there was a life outside of my bedroom.

But love is never a trial-less experience, as I quickly experienced. As I said before, I'm in a long distance relationship, and by December 7th, 2013, we would have been dating a month. I'm in my room, Room 328, my desk upright against the wall as I listen to dubstep or Green Day or some music band, contemplating the flowers I bought for her to be sent the next day, as a knock comes to my door. Jeremy, the blonde, bulging foreheaded man of probably 23 always with a smile on his face, was there. He was a Sponsor a few years ago but was one of the first victims of the William Reign, a victim that didn't give us the chance to foresee the events to come.

"Hey Mack! Want to go to the youth group tonight?"

CCF, or Campus Christian Fellowship, was my brief, freshman foray into faith, with Jeremy as my shepherd. I would usually go at his invitation, being unable to say "No" to a friendly face (I'm really bad at saying "No"). I stopped going because my desire to be introverted took over my desire to go talk about Jesus and sing.

"Well, Jeremy... I'd like to but I'm supposed to meet a friend at 10pm..."

I referred to my friend Erik, a thirty-something Stimson alumni and Army veteran. We planned to split $100 worth of drinks together using a gift card he won at a football game.

"10? Sweet! CCF starts at 9 and ends around 10!"

You can probably guess what happened next. After singing for a half-hour beyond the time Jeremy promised, I finally made my way to Valhalla, a bar just on the edge of campus, one that was dark, yet well maintained.

I entered the bar, the dim lighting just barely illuminating the wood of the room, a deep-brown oak wood bar with matching stools, and several black cherry wood tables around black leather bars. Erik was there, the only friend I truly made my freshman year in a karate class. His brown-blonde goatee mixed with a few scruffs of blond hair to cover his almost-bald head glistening in sweat from the hot room. "You're late, motherfucker" he said at me with a half-chuckle in his voice, as he dragged me up to the bar and ordered me to order. I picked a fire-bomb, a shot of fireball or three mixed with redbull. The bubbling, yellow-orange liquid came to me in a clear plastic cup, and I downed it in an instant, as Erik grabbed a giant pitcher of amber-colored beer. That's around the time when the night went to hell.

Apple-tinis, shots of Jack Daniel's straight, more beer, tequila, all told around 11-12 drinks in two hours. I was supposed to call Kasey at midnight, I remember, as I watched a television movie admist the crowd noise, being generally distraught with how packed the bar was; I don't like crowds when I'm drunk. I don't remember what Erik was saying to me and when we left the bar, but I know I was on the phone with Kasey, my stomach grumbling for food and coffee.

"Kasey, I-I wanna... I want a ven...venti... ventea tea... car-mel macchiato" I mumbled into the phone, my words and my spit flying everwhere.

"No Mack, no coffee" she said, with her classic hint of worry and concern mixed with tears, "You'll die", citing something medical about liquor, heart rate and coffee.

"Well you're not a FUCKING DOCTOR Kasey!"

Now I was drunk, very drunk at this point, stumbling up a grey-tiled road down to Stimson Hall, back home. That was the first mistake I made, calling up a lover while drunk. Second mistake was calling her before our one-month anniversary, we're weird and stupid like that, counting each month we've been together (A year and a half now - my new personal best!). But when I called her, while drunk, while only have barely been dating a month, and telling her that she's NOT what she's dreamed of becoming her entire life, I know I made the trifecta of "Dating Don'ts", as she would remind me in the morning, sobbing her eyes out through the little Skype window on my white iPad, as I lay covered in vomit and sweat. Apparently I had stumbled into my building, stolen a slice of pizza and promptly vomited it up in a public trash can, then continuously more on my bed.

The next morning, as I reacquainted my love with the toilet bowl, puking globs of yellow stomach lining into her moist gullet, I was thankful that I had planned ahead. The poisetta I ordered for her arrived at noon, and as she cried, happily this time, over the flowers, *all was forgiven...*

I ran back to Rico's Pub, the balding, bespectacled man kept staring me down; I made an attempt to enter, even going so far to sit down at the bar, but I was so locked down in fear I ended up running out. I didn't know how to order or what to do, having stood at the door for a minute or two before being told I could sit down. So I ducked into the coffee shop down the way, called the Daily Grind. As I stood there, shaking, not knowing what to order, the yellow-walled room with the black and white tile flooring not calming me or inspiring me to write as it usually did for coffee hipster-writers, the Seahawks Barista calmly waited for me to decided what to get. He was in a grey sweatshirt with the word "WSU" emblazoned on it in crimson, his ocean blue and neon green cap with a poof-ball topping resting softly on his brown-haired head. I ordered a white chocolate mocha, one of my favorite drinks, as the man took my debit card. I saw a tip function but didn't know how to work the machine, as the man told me that I needed to enter my pin and swipe. I use my card all the time, so not knowing how to work a card-swipe machine shocked me. As he made my drink, sans tip, I stood there and sent texts of fear to my girlfriend. With a smile, he offered me a chocolate covered espresso bean, to which I stupidly replied, "D-does that cost extra?" I likely blushed like a rose as I said this, falling back into a terrifyingly catatonic state of fear. He smiled and said "Nope", and I took the offered bean. Wanting to give extra to such a polite man, I asked him:

"Can I leave you a tip?"

He just smiled and said, "Nah, you were supposed to leave a tip when you swiped, but don't worry about it!" Now, I figure a regular person would have swindled a confused customer into a tip, but this man didn't, so I tipped him in the only way I knew how, and said "Go Hawks" as I left the store.

"Go Hawks!"

I walked past Rico's, having long given up a trip inside, and my stomach was growling for food. I crossed the road, into the shadows of the unlit side of the street, like night and day, and noticed a tall, white sign with red lettering: "THAI GINGER", is what it said. The building was reminiscent of an old Mexican restaurant, a red tarp-like, umbrella-shaped hood covering the edge of the roof, the building itself made of white plaster. I figured, "Fuck it, I can eat alone, right?" and went inside. The carpet was a deep maroon and all of the furniture was the same burnished yellow oak as everything else was in this damn town, plywood in fact. A young Asian girl in a collared shirt the same color as the carpet brought me to a seat, letting me keep my coffee, and whom I presumed to be her mother came by to take my order. I ordered Chicken Pad Thai without the peanuts, but with extra peanut sauce on the side. I didn't know if my teeth could handle any crunch yet.

But as a plate of Chicken Pad Thai with peanuts, and a bowl of soupy peanut sauce beside it, I gave up and ate, alone. I thought I could go out and do normal people things, I thought I could live. But as my teeth painfully cracked down on the peanuts, I realized I was still looking for a way to be social.

Epilogue

Several weeks later, a similar situation came before me; I was in boxers, likely arguing on the internet, when it dawned on me.

"I need to do a project again"

This time, determined to do things right so I could write about it later, I showered and got myself dressed in green-grey slacks and a white plaid button-down shirt. Dad always said "You look good, you feel good. You feel good, you do good", so I did just that. With my hiking shoes and a backpack full of journals to write in, I walked into Rico's Pub and sat down at the bar.

*Dammit, I got money to burn and I'm itchin for a manhattan*, I thought, as I flagged down the bartender.

"How much for a Maker's Mark Manhattan?"

"7.50" the blonde, paste-white female said, her hair tied in a ponytail.

"I'll take one, please"

A few moments later, I would notice a man to my right, conversing with the bartender whom took my order, her pointy yet soft nose being the most distinguishing feature about her, besides the curly ponytail. He would nod and lean to the right as he spoke, saying "Yeah, okay" affirmatively. I would learn that the man with the taut, cross-country runner body was named David; an electrical engineer employed at the college and divorcee of an alcoholic wife (causing him to cut down on his own drinking) with three kids and a grandson. I would later see him at the gym and around campus, striking up small conversations and making failed promises to meet at Rico's again (time was something I didn't have - and still don't). But you don't meet someone by looking at them with a brown Manhattan in your hand. He noticed what I was doing, and I told him I was doing a project for an English class. Eventually, I figured 'What the hell, go for it', offered him my right hand and said:

"My name is Mackenzie, nice to meet you"