
January 2019

Awakening to a new year, realizing that cannabis gives me social anxiety in situations where I don't know people very well (along with lethargy). Also recognizing cringe worthy sayings that I write. Proud of myself for writing in the journal. Lots of reminiscing from the childhood I had, emotions of love, yearning, and shadows of old habits that reared their head. I call turning 23 my "paradigm shift" year since 22 was "convergence" after my plans for completing undergraduate with no debt and getting into a PhD program panned out simultaneously. I also talk a lot about being kinder to myself. Therapy helped me recognize that many of my early memories are 3rd person POV, making sense because I disassociated myself from who I was at 12 years old when bad things occurred, creating a "we" personality as a coping mechanism. Joseph plays a grandfather role from the start, giving me a beacon of guidance in otherwise fog. Also began to order milk substitutes in drinks this month. Getting to know the Fordham community from a personal but also impersonal POVs. The former, lets me figure out how to write this journal and also appreciate my social development in romance, friendships, partying, etc. The latter figuring out many are complacent and not focusing too much on the future, making me double down on networking and internship. Issues with Alexis (strains in our relationship), though I don't pinpoint the reasons. I mention wanting to share my story, being anxious about not being smart enough to do research but okay with coursework, and setting up priorities (even here, programming in R and Python emerge as points). I noticed many people in Grad School were older [this is also a reflection in 2023, given that I am 27 now meanwhile people I saw were 26 and 32 while I was just 23, meaning they're 30 and 36 now] and how I thought they had it all figured out. Lol. Existential dread as per usual: "I do not know what I am doing and sometimes that scares me beyond doubt because my life could go in so many ways. I am trying to plan for my life the same way I did all those years ago but now the stakes are higher because I am older and have more to think about." I teach myself more and more Latex, which makes me happy and shows ability to pick things up. Anxiety ticks: "I feel like I have excess energy and that I need to get rid of it somehow or else I will explode." (hand sweat, finger clenching). I recognize that I don't watch as many shows as other people and that creates a certain distance from a good number of people on what we can talk about. I was also waking up earlier at around 6 am every morning to do something. I tell myself that "... if I graduate at 26-28 with my Ph.D., I will consider it a victory; 27 would be ideal." I mention stress a lot; "there is so much instability and you need to optimize every level and every period. I suppose that means that you must know what your period length is and how to best maximize it. What would optimizing my first year in a Ph.D. be like?" I also get my permanent residency this month. Up until that day, about 3/4ths of my life had been living in the shadow of fear in the United States.

I say that my feeling of not being enough to fit in will plague me for the rest of my life given that I felt like I was on a stage to justify my existence. "All I have done with my life so far has created a persona where I judge myself so harshly." "I don't believe in the organized religion my father preaches from his imperfect pulpit.. however, I do believe that there is a randomness to life that can be swayed by the actions and thoughts that we project onto it." I told myself I cannot wait to give presentations at MSU, returning triumphantly. I also moved to the Bronx with new roommates.

February 2019

Permanent residency led to a new angst: will the drive I have kept with me all my life persist now that I no longer needed to justify my existence to the US government? Prophetic dream of observing two people unsure of staying together talking by a fountain and a plaza. I notice I talk a lot about wanting to make guides about economics for people because the way I was taught felt so esoteric [but in hindsight May 2023, I did not write any of these. I was left exhausted from learning them myself and did not put in the added effort of making things digestible.] I also reflect on watching the first episode of season 7 Game of Thrones: "This is the first time in my adult life where I feel like I spend quality time with my own friends and it feels rather amazing". Discovering I like Guinness. On Oliasami's: "They took me in when the rest of the world cast me out. I will never forget that." I remind myself that I chose this life of a Ph.D.; it will not be easy by any stretch, but it will be rewarding once I get through it. I notice I beat myself up a bit through stress of the classes and seek validation from others, then use my free time to catch up on things. Also, green card came this month. "How do I repair 17 years of living like one misstep and I would be kicked out of the country, of my dreams?" The Darius-coke incident this month was one where I felt like Alexis and I were diverging as people. Felt tempted to flirt with undergrads who came to me for tutoring, but I refrained from mixing things up. Also, noticing that my time in the Bronx initially led to me eat mostly eggs for breakfast. Therapy realization: "I am optimistic because my whole life has been outside people looking believing in and helping me, which encourages me to go further." I talk about some financial maneuvering so that I can get an Amex eventually. My life during this time mostly consisted of the four classes which I fussed over a lot, tutoring, going to the gym in the mornings, cooking big breakfasts, eating lobster tails, hanging out with Bronx neighborhood friends, and seeing Alexis with her friends.

March 2019

As much as I look back to Joe the therapist with 'meh' feelings at the end, I do write he helped me out a lot with the ability to communicate my feelings and that I felt like I was progressing emotionally. Appreciating Hozier this month through the album dropping "Wasteland, Baby!"

Also noticing that I would come home late from working at the library (11:30 pm was a normal time constantly). I sparsely talk about how Alexis and I are doing okay at times, that sex is surprising when we have it, and that sometimes we connect (and that I feel protective of her). I notice that I don't really talk about the dynamics of our relationship, though, which makes me think I wasn't really paying attention to her growth during this time. It goes so far as to say "I enjoyed it, felt like an actual date". I also go through researcher's and writer's block this month. I call it a mental break from the life I know during the common week of the Ph.D. I continue feeling stressed about econometrics specifically and wonder if I will ever learn it. I meet Carlos Panjon this month and really appreciate our friendship [especially 4 years later]. I continue going out with Alexis and her friends until 4 am, smoking hookah and drinking more than I thought I did. And I end the month thinking that Alexis and I are finally on good terms.

April 2019

I notice that my parents have little understanding of the world I live in. My dad did not know I knew calculus, my mom doesn't understand the PhD at all. I meet Lauren Grizzafi from GSAS as I introduce myself to people at Fordham more. Get involved with the department more, too, by doing sweatshirts and such. I feel like Montclair was not helpful in getting my prepared for a Ph.D., and lament about that. But I start to feel like I am getting some grasp on the topics I learn. I resolve not to leave Alexis even though I am tempted by the likes of Anjali who promises me a better life (or did she?); I think the summary is that I was very much so scared to leave the situation and give myself the chance of something new. I continue saying that Alexis and I don't spend too much time together, too. This culminated in a discussion of our unhappiness, and whether we should break up. Anjali and I stopped being friends because she could not do that to herself, of course, while I was flip flopping. I oscillate between saying I have good friends and saying I feel lonely and how lonely life is. Speaking with Mirna Alsharif about life and her program, her career. Finding out Luxor Lounge with Hookah, where Alexis got her fake ID taken away from her. For 4/20, Alexis spends time with her friends while I work. I ask, "Am I wasting my youth on this program?" I seem to struggle with pornography here, well, throughout really, but decide to stop this month by deleting anything I had kept that was nefarious. Also noticed that after the whole 4/20 incident [where I later discover she had the whole couple thing occur], Alexis was much more chipper than we were together. I should have suspected something, mostly that we were not going to last. Going out with friends made me reflect on what it means to 'fit in' with a group and why I constantly feel like an organizer/outgoing individual. Also, flirting came more easily to me this month with random people, though I of course do nothing about it. I start to miss the gym life that I tried to keep up in the beginning of

the year but fell through with it. I feel good about my roommates, Tait and Masud, and realize I have been spending quality time with them that I cherish.

May 2019

Reflecting on how quick the year has been flying by. I feel like I do poorly in class exams but end up doing okay, in fact passing my first year comprehensive exams with high marks. My confidence in the field has grown since I started in August last year, so I reflect on that. Oscillatory friendship with Anjali, while I get more involved with the university (for instance, I set up the economics community board which becomes a staple for the department). Again, a lack of talking about Alexis entirely these first couple of days of May. When we do meet up, in Central Park, I feel strange and like I don't know her well. I question my self-confidence when it comes to her. Instead, I continue heavy studying for exams, felt camaraderie with people in the program over how hard it is, and reflect on how I don't feel like I have many real friends. It culminates on a Friday night when I stay home and everyone in my small circle is busy (roommates, Alexis, etc), and I am left to journal and reflect how my life feels. I say that I feel depressed and not being able to have much self-worth, and that I worry I won't do anything of value over the upcoming summer. I reflect that I let myself have no boundary for myself and my happiness, and that I stopped going to the gym or meditating instead to let myself deteriorate as a person and as a man. Discover that Alexis had a threesome in our open relationship which made me angry since I had been working so hard to maintain in the program meanwhile she has been enjoying her life more fully. I end up angry and sad with myself because I let this happen. I reflect on how she used to be beautiful and outgoing when I met her, and theorize that being with me caused her to become depressed (or at least stay more depressed than she would otherwise have been). I say "I have created a space where she feels like I will judge things she does regardless of what they are"; we take a walk where she laments that we have nothing in common anymore and how sad it is to think about not being together. We decide on a taking a break from our relationship for a week and I truly wish to fix things. This made concentrating on finishing the semester really difficult. I got strep throat, worst of all. I have a really long night in Manhattan after the econometrics final and end up sleeping with some random person that Brandon, my old roommate, introduces me to. I say that I use alcohol that night for numbing the pain of my existence. I reclaim a kiss from a gay man because I had been kissed without permission by another one I met in late 2018 and I wanted balance/control, the one night stand girl calls me the energizer bunny, and then I wake up in her apartment and make the long walk back to grand central with a piercing headache. A quote from Emily Maroutian that got me through this time: "You're not stuck. You're just committed to certain patterns of behavior because they helped you in the past. Now those behaviors have come more harmful than helpful. The reason why you can't move forward is because you keep applying an old formula to

a new level in your life. Change the formula to get a different result.” And frankly, because of this stupor, I reach out to cling to Alexis during this time. I start reaching out to friends I had neglected and think “What good are grades when they don’t love me back?” Carlos proves to be essential here, spending time with me to get my mind off things. Big heart to heart conversations ensue with him. My therapist convinces me that I am no longer in survival mode and can ‘let go’. Alexis and I get back together, though somewhat hesitantly. I feel like my life would fall apart without her. But the dynamic is bad with this and I feel like I am now anxious about this relationship ending at any moment. She continues to hang out with the guy from the threesome, Rob, and I spy on them one night out of suspicion. I had yet to tell Alexis about how I was assaulted by my cousin when I was a child and think about telling her. Sex was getting better and I feel good about it. Alexis starts selling weed, I finally get an updated Salvadoran passport. I hang out with her friends while she is out with the guy Rob again, reflecting on how I used to do it with Mariya the fall prior. Partly hypocritical of me, yeah? Open relationships never work, especially when you start to realize all that the other person is doing. Her friendship with him, and her lying about it, was getting me angry – her friend, Jess, obviously wants her to leave me. She writes as such in her journal which I read. I make closer friends with Julia, Alexis’s roommate, and continue freaking out about my comprehensive exams coming up in June. Anjali and I share some moments and I say “In another life, perhaps.” This feeling I have felt one way or another with a number of girls.

June 2019

Nayib Bukele becomes president of El Salvador. I pass the exams for comprehensive qualifiers, which I celebrate by going to the gym and pounding my body. I party really hard with a friend, Dan, and find myself satiated with the amount of partying I have done, almost feeling like I compensated for the undergrad years of not doing so even though it has been a short amount of time relatively. The first half of June felt like a combination of routinely going to the gym near Fordham, making food at home, and being at the library to study. But immediately after the comprehensive exams, I start hanging out with Alexis, Julia, and Matias quite often. I feel like most of that month was spent drinking and smoking with them; I also took other drugs with Alexis and tried to make our relationship bounce back from the stuff that happened the month prior. Lots of me trying on that front by partaking in drugs and buying stuff that I normally would not have; this also leads to Alexis criticizing me for not respecting drugs as much as she thinks I should. I also met up with Kent and we went to a Russian bathhouse which solidified our bond. Something I also notice was that I routinely went through Alexis’s computer and phone without remorse – my trust in her was at an all-time low. Other things: my aunt, married to Gustavo, passes away from cancer and I try to hang out with my brothers more. I have been able to go to Jersey because Sam would pick Alexis and me up, and I try to make Alexis, her

sister Samantha, and my two brothers hang out. We go to a dog park, and I realize how much I dislike suburbia living. More woes with Alexis as she keeps our open relationship closed to me but open for her to explore with other women. Spent a decent amount of time with Julia. Realize that Alexis takes attempts at improvement as a personal attack on her person. Also, again, more smoking and drinking with Harshil and Madlen, more drugs which make me throw up. Staying at that hotel for her birthday was crazy and I am much too out of it to be okay. I vow not to do it anymore. Reflect on how I turned down work offer with a professor because I was being too overwhelmed during the first year, but also because I did not know if I wanted just an academic-involved lifestyle. Saying no is important, but so is having backup plans.

July 2019

Suburbia doldrums followed by a trip to Colorado mid-month. Spending time with Alexis's family was fine, and I really enjoy being in nature. These trips happen mostly to commemorate Lisa's life, as it has now been almost two years since she died. Alexis's family has many hot buttons that I notice make them prone to complain easily. Visited the Great Sand Dunes National Park and think about making my research geared towards inequality (a la Picketty's work). Saw someone almost getting killed, have this reaction that I should have done something even though there was nothing to do. I feel like this summer is my compensation for such a hard first year and don't really think of much with research front things. Instead, I focus on finding a job and or internship so that I can make more money and have some hope of securing a career post program.

August 2019

Spent time with my brothers again, showing them around NYC but recognizing that NYC is only fun when you can afford it. Alexis and I continue a strained relationship of sorts with Rob meddling in the middle. Another meteor: Katie Humphrey arrives back on my radar and I have a romantic breakdown over her and the life I could have had. I think this is a typical reaction given the volatility of my personal relationships at that moment and the fact I don't really know where the PhD is taking me, nor if it will work out. Also make a moment of reflection on how 12 year old me would be proud of my success in the video games I had success in this summer, as well as being proud that every girl that I ever wanted so badly at one point in my life ended up telling me they now wanted me, too? This was the triumvirate of Kate, Becky, and Prarthna. Further deterioration of trust between Alexis and I, both from my end and from hers. Also, Katie and I cannot keep talking because we like each other too much and I cannot afford to mess up my life for her right now. It was a sad month. I reflect on why I feel overwhelming senses of duty towards "broken women" and why I yearn for their approval, loathe to disappoint them. Matias

breaks up with Julia, I try to reconcile with Alexis but to no avail. We continue fighting about a myriad things including Rob, her not appreciating me enough, our mismatched sex life, and then she ends up cursing at me. I keep checking her phone to feed my anxiety. All around bad time. End the month with thinking about joining student government in order to build a community around me and the school, since again my personal life is a mess. I also get closer to Johanna Francis as she offers me an assistant position over working with Paul McNelis (that is a dodged bullet, absolutely). Also reflecting on how incredible Joseph and Sam are in my life as mentors and guides. Joseph, specifically, has added a lot of value in my life because of how much I learned from him. I end the month with a party at my place which really makes me feel good because I love playing “host”.

September 2019

The start of my second year and I get excited by research in monetary policy space by Sinha. Mistakes from year 1 rear their head as I try to get used to the dynamics of evolving friendships. It does not help that I have a double life: one outside the university with my partner where I do not connect with her group on an intellectual/professional level, and one inside the university where I am trying to develop myself socially and figure out myself professionally with people more like me. This creates too much tension and I seem to be neither of one group or another entirely. More concerns grow about my family, my two brothers specifically, as it seems that the situation at home is not tenable for Nate or Brandon. Discover that the Rob situation with Alexis was worse than I thought and feel really bad/anxious about it. This, along with anxiety and fear for my brothers’ well-being hinders my productivity level this month a great deal. I express a lot of “head fog” and “lack of motivation” throughout the whole month. Also begin my first internship during my PhD this month, which provides much-needed corporate interaction/professional development away from personal relationships and academic doldrums. Katie rears her head back into my life with a message to get over my ‘woe is me’ problem; this is what she said: “Your life is complicated, I get it. But you won’t let yourself simplify it. You lock yourself away in this far away castle of secrets and meanings you claim are too complex to share as your defense mechanism, while continuing to wonder why no one “gets” you. You put yourself in the damn castle and continue to spend all your time confused how you got there in the first place. You speak of vulnerability and a happy future, but you do everything in your power to disallow any of it to occur. The world would sooner blow up than the chance of you opening up and -god forbid- you letting someone care for you.” September is a month that feels like I am single again: I go on a number of dates, flirt with various women, and otherwise try to quiet that personal side of myself. I get lost in internship, classes, and dealing with Alexis by not really putting too much stock in fixing my relationship. I can see that the end was getting nearer every day. I also find Devocion, the coffee shop, for studying.

October 2019

I try to revisit my interest in behavioral economics this month through the financial econ class. Spending more time with Alexis. My feelings here oscillate between being in love with her and thinking we are not compatible. I continue thinking it is dispensable because I try to flirt with other women instead of spending as much time as I thought I should be doing with her mending the broken trust. Work, school, and everything continue as planned without many updates. I find myself feeling overwhelmed with doing the classes plus an internship, but I hold on. I also get told I am still angry (this was on an application to a fellowship) and I reflect on how the scars from my childhood and my 'victim' mentality from being undocumented still hurt me. However, I have to recognize that I am in a PhD not because of my status but because of who I am as a person. I also need to grow up and get over the things that happened to me because they are holding me back. I think Alexis and I will end before the year ends, though it is a strange dichotomy. I don't like the idea of her cheating on me because it feels like she broke my trust and the trust part is hard to reconcile. However, I like my freedom in an open relationship because I can sleep with whomever I want. In other words, having cake and eating it to. This comes at a hard time as I try to figure out what to research professionally for my doctorate and figure out what I want from life at 23 personally. I meet two girls named Gillian and Zuher at Pace for an event Alexis was throwing. Gillian and I would be sexually involved about 2.5 years later, and Zuher would die in less than that time. I also meet Gabby, someone I end up hurting because she becomes too emotionally invested in me. That takes about a month later. Alexis and I continue fighting, Monetary Econ is the big focus for me this month. International Econ surprises me with high grades. Arunima sees a lot of potential in me during Monetary Econ class and it lifts my spirits. I also recognize, through my associations with women, that instead of being this awkward kid I always thought I was, lucky to be in a relationship with a woman like Alexis and having low self-worth, I am actually quite adept at making people like me. I get complimented on my ability to have good conversations, witty banter, and eloquence often. I think I had sold myself short for years. This may be stemming from my low belief due to my undocumented status. And it carried over into the PhD program, though events this month help me figure myself out a bit more. I feel more comfortable in my own skin.

November 2019

Mostly administrative work for Johanna, classes work as per usual, dealing with internship and finding that people appreciate my style of communication more than other people who have been there more (I need to be kind and easy to talk to; if needed, complex but not complicated as Kent says). I get accepted to this conference held by Pope Francis, which boosts my

professional self-assuredness. Gabby and I continue our passion play and I go on an official break with Alexis which makes me feel both good and guilty at the same time. I end up hurting Gabby really badly and then ghosting her, then getting back together with Alexis because I am too afraid to be financially unstable without her dad's help. Also, I discover Dag Hammarskjöld who ends up becoming a lasting inspiration for me as an economist and humanitarian. I end up quoting him in the epigraph of my dissertation years later. Alexis gives me the "God's Favorite Customer" lighter, one of my favorite items from Father John Misty whose music got me through my first year in Manhattan. Wisdom teeth showed signs of pain this month, and it would not be until about 3.5 years later for me to get them out. I try to quit some of the addictions that I had used to distract myself from the disassociated state of work and life. I also leave the therapist I had been seeing; it wouldn't be until the fall of 2021 that I would go back to therapy.

December 2019

I do my second annual Christmas cards round to people I care about. It seems to be a growing tradition, which I keep up even in 2023. The beginning of the month is a marathon of sleep, work, and writing as I try to finish out the classes in preparation for their final exams. I receive accolades from another team at my internship for being a great presenter, which makes me feel good, as I also received similar kudos at the university for my academic presentation. My sleepless insomnia bouts seem to be highly present this month, too, as everything from the end of the year weighs down on me, as I try to reflect on all that I did this year, too. I stop eating regularly and spend most of my time at the library. Alexis and I quarrel at how she continues to ask me to come to visit her when I am busy and she has nothing to do. I finish my internship on a very high note. I spend time with Samantha, Alexis's sister, and find more commonality with her than Alexis, which is fine. I feel a certain familial vibe towards them all but don't know how to deal with it when I want to leave that relationship. That inner wrestling is something I continue to struggle with. I end up getting great grades for the semester, but at what cost? I feel less toned, physically, as well much to my chagrin.

January 2020

The tense friction of last year continues indefinitely. Even with the momentous trip outside of the United States for the first time for me on a cruise to Mexico, Alexis and I continue fighting and disagreeing on many fronts. This calms down mid-month as we go back to our respective lives, me living in the Bronx and her in the upper east side. I struggle to get rid of some of my

addictions, succumbing to them when the pressure was too high. My insomnia continues during this time. I read *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens, a book that highly influences me, makes me feel seen, and quickly grows into one of my favorite reads. I am still the youngest person in the PhD program, something that does not change until my third year. My social anxiety at the university also goes up this month as I try to piece together a routine. I end up trying to distract myself from not getting research work progress done by doing chores around my apartment. I reconnect with a childhood friend of mine, Erica, which recenters my perspective of myself. One thing I find is that I lost perspective of what I am doing because being inside academia, and the bad relationships, makes me forget that I am doing something rather noble and exciting. I join graduate student support group therapy, which again helps with perspective. I also deepen my bond with Jeffrey, an MA student in economics who bonds with me over poetry and writing. My ties with Joseph also grow deeper, too. At the end of the month, Alexis and I started a new type of relationship – I have a sense I don't know her as much as I thought I did.

February 2020

Doldrums of trying to make my relationship with Alexis work. Lewis Capaldi becomes a newfound musical artist I enjoy and connect with my relationship entanglements with Gabby and others from before. Continued trying to make the gym and work a steady routine, with mixed success. I think I have the beginnings of my first research paper then, though hindsight tells me that I am looking at it from the wrong angle. I spend a significant amount of time telling myself that it will be okay, though I am worried that I do not have the same progress as my cohort in getting their research questions honed down. Was introduced to the idea of VP of the graduate student government again, this time by the then president who was another PhD Economics colleague; I am intrigued because I seem to enjoy administrative positions in academia, evidenced by my success in working with Johanna. I find less enjoyment in thinking about teaching. Away from economics and the coding work I seem to occupy most of my days with, I get a chance to go to a poetry club and solidify my interest in getting published in that space. Arunima becomes more prevalent as I ask her to be my mentor. Johanna tells me that she thinks my curiosity and willingness to learn will get me far. More interactions with friends, this time Meeraj and Erica, and I am grateful for the range of people I have in my life outside of Fordham. End of month sees me physically not happy with Alexis and I regress to feeling depressed on that front. And then I say, "Add to the fact I am stressed out AF regarding my life and career, I could not tell you where I am finding the will to go on. Perhaps it is the allure of success and knowing I will have a life apart from all the things that constitute "me". Escapism, once again. This is most definitely tied to my desire to change my name. Away from all of this, into someone that I can make of my own."

March 2020

Katie was with a man for several months, explaining her absence, but came back to me to chat. COVID-19 is the rage of the month and it causes a perpetual spring break as well as cancels my first trip to Europe for that conference held by the Pope. I would have to wait almost 2.5 years before I would actually go to Europe. I want to explore professional opportunities but feel like my life with Alexis ties me from doing things as freely as I would otherwise be, much to my sadness but I accept it. "Melancholic acceptance", as I had often put it. A quote from *Mad Men*, which I know later comes from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, is "Our worst fears lie in anticipation". Or, better put, "present fears are less than horrible imaginings". The Great Disruption, which began in mid March, was from the virus and I, along with Alexis, her sister and her father, all quarantined in their house in New Jersey. Thus beginning an indeterminable amount of time back in New Jersey.

April 2020

A virtual world now with everything being online due to COVID. Still in Jersey, I get guidance from Sinha and Johanna Francis. The former tells me I am far ahead of my peers which I am baffled by. It is hard to gage where I am in the program given that markers of advancement kind-of fall away after the third semester. Grades become immaterial and the next real big thing is when you defend your proposal. In the stupor of being stuck inside and having not much to do, I go on many endless nights of thinking. Here are some thoughts: "Many days I still feel like I part of the reason, or a large part of the reason, I still do this degree is for the prestige I hope it will buy me. This prestige is a huge gamble because I do not think that it will be as I imagined it at first. I am not simply a wall street banker type, although I have a feeling I could survive in that world. Of course, I just could just be talking out of my ass since I have never actually worked there before. But today I spoke with Sinha and (or, I guess, yesterday) and she seemed to be all smiles about my project, telling me that I am ahead of my peers. Which really surprised me. I am not sure how much she knows about my peers. But I trust her to a decent degree. She did go to Columbia, after all. She might know something I do not about my abilities. But, back to COVID19: it sucks being stuck in this house with Sam and Samantha. I get tired of his constant singing random songs, his opinionated views that he defends with a vigor as if he knows it all. I get tired of her constant yelling and seeing her make him do everything for her out of fear she will try to be suicidal again. I also dislike her lack of interest in doing anything. She will not be a famous K-Pop star and the quicker she accepts that, the better. Do I know where things are going to go with all of this? No. I have an idea and I suppose it is best to go along with it and write it. Once this is over (quarantine), I will go back to NYC and resume my life of autonomy for a short period of time. I will then have to move into an apartment with Alexis and Jasper, which will be stressful but manageable. Then, we will live together for an indefinite period of time and

see where it goes, although I highly doubt we will ever live apart again given that we are still married. And so, the saga of my life living alone will end I will be forced to settle for Alexis with whom I hope to shape into something I can deal with. Maybe she will actually lose weight and become thin again. Doubtful, but I hope. Or maybe we will claw at each other's throats and be miserable. Sure, we talk about being together forever, but I cannot put her craziness on the back burner and pretend she will be fine. Nor can I pretend that I am one hundred percent okay. This whole thing is a balancing act, and I am not sure who will cave in first; neither of us are athletes. But I remain optimistic about one-day accepting things and generating happiness." I miss Joseph and the city a lot, and bond with Jeffrey to keep ourselves accountable during this period of uncertainty. I lament about my lost productivity: "How easy it is to fritter away hours in the day with meaningless nonsense in order to escape the responsibilities we have. I am somewhat startled by my lack of drive, although the present environment must definitely be part of the culprit. I cannot recall a time during my college days when I was most productive than when I lived there and could afford to spend many hours working." Good news this month: Francis approved me to work with her over the summer, which keeps me afloat with money during those two months. Additionally, towards the end of the month Alexis and I try to get closer since we are living at close proximity after all.

May 2020

The relationship with Alexis gets better, perhaps out of the necessity of being stuck together or perhaps because things are actually improving. Not sure, but I don't question it. Days in Jersey just blend together because there is no real tracking anymore in quarantine. I vow to apply to jobs indefinitely and keep myself well-versed in what companies are looking for, recreating my resume over and over. I tell myself that, "It would be nice to have money and another facet of my personality that is not Fordham. I am also 24 now; I feel like I need to do something that aligns me with some greater purpose. I do not think I am that great at what I am doing now and need something tangible." I finish the spring semester on a high note but feel burned out – many late nights coupled with early mornings as I seem unable to stay still. I continue feeling this missing gut feeling over Katie.

June 2020

I do not write much in June, escaping into video games, reading, and spending time with my family. I end up doing a lot of programming, too, just to stay fresh with that, but otherwise, get zero done for my research. I worry about the virus waves in the United States and think it best for Alexis and me to stay in New Jersey for the foreseeable future, much to my chagrin.

July 2020

During Coronavirus and this unsettling state of the world, I have found myself lacking basic structure in my days and weeks. The lack has caused me a great deal of stress and anxiety that I struggle with. Even now, I find myself struggling to find the right words to express myself and thus lend myself to just writing a stream of consciousness as I have done many times. A time of reckoning is nigh; I feel it in the air. I end up hitting a milestone in this video game I used to play as a kid and feel a lot of validation from it, but that's about it. I reconnected with friends I had not seen (Kevin, Maria Lynch) and they led to interesting questions about looking inwardly at who I am and not the labels I was given. I then had this idea that I feel strongly about: the education I have received thus far, along with the trust and confidence people have shown to me has allowed me to build a blank canvas on which I am convinced I will paint my story. These last 24 years have been about navigating away from a certain path my life COULD have gone and, instead, towards a brighter future without hindrances that use who I am and where I come from as a means to keep me down. I am grateful for the opportunities that came my way, to the people who see something in me, and for my ability to persevere (resilience). Statistically improbable. I have grown closer to Alexis these last few months and I am grateful for having this opportunity. There are days that I still lust for the flesh of someone different, but those are farther and fewer in between. Often I am simply happy seeing her smile and knowing I have her in my life. It is perhaps my greatest luck of all! I finish this month thankful for the life I have despite its struggles. I am also looking forward to getting back to a routine and, for that, I must begin to create something. Lethargy has left me dazed and confused; no longer. Onward, to victory!

August 2020

I write a poem that eventually gets published about a year and a half year later; it is called *The Persistent Pyre* and I write it about getting over my emotional feelings about Katie Humphrey. I am not sure if the poem came first, or the feelings did. Or if one helped the other. But I know that I am over the hump of those feelings, even if I still have ghostly tendrils reminding me of the life that could have been. My brothers and I spend more time together and cry about the bad childhoods we had, and how we need to continue working towards building a better future. I start reading more direct papers on expectations in economics, which sets the foundation for my entire dissertation eventually. I definitely lament getting 'quarantine weight' which makes me deeply sad. Alexis and I celebrate being together for 6 years, and we go to Hard Rock Casino in Atlantic City. It was actually a really good bonding experience and we feel happy with each, the fights of the last year almost melting away. We talk about our lives and what the future may hold for us; August 20, 2020 was one of the best days for our relationship. My mother and her

partner continue to have a deteriorating relationship, which causes me stress. I don't really think about school too much, since it will all be online anyhow. I don't expect the community to be very high at all.

September 2020

September had high hopes for research. But ended up doing a random subset of various things in and around Jersey, such as building a fire pit, spending time with my brothers, etc. We also went to Scranton, Pennsylvania to see the town where they filmed *The Office*. I find myself doing work on econometrics and computational macro absentmindedly, especially from a place where I don't really feel like I have the best set up to thrive, and miss my friendships, especially Kent. Kent was the one who encouraged me to get the internship the year prior, and continued to encourage me to keep professional fronts activated at all time. This made me think of reaching out to friends of Sinha's, especially this one guy Eric Gaus who works for Moody's now, and how I view my career as a game of chess. I tell myself I have to keep playing that game more seriously. More random meetups, one with Kelsey whom very obviously wanted me but which I dodged because I don't want any more trouble and or distractions in my life romantically. Jasper ends up with a random cyst that forms on his face – this cyst is something that persists for months and it ruptures no matter how many times they try to dig it out. It is an expensive ordeal and now, years later, I see it curiously paralleled with the end of what Alexis and I went through in our relationship. I struggle with the student therapy group and think it's not helping, and also try to set up a Github page in order to get away from my basic google sites; I think this will help me differentiate myself. I hype myself up with my career objectives, which include continuing to network, update resume, do well in my classes and plan out the rest of my time at the university including the Columbia courses I want to take, keep making myself important in the department and possibly elsewhere in order to keep my influence high. I am mostly in the same pattern as 'work, go out to drive, eat, work, do some entertainment' in New Jersey because I have nothing else to do. I realize how quickly I catastrophize when I do not understand an assignment or problem right away. Looking at the econometrics assignment, this month for instance, especially with how I was feeling low on September 25, I see that my mood on myself oscillates between being entirely useless and actually working to get ahead.

October 2020

dimidium animae meae, or "the very half of my soul". This phrase comes from the letters Cicero wrote to Atticus. I think about this as I try to read more fiction works in order to keep my mind afloat. This month is a lot of house chores, econometric and computational work, and not really thinking about research. This is because I prioritize finding a job, but I cannot land a job without

finishing the degree and I cannot finish the degree because I cannot find a research avenue. Everything feels timely and important all at once and it is difficult to ascertain which is which, and when to do what. For instance, I write, "I DID create my resume using HTML and CSS; I DID apply to the council of foreign relations (thanks to Kent's suggestion); I DID find a number of inspirations for my research. However, I DID NOT end up liking the amount of advancement I have with my website for instance (especially after seeing Christopher Neilsen's website); I DID NOT read anything research-wide outside of my classes; I DID NOT finish the assignment for Metrics by today nor prep enough for the computational midterm. So, I am at a standstill." Joseph says that excellence is earned throughout a lifetime, and I continue plaguing my mind wishing that I had it already in a jar, to let out whenever I wanted to feel better about myself. I finish out this month by saying this: work and life are very fast. I think I need to slow down when I can and enjoy the scenery; it will not stop for me otherwise.

November 2020

I continue networking, building a website by teaching myself how to code on Github pages, and generally feeling okay with myself. In hindsight, even though what I was doing was not research, I was proving to myself that all I needed was sustained resilience. If I put enough concentrated effort in, anything was possible. I just needed to get off my back and do it. Kelsey says to me, "You don't live in the moment a lot, remember?" The words stung, but she was not wrong. I continue wanting excellence but feeling as it eludes me at every step of the way. Spent time speaking with Johanna about my future to make me feel better, also keeping my relationship with Jeffrey, Maria Lynch, and Joseph afloat by having important exchanges with them to validate my plight in the PhD. The really good parts of the relationship with Alexis seem to go back and forth, with me feeling like she is losing her way again.

December 2020

Writing the holiday cards again, my third straight year. I finish out the semester with again a lot of turbulence and late nights, not really knowing if I will be able to win it all as per usual. But this seems to be a recurring question for me. Is it because I don't think that past performance has any bearing on future? My best friend in the PhD cohort, Kent, drops out and as much as I feel for him, I think he made the best decision because he is doing really well career wise and inspires me to keep going. The month came and went without much fanfare, except that I finished the semester in high colors. I will say that I am doing a better job at being more pleased with myself regarding the work I do and the progress I make. Maybe there is hope for me, yet. No. I am certain there is hope for me yet. I cannot let my fears about uncertainty dominate my narrative.

January 2021

I started the year off with Alexis, her family, and my two younger brothers. I had not celebrated a new year with my brothers for almost 7 years, so this was really emotionally wonderful. I continue worrying about my mother and her precarious situation as she is undocumented, and is in a turbulent relationship with her partner of almost 14 years. I do a reflection of all the girls I've loved before, many of whom I ended up hurting, and feel a sense of catharsis, thinking that this would mark the end of all these relationships and any heart tugging girls do to me. Things were Alexis were fine and I seem to be entering this acceptance piece where I think things will go okay between her and I moving forward. We celebrate my birthday by spending time in New York and I feel like I am more grateful about my life than I had been in the past. Given my birthday, though, I set a new goal of trying to make a post-tax income of over \$150k by the time I hit 32 (not sure why that age) but it seems consistent with my desire to become financially independent. I meet up with an old friend from college, Sarah, and feel good reconnecting. Also continue working on data analytics and visualization work. Positive work with my mom and our relationship this month: she apologizes to me about all the stuff from my youth (kicking me out, not being there to support me, etc). Lots of productive procrastination as I struggle to get kickstarted with research in the new semester. I scramble to get my green-card situation fixed (it had conditions which made it expire and I needed to file new paperwork; this renders me unable to drive for a time since I cannot renew my license). I end with saying, "I think I need to be less averse to starting stuff and more willing to invite discomfort back into my life in order to get ahead."

February 2021

I find some research solace in getting a literature review together for Sinha so that I can proceed with a new project I had in mind regarding expectations. She suggests the Survey of Consumer Expectations (SCE) from the NY Fed, a data set that eventually becomes the basis for two chapters of my dissertation. I commiserate with Pedro about the state of things at Fordham, and think about I will have to put together a career from this without much guidance from the department. This is somewhat sad given that I think there's supposed to be more structure, but at the same time not something new since I have been doing this for myself for some time now. I don't expect Fordham to provide too much, since they're already investing in me by paying me and giving me the PhD for relatively free, but I hope to be able to trade on their name and the degree later on in my career. Let's hope it pays off. I have noticed my mental health really deteriorating this month. The pandemic monotony, career fears, and research anxiety have

coupled to really take a toll, on top of worries about my brothers (Brandon finding a path, Nate doing better at school), my mom (her health, jobs, mental state), and Sam (mental state, his future). I also worry about Alexis, to a lesser extent. I talk with someone a year below me to find she also experiences self-doubt – it's everyone!

March 2021

I continue applying for internships and jobs, dodging a few things that did not seem too appealing or did not pay me the level that I thought I deserved by then. Of course, I am not an expert but I do set a goal of saying that I won't accept anything less than \$100,000 for my first job post PhD. I continue with my project of inflation expectations and monetary policy announcements, which (in hindsight) becomes the first chapter of my dissertation. Some thoughts: "I feel rather aimless in the research pursuit (which is why I am trying to apply to jobs and such), but oddly happy at the work I do for the department. I seem to really make a difference. Don't know if others would have been able to do what I have done. Francis offered the GA again next year, which pays a bit less, but maybe it is time to head into teaching. Or maybe I could do half-half? I do not think that full time teaching will be the best since (a) I barely know what I am doing with research as is, (b) it will be hard to start something new in terms of a course, and (c) I do not want to teach as a profession." Outside of this, my brothers have an unsustainable living situation with my uncle and I worry about my younger brother not being able to pass junior year of high school. I try to help out as much as I can but it's difficult, financially wise. My mom tries to leave Patrick here, too, and I help her out with getting a hotel. As Johanna tells me when I alluded to some of these problems, I am 'setting myself up to fail'. I recognize that I do not have the emotional nor financial headspace to be as effective in this PhD as I wish I were. I do not know if my lack of motivation or creativity with research begins from an innate doctoral block or from the current personal problems I am going through. I have considered taking a sabbatical from the program to go work for some time, clear my head, perhaps wait out this storm of issues, and maybe bring back with me experience that can feed my research. I long for returning to New York City.

April 2021

Busy month as I try to keep things stable at home and make progress in the PhD. I meet with potential interesting alums from the Econ program at Fordham, one from KPMG and one from MSCI. I also commit myself for two more years at the university with my election in the Vice Presidency role of the graduate student government, starting this summer. Given my feelings about teaching and the skillset which aligns itself more with admin, I think about finishing my degree in about two years' time so that I can alleviate a number of my issues: financial insecurity, wanting to move from my life, not being dependent on my partner and her family,

and not feeling like a student anymore. It would also help with my feeling of imposter syndrome in academia. I connected with friends (Jeffrey, Kevin, Joseph, Meeraj) to keep some semblance of sanity since they usually help me come back down to earth and also give my advice to the Warren County Community College advisory board, which I am a part of. I like being involved since it puts me in a position where I can impact student experience and outcomes without thinking about my own situation. Plus, having been part of that community college years prior, it's nice to know my involvement brought something to fruition. I continue looking at apartments with Alexis and spending a good deal of time with that. I also get validation from a Princeton seminar about having a networking tracking sheet, which I had thought of years prior when I first started at Montclair. I truly think my ability to network and be active about has helped me get where I am today. Some advice from a colleague in the program who was almost finished the program: "Get a first paper done, period. That feeling of gratification will push another, and another. Also, do not let the perfect get in the way of the good."

May 2021

I get back into Freakonomics, which was one of my first instances when I was a teen that made me think about economics as a skill for life, not just this really corporate thing I think society at large makes it out to be. I think I need to get back to those roots if I am to finish the PhD. I also move out from Jersey and into the Upper East Side in Manhattan with Alexis. I interview with the Central Bank of Chile (which came about from following a student of Christopher Neilsen on twitter, that professor from Princeton I networked with to help me out with coding my Github website) and they seem to like me! This is validated by the fact they offer me a research internship with their monetary policy division over the summer. I remind myself of the doldrums of February and how I was applying left and right (even into March); to see this culminating into something this good for the summer, and then in the fall with the Vice Presidency, is really gratifying. A whole thing on professional development: "Of course, this is a lesson to be learned: delayed gratification can be a rewarding course of life, not just in the personal decisions we make. What I mean in the above is that my anxiety manifests itself when faced with stagnation; I feel like something is running behind me, ready to pull a curtain over my life and expose me for what I ultimately think is my biggest fear of being- a failure. But what does that mean? I think that, for me, a failure is whenever I stop growing. I think that this explains why I constantly seek the next thing; being stagnant means that I have hit a plateau, and there was a formative period of my life when I hit that plateau because of my immigration status. I set a plan into motion when I was very young and saw it come to fruition at the end of high school, really hoping that it was going to fix everything (namely, going to Columbia on a scholarship). Since I was precluded from that due to my immigration status, which was no fault of my own, I think that it tore a piece of myself to know that I had worked that hard only for it

to have led to nowhere. But perhaps the lesson from that period of my life is not that I worked so hard only to not be able to cash in on my achievement, but rather that I worked so hard to build myself up that the actual occurrences of my life had a chance to manifest. Had I not worked so hard in high school, I would not have been the impressive student at WCCC that made friends with John Peppas and been offered, years later, to be part of the advisory council. Had I not worked hard in high school, I would not have been able to get the job at Summit Prep who were impressed with my tutoring company ordeals and intelligence. Had I not worked hard in high school, I would not have been able to convince Marci S. to help me draft the emails to Financial Aid Directors in NJ and have a comprehensive CV to go along with my requests. Had I not worked so hard in high school, I would have not developed a personality that said to network above all else in order to build the human capital I have been able to construct this many years later. Then, of course, all these things that working hard in high school fed into the next. My hard work ethic went to Montclair and I graduated with such high honors, gave the graduating speech, and even had professors pay for me to apply to graduate school. I was able to convince others about my drive and passion; all that led me to Fordham University and this PhD. I think I owe it to myself to come to grips with the fact that I am worthy of the things that come my way, not because they are given, but because my ability to think in the 4D chess manner is the reason many of them occur. I should embrace the anxiety not as a negative but rather as a state that I inhabit whenever I want to protect the work I have carefully done so far. Delayed gratification is the key; waiting is the key. In the waiting, our demons like to come in the front of our minds, but this is a trick of stagnation! In the waiting, the best we can do is think ahead and think about the other figs to pick. Oh, what a great analogy. If stagnation for Sylvia Plath in front of the fig tree meant that she considered all the options and let them rot before actually choosing (analysis paralysis, if you will), then what I go through should be a situation where I send birds (owls?) to pick the figs. I direct them to pick the shiny figs that I see, but once I send them, I move on to check out the other figs. If I truly care about and believe in the world of probability as I often say I do, then there is a nonzero probability that, if I send enough owls out, at least one of them will return bearing fruit. And so instead of marveling at the figs until they wither, I passively collect them until I find the ripe one. I like that." Other happenings in the month were a really bad instance of crying with my brothers at how bad the situation is with our mother and her partner (they made us feel like the bad guys in this instance, with my mother yelling as per usual and then not talking to me for a while); I end up telling my aunt Cecilia and her daughter, Pam, a lot of what had occurred over the last few years. Alexis and I also move into the Upper East Side and we immediately fight over stupid things the first night there.

June 2021

I continue getting more frustrated with Alexis's lack of motivation and her escapism in drugs in order to pass the time. I get more into poetry and decide that maybe I should continue writing, perhaps getting published. I seek an avenue for that purpose. More friend connections: Jeffrey, Joseph, and this time Alexey (Joseph's friend), and an old friend from high school (Napat). I get a job offer (short term contract) from the former manager at my internship in the fall of 2019 who is now a director at a place in Miami doing data analytics for growth marketing at a place called REEF. Because it pays more than the Central Bank, and because I need money, I push the central bank back to start at the end of August and take the REEF gig and plan to do it from mid June to early August. I get acclimated with my new Upper East Side apartment, stooping many things from the rich neighborhood including a flatscreen TV. Not much is done for the PhD directly this month as I try to focus on getting other things taken care of. Joseph tries to teach me a lesson about forgiveness even though I am still angry at my father, and I think that presents itself to me as a mental block in some ways from being happy in my life.

July 2021

Turns out, I hate working in a start-up environment. I don't think things are done properly and it moves much too quickly, something that exhausts me. It could be that I was also doing the whole thing remotely and it may have been better for me if I was in person, so I will not write off that kind of environment forever. I think a lot about keeping track of things (professionally, socially, personally, fiscally) and how I wish there was a smart app that could keep track of data for me such as when I spoke to someone last and what the conversation was about, or when the last time I went for a run was, etc etc. Basically a dashboard for my life, with a GUI similar to the inside of the Iron Man suit. I think about Katie and wish we could have stayed friends. I get introduced to another great fiction writer, Somerset Maugham, and read the Razor's Edge which is another great book that inspires me. This, David Copperfield by Charles Dickens, and The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt by Edmund Norris are books that have stuck with me thus far in my 20s. Alexis and I go to Atlanta with her family on that yearly trip to celebrate Lisa's life (she had died in 2017) and I find myself underwhelmed by the experience. Further underwhelming feelings come up during my first talks with the president of the graduate student government with whom I was supposed to work under as he does not seem very technologically advanced or clever. I am eager to gain experience and market myself to the outside world as a "problem solver" in many capacities, but perhaps my strategy of being a cover-all economist is not going to bode well in the future. Especially if I cannot finish a dissertation. At the rate I am going, I am certainly very far away from that, and from proposal defense anyhow. I don't really know how that will work, but I am trying! After speaking with my friend Meeraj, I told him about the plans for higher ed leadership, central banking, and applied data work and how the summer was overwhelming in many regards. He seemed to say that I need to eventually converge on one of

the goals and put all my efforts into it. I agree. Maybe then I will stop having so much anxiety over it. I also don't speak to my mom at all this month, it seems, as we are still, sadly, on bad terms. As for what I am doing on this PhD journey? To be honest, I am not sure. I have not kept in touch with Francis or Sinha this summer, which I have tried a bit on my side. But what I have toyed around in my head is that I need to give myself a time to grow by all of these new things coming along. My hopes is that this new tri-fecta of things I must do (student government, Central Bank of Chile, and the Columbia class of Macro-Finance) can point me in a direction where research can truly begin. Is it not true that other people of my year in the program have yet to do a proposal defense? So maybe I should not be kicking myself too hard. Let this next semester happen and then we can reassess.

August 2021

I start with a new therapist this month, and think it may go somewhere positive. I also revisit the same pain I had before with my wisdom teeth and think about getting them out (but oh how expensive that must be). This is also a month of networking, especially with KPMG and McKinsey and I am grateful to still be on top of all of that. With my friend Kent, who might be leaving NYC, the idea of graduate student unions rears its head in my periphery. I also reconnect with an old colleague, Jay, from my TIAA days who encourages me to keep up my networking with Roger Ferguson, the former vice chair of the Federal Reserve. I had met Roger in 2017 and he was generous enough with his time to encourage me to pursue my PhD. I also face a reckoning as I start to prep for the Central Bank of Chile and realize I am not very comfortable using Dynare, and have difficulty feeling less brain fog throughout my days. The growing anxiety from my upcoming vice presidency and research internship, coupled with an excitement of positive meetings with Roger and folks from KPMG and McKinsey, make my emotional highs and lows quite extreme. I am in this state, with a rather banal state of affairs at home with Alexis after we break up emotionally, when I meet Hiu Yan during the orientation for the fall semester. I quickly realize that I am not going to get over someone who makes me yearn to realize a relationship when the one I had had been fraught with difficulties for years. I have been listening to this song called "It will come back" by Hozier (of course) and the way I take it is about hoping for a temptation to not rear its head because then the feelings which you may try so hard to get rid of will come back. I find that very much so a problem for me and I relate to it on a rather deep level when it comes to broken women. A huge part of this, I feel, is because my relationship with Alexis no longer fulfilled me as a man and I could not see a future where I was still with her and happy in my life.

September 2021

I try to cut off the situation with Hiu Yan, fail miserably after continuing to find things with Alexis still living with me to be unbearable and that Hiu Yan yells at me to give happiness a chance, and I restart the conversations again. I discover how similar of childhoods we had and notice that I enjoy so much her physically in a direct and stark difference to Alexis. It often makes me feel like a deplorable person but a mental connection is also sometimes there which abates those feelings to a degree. We bond over having similarly difficult moms, being romantics in the sense of loving poetry and classical music. She refers to me as a tragic prince, a euphemism that veiled the romanticism I had longed for in my life and the admiration from a woman that I had wanted for so long but felt that I was no longer appreciated by in my relationship with Alexis. But this situation turns much more serious not even a fortnight after we met. It turns physical and heavily so, my burning desires that had been suppressed even since 2019 unleashing in such new ways. It felt similar to the situation I felt with the women from 2019, especially Gabby, but this time I did not cut it off after a few weeks. This time it felt like my life could move on from Alexis and into something new. Of course, the backdrop of this was the new semester, the higher sense of responsibility towards my fellow graduate students as their vice president, and the call to do research for my degree. I struggle with my personal demons as I also join the Columbia class and find the work highly challenging, as well as realize I have a lot of work to do as vice presidency given my tendency to want to "rock the boat" and streamline processes and making things new in my own manner. Alexis and I cry a lot regarding our relationship ending and I can no longer hide that I am extremely unhappy, which leads me to write 'Fuck' many hundreds of times in my journal as I realize that something I had stayed with for the last 7 years was finishing on this note. I remember certain songs with people. Gabby's will always be "The Night We Met" by Lord Huron. Katie's is "That Old Feeling" by Sinatra. And now Hiu Yan's is "Burgundy Red" by Sunset Rollercoaster. Alexis and I go sky diving; how metaphorically appropriate that we go up in that plane together but fall into the unknown below individually. This entire month makes me go crazy in my head as it just feels like an unending onslaught of emotions and feelings and professional obligations. I also feel estranged from the economics department for the first time, because of my new government position. My friends offer wise counsel. Maria says I need to do self-preservation. Joseph says I need to be pragmatic. Kevin says I need to hold onto integrity. Jeffrey says everyone will be okay in the long run. He also wants me to find a priest to talk to. He says the spiritual life is yearning to be let loose in me. I also find a new mentor: the GSAS Dean, Tyler Stovall.

October 2021

Sometimes love is not enough. This month sees more deterioration of my mental state as I entertain Hiu Yan, but also another girl Grace from the student government. Alexis accepts that things are fairly over and spends more and more time away from our apartment, including going for days to her father's house in New Jersey. I find myself alone more and more in the apartment, but spend it by filling it with other women (Jacqueline, Linden, and Grace). Grace gets me involved with this unionization push at Fordham but I don't really think it is my place to do so since many students cannot take advantage and I have seen that many Fordham students are overly demanding. Most of this month is handling the logistics of graduate student government affairs, interviewing with and receiving an internship offer with KPMG, and dancing around what do with my personal relationship life. I recognize that much of my infatuation with Hiu Yan is physical as Alexis is nothing like her; Hiu Yan also shows signs of being emotionally needy and I am not willing to be a part of that. Notice how little of any of this was making progress with the central bank research and my overall PhD research. I also get an American Express card to buy things for the student government because it is difficult to keep track of too many reimbursement papers and instead I opt to have one central one to make my life easier and to allow other students to use it. This puts me at risk since the card is in my name but I find it to be a semi obligation of mine to be a sacrificial point person.

November 2021

I have the first panic attack of my life with Alexis at a Pain Quotidien thinking about where my life was going and how it was not where I wanted it to. I think this was a physical reaction to the state of my mind for the last few months. I worry about a number of things: Alexis and how I have very little physical attraction towards her, how fucked up our marriage feels at times, Hiu Yan and how I want to dominate her entirely, how I still view questionable porn and have been edging a lot in a kink that should not be a thing (I blame Gabby from 2019 for making me start liking that), how Grace snubbed me and makes me feel like I should have been the one she pines over, how I do not care much about school anymore, and how I want to just make money. I also think about how getting the internship for KPMG, which begins in the summer of 2022, so early has now made me secure and not motivated in some ways because I know I will be okay. So I am curious if there is a better time to get news of change and positive things because too early seems to hurt motivation, but too late hurts anxiety. I conclude that Hiu Yan reminds me too much of a child with her personality, which is off-putting. I keep wishing for this imaginary girl that does not exist but is rather a compilation of girls that I have seen (I then proceed to complain about things like how aloof one was, or how shallow the conversations with another was, or how body types and or face types were not correct in other girls). Hiu Yan submits herself to me entirely and I feel very much in control, not fully realizing that I do seem to be using her without needing to be emotionally involved with her. My feelings about Katie come

back; I am listening to “Liebestraume” by Franz Liszt and imagining dancing with Katie in a restaurant, her blonde hair adorning her face and her soft voice guiding my wandering mind. Could it be that she, too, would fall from my grace if I were to be with her? I recall how I felt like no one else existed when Hiu Yan and I were together. Or did I? Did I write that because it was true or because I wanted it to be true? I was so messed up with Alexis that the thought of having someone else enter my life made me yearn for an escape. It’s that part of “Liebestraume” that fills me with such unfulfillable longing. I think of how the rest of my life will go and melancholy swells inside my brain and soul; how deep are the caverns of our loneliness and how mysterious the path to take in finding ourselves. I also tell myself to get back into reading for pleasure, something I used to take more pride in. I also write to Fabian a lot this month, saying, “In the distance, I see the unwavering moon. Strong, full, and holding a reticent promise just like the night I was born. I’ve romanticized that natal night for as long as I can remember, often wondering if anything was decided for me, foretelling my personality and unwritten life. I seldom believe in fate because probability is a rule baked into the universe. But could it be that the belief in fate is just a belief in probability working in our favor? Logically, or for whenever the dice lands correctly, fate must work for us sometimes. And one of those times could have been on January 4, 1996.” I also listen to my resentment more this month, talking about coming to terms with being born into a poor family, having my father walk out of my life, and how college went for me. I conclude these three themes by saying that despite my struggles financially, I feel like I have nowhere to go but up, and that has brought and will continue to bring me, great satisfaction. Regarding my father, I say that I was able to change the paradigm of what a future meant without his influence. This was arguably harder, sure, but it allowed me to define the things I wanted to be good at and the professional goals that I set for myself. For college woes, I say that I learned how to network better, to seek out opportunities in what seemed like deserts, and the ability to hold onto excellence because you never know when the chance will present itself for you to show who you are. I also ended up being debt free from college, and eventually graduate school, too. Two themes where I still needed to process my emotions about were being kicked out of my house with my family when I was 18 years old and the overarching immigration problems I have had in the United States which have decidedly marked many things for me as it shaped the way I feel about myself constantly. Not only does it relate to the feelings of imposter syndrome I have faced in graduate school, but also continues to make me feel like an outside observer in society. I also talk a lot about what I want in my life, saying that I want a fulfilling relationship with someone I look forward going home to and who makes me feel appreciated as well as someone who is not afraid to go after what they want in life and who is intimate with me and I satisfied with that. With the professional front, I say that I want to have a job where I don’t spent it all 100% technically on data and analytics but rather have a strategy component to it where I can use my creative power and presentation skills to guide. I also find a guiding phrase in Latin: *Materiam superabat opus*.

December 2021

Alexis and I do couples therapy as a means to see if anything will ever be recovered. I have no hopes there and feel like it really isn't our communication style but rather just wanting different things in life. I think couples therapy only works if both sides want to fix things, but I don't really want to. I come to grips with a realization that physical beauty is not enough for me to want to be with a girl, spurred by having a beautiful woman (Jaqueline) in my bed and me not being able to physically get myself to have sex with her as some sort of mental block. Tyler, my new mentor, passes away unexpectedly and that sends me into a strange spiral because I had never had someone close to me die. I process this news with Jacquelyn who, even though we kiss and I find her as an attractive Zooey Deschanel lookalike, is not interested in me because she is older and in an open relationship with someone else. I do learn from her, however, that I need to get over myself and be thankful for being where I am at such a young age because many people would kill for this position. I also come to grips with other things such as how volatile and similar to Alexis the personality Katie has it, which makes my infatuation almost die out. Grace, too, falls from my favor because of how aloof she is. This leaves Hiu Yan which makes it difficult to understand if I truly want her or if she's the only option who stayed. Our conversations grow deeper this month and I find her to be rather indispensable since I am not really speaking to other people to confide in this way. Rather hesitantly, I tell her I love her at some point. This marks a mistake because I know that I am not seeing things clearly but am too emotionally vulnerable otherwise. I notice that I have taken this research component for my PhD to be a joke. I feel like I have no accountability to anyone and that has made it so that I have not made ANY progress. Sure, I can lie to myself and say that the progress has been in the form of the central bank, but I feel like I have not done with that either. I still feel uncomfortable with the system and math, as well as the code, and I have been in the space since September. I wonder if this is an indicator that I am not cut out for this type of work. Hmm. Also, I will say that I have taken the offer from KPMG to be unmotivated to make anything else work. For instance, I gave up on the Goldman Sachs application because it was proving to be taking the time that I did not want to spend, even though the benefits from that (had I gotten it) were tenfold from the effort. Could it be that I am getting complacent with how certain things are?

January 2022

I begin the year off feeling attractive, knowing that I have been able to “pull” girls more than I ever thought. So an emotional and self-esteem high, if you will. Immediately, I find myself sick and stay home for my birthday, spending it alone. Jeffrey and Kevin were there for emotional and soup support, thankfully. I spend more time with Hiu Yan this month, which in hindsight is a mistake, and feel like we develop a simple ‘home life’ routine where she comes over and stays for several days at a time. This begins to trouble me, as well as how much she reminds me of Alexis’s younger sister, Samantha, and how too much like a child she is and immature. More red flags for me to end it but I am an idiot and don’t think I can do better, especially with the recency of the Alexis situation still lingering around like a ghost in the apartment. Hiu Yan also wants to make things more serious but I am so hesitant to do so. I think of research and how to incorporate fading memory with announcements given by the FOMC, amongst other things. But I notice how little motivation I still have to finish anything, and how quickly my ambition dissipates on that front. Also, a strange occurrence from Hiu Yan who tells me about an unnamed friend of hers who warns her about getting involved with me because I am too much of a self-serving individual and that I am using Hiu Yan (for what was unspecified). [In hindsight, over a year and half later when I write down these reflections, I can see how I am using her to fulfill my sexual desires that had been mostly unfulfilled for years with Alexis, yet I am mostly averse to want her in any other way long term.] I reaffirm that I like talking out loud about research-esque ideas and need to see my thoughts in order to make sense of them at times. I also keep a promise to myself from the prior year to read more by setting a goal (and doing the actual work) to read one book a month for this year. I also reaffirm the idea that I cannot enjoy a physically beautiful woman if I do not have a mental connection with her, shown by Grace coming over and finally succumbing but just as I was about to enjoy my prize, I could not bring myself to have sex with her. More sad news: my grandmother, Carmen, passed away at the end of the month and I reflect on mortality again. My mom is devastated and I go back to my musical theatre roots to sing and record songs for her that would bring her comfort. The deaths of my grandmother this month and Tyler last month brought to light the following phrase: “Life is hard, regardless of what you end up doing. Sorrow has no hierarchy. Suffering is not a sport; there is no final ranking.” Also, the Central Bank of Chile work ends unfinished and the contract technically expires. My mentors tell me they want to continue as coauthors but I seldom, if ever, hear from them. On my periphery, I catch the attention of Nicole, a girl from GSAS which I find insanely attractive, through the singing posts I make on social media. I also meet Patrick Hornbeck for the first time this month and am taken with his eloquent manner of speaking, clear efficiency, and impressive acumen. This is the kind of mentor I wish I had in the economics department, at least in a scholarly sense. I recognize that I am not making the progress I thought I would be but also am impressed at how I can pull off difficult things in a pinch. For instance, I received a B+ in the Columbia class and this is without doing the last two homeworks and an iffy final project.

February 2022

I can finally put things with Alexis to rest as she takes most of her things out of the apartment. I proceed to spend the month toying around with Grace, and, even though I am getting bored of Hiu Yan, I also continue that notion simply because she fulfills me physically. I find solace of all my emotional distress about what to do with myself through Dag Hammarskjöld quotes: "Is the bleakness of this world of mine a reflection of my poverty or my honesty, a symptom of weakness or of strength, an indication that I have strayed from my path, or that I am following it? - Will despair provide an answer?" -Night is drawing nigh. For all that has been - thanks! To all that shall - yes! - Maturity: among all things - not to hide one's strength out of fear and, consequently, live below one's best. Thanks to those who have taught me this. Thanks to the days which have taught me this. Tomorrow, you will have to play a much more difficult piece - tomorrow, when the audience is beginning to listen for wrong notes, and you no longer have me in the wings. Then we shall see what you can really do. For man shall commune with all creatures to his profit, but enjoy God alone. That is why no human being can be a permanent source of happiness to another. On a really clean tablecloth, the smallest speck of dirt annoys the eye. At high altitudes, a moment's self-indulgence may mean death. Your errors of the past make your relation to others difficult when the present shows you that you might repeat them." The Union for Fordham Graduate Students also comes back in full force and I am left thinking that I will play a neutral role in it as I don't want to wreck my relationship with the university administration. I deal with family roles and also Alexis's dad, emotional distress which again keeps me from doing much on the research front. Hiu tries to force herself onto me and I wave this situation off, though it damages the way she feels about us. Fearing that I am going to lose the physical escape I have with her, I decide to book a trip together on a cruise. This was a free trip for me and I make her pay more than half of it, while I use points from my American Express card to pay the difference. [In hindsight, this was a huge mistake.] As compensation, I try to have Grace again, fail, and then get a date with a girl named Gillian whom I ask out at a coffee shop. I spend most of my work hours doing administrative things for the graduate student government and blow off a professor who sounded like he wanted to help. Turns out, by the way, Gillian was the same girl whom I met at Pace University in October 2019. The same thing happens with her as it did with Jacqueline in December and Grace: I have her at my apartment, she is basically naked, but I cannot bring myself to sleep with her. I have many misadventures this month with women and catch myself having oscillatory feelings about Hiu Yan and the other girls I talk to. These feelings go from being tired of them to being fascinated with them, with little in between. Still on the periphery, Nicole, with whom I want to discover more about and lust after. Still on the backburner? PhD research. Instead, I fill my days with student government work.

March 2022

I do a lot of self-evaluation at the beginning of the month as I try to understand how I navigate a career after my degree. Part of this is being grateful for the opportunities I've had throughout my time in school and before I received permanent residency when I was unable to really do anything because of my immigration status. I talk a lot about the value of networking, putting myself out there in order to increase my chances of finding success and or avenues to pursue, as well as not being afraid because I did not feel like I had anything to lose. I meet Nicole in person at last this month and our mutual attraction is both physical and emotional in ways that totally caught me off guard. I find myself desiring her in ways I had never experienced before, which scares me. The trip with Hiu Yan on a cruise came and went. While the time was enjoyable, I spent a lot of the trip thinking about Nicole comes across as a mature woman with whom I could build something with and I write a poem about her on the open seas. We had met before the cruise and she nailed herself to my heart through a kiss, but she is currently going through something or another, though our similarities make it hard to stay away. After the cruise, I find myself really upset with becoming more involved with Hiu Yan and decide to break it off entirely because she is not really what I want, and because she exhibits too much separation anxiety. If she was, I would not be second guessing all the time. Despite my mistakes this month with Hiu Yan, I come to my senses that I am moving too fast in a direction that I don't want to be and have the guts to stop it before I end up regretting it and end up in a similar situation as I had been with Alexis. It was a difficult thing to do, given that Hiu Yan was emotionally really torn up about it and gave me hell for a while. On a more professional front, I need deadlines in order to get research work done, and even then I have a tendency to not do it until the last minute. I think I do okay with an academic presentation but I lack a lot of structure for good academic work. Therefore, I resolve to do the required pieces in order to graduate but my sights are set on either a career in higher education or corporate economist work. I think I need that kind of less "academic rigor" in order to feel okay because otherwise I get caught up with the nonsense of academic minutiae. I also start talking to my mom more often and in a better way. This is a stark contrast to the past.

April 2022

The whole affair with Hiu Yan over, I focus my sights on only speaking to one person: Nicole. I vow to stop doing dubious things with spending so much time on women and decide that I need to only focus on myself. This is doubly spurred in my brain due to my election as President of the graduate student government for the following academic year. I make a vow to live up to the expectations that I set for myself, especially when it becomes other people looking up to me

about it. For me, that means that I need to really set up a structure where I can be an effective president as well as someone who can do research. Given my upcoming internship, where people already treat me as if I finished my degree, I also vow to finish my degree in about a year's time. This is for me and for my career, as well as to keep a goal I set when I first got into the program to make it last only a year. For all of this to occur, however, I need stability and I thought I could have that with either being alone or in having Nicole. I also needed to move out of the Upper East Side and move on from the ghosts of that place. Professionally, I vote no in the union election for Fordham Graduate Students because I don't think this is the way we should be trying to make the situation better. I also don't think it will lead to any sort of equity. I think students should be more self interested and seek out ways to get ahead simply because they become complacent otherwise. Of course, I also know that my vote was merely ceremonial. The vote passes with over 95% of possible students saying yes. This does not reflect the majority of the graduate students I represent, however, and I feel secure in my decision. I also focus back on research and make good on my promise by doing more presentations, getting progress finally even though it's difficult to make. My sleep schedule is all over the place – I sometimes stay up til 4 am doing research work. I become much more smitten with Nicole, telling her I love her by accident, because of how similar our brains work. I find that, in many instances, my close friends of Kevin, Cam, Jeffrey, Meeraj, Jay, Joseph all come to make my life better. I am thankful and write: "The companionable silences without any discomfort, the critiques born of esteem, the disinterested caring without a hidden agenda." This is how I think about my friends who have helped keep me afloat.

May 2022

I notice being able to write more about these months, including the previous one, and in a better light about my emotions. I still feel mixed about the union, leaning still towards negative, even though I try to put on a farce that I am a supporter. This politics game with my new position in student government is something that plays a bigger role starting soon. Anyhow, I continue with research this month and also meet more players that prove to be useful in mentoring such as Tim, who was a senior economist at KPMG and gives me advice on how to succeed as a corporate economist. I discover that my ability to network with these types of individuals has led people at my level to develop a bit of jealousy and or are off put by me in some ways (this was from a conversation with Jay who told me that is the impression he got from other interns when we were both at TIAA years prior and I had made contact with Roger Ferguson, who turns out to be a long standing mentor). I turn down another girl, making good on my promise to myself to only be focused on one person at a time in an effort to keep my life as uncomplicated as possible. My mom and some other relatives come to visit me, which also increases my discussions and their depth with my mom and I find this to be a positive turn of

events with how we relate to each other (she also apologizes to me; this means she and Patrick have now both apologized for how life took a turn years ago from when they kicked me out at 18 years old). I feel like this puts a lot of my feelings to rest because I have some semblance of closure. I meet my vice president for the student government, a woman named Gaby, and start thinking of ways to train her. On that front, I feel relatively excited to shape the entirety of that history given the fact I already started by changing its name from the Graduate Student Association to the Graduate Student Council – also, on that front, I think many people at the university are aware of the effort I am putting in and can see that I am quite effective at getting things done and streamlining processes. In not-so-professional news, I get the poem I wrote about getting over Katie in 2020, the Resistant Pyre, published in a London-based magazine! I also start thinking about doing a solo trip to Spain. This is spurred by the fact that my friend, Sarah, lives there and is willing to let me stay at her place. Nicole and I become much closer this month, becoming physically intimate and feeling like this is the kind of relationship we both want to be in (but we do not become “official”). She does provide me a safe space that I have been searching a long time for. May is a month of pre-transition as I start to get ready for my move to Woodlawn and out of the Upper East Side; very little work occurs outside of creating a skeleton of what the first chapters of my dissertation will be.

June 2022

This month was marked by the start of my internship with KPMG’s Economic and Valuation Services group, as well as my move to Woodlawn, both of which Nicole played a key role as she helped me navigate these new environments. She also started an internship with Disney, specifically the ABC News group. I spend a good amount of time meeting new people in the paraprofessional environment, including a man which becomes my closest work friend (Pierce) and with whom we tackle networking together. I definitely feel like the undergrads who are doing the internships lack a certain level of maturity and I decide that the best way to do this whole thing will be to explore the different facets of the organization that best suite my strengths. To do this, I bank on my status as a PhD student, an intern, and my having already established a connection with number of higher-ups at the company via LinkedIn in the months prior to starting to get my name on calendar’s of people normally not possible, including managing directors and national leaders. Through them, they gave me more names to follow up with and I try to make it a point for them to send an email introducing us. At each of these meetings, I give a short introduction to who I am and the kinds of things I have done thus far, and notice that my stint at the Central Bank of Chile carries me far. I continue playing that up as much as I can. Further, almost everyone I meet at KPMG who has a PhD advise that I finish the degree before considering joining, something which adds to my drive to finish in the coming academic year. Nicole and I say “I love you to each other” but still don’t officially start dating.

This is actually something I write very deeply about: “The air grew denser, perfumed by unseen vulnerability and the clamor of a beautiful future. I thought it best to add to this cacophony and so I tickled her; while her lovely laughter rang through the room, I looked at her straight in the eyes and I tell her, wholeheartedly, that I love her. She grabbed my face and struck my heart with hotter lightning than ever before as she tells me “I love you too.” My days for this month further consist of learning a lot at KPMG, thinking about how to apply anything to my research, maintaining on top of networking, and the move. My mental state is not bad, just stressed a bit, but I am hopeful at last that all of my dealings will be successful.

July 2022

I meet a bunch of interesting people at KPMG, many of whom continue to affirm my decision to finish the PhD and come join the industry. It may be there at the firm or elsewhere, but I think the common thread is that they found more fulfillment outside of the academy. Some were muscled out because the research world is difficult and often not meritorious. I also get told to remember that this is a business and that I need to figure out a way to make money; PhD by itself doesn’t add that just by existing. So I am very much being sold being a corporate economist. I struggle with this because of the progress I made as president of the student government, including the new wave of automation which I usher in to make processes for students more easily done, which has me thinking that maybe I can also try for deanship positions. This is a lofty goal of sorts which Nicole encourages me to explore, though. I try to front-load most of the work of the student government to the summer, which means my days consist of KPMG and networking during the day, student government at night, Nicole in between and on weekends. As I read, I see that research is the last thing on my mind. I seem to be banking on the fact that I have the two ideas for my two chapters and hope that I can somehow pull them off in the semester once my internship ends. This is not a good plan, in hindsight, as it puts a lot of pressure on me during the academic year. However, I cannot do it any other way since I try to afford myself a secure job through the networking I am doing and, with a job in hand, I will be forced to finish in May 2023. “Selling is a lot like romancing”, and this is what I did for most of July. Meeting with KPMG and getting to be part of their network was an absolute win for me. Even with the conversations in outside teams (Moody’s, economist office, etc), I seem to draw a nice crowd with good vibes. The goal to get a job at the end of this seems to be working. Nicole and I continue to grow closer, experiencing the first taste of travel together into New Jersey, meeting each other’s communities that constitute a remnant of our pasts, and speaking about how we would navigate a future together. There seem to be a lot of dynamics that would be pulling at our heartstrings as we move forward. Something else, too, is the growing thought that this upcoming year may be the last year at Fordham. I feel somewhat removed from the university, not like my first couple of years here, and the rigor of the work I

used to read makes me think about how I am ready to learn about and understand whatever challenge comes my way.

August 2022

I get approved to get an offer of employment from KPMG's Economic and Statistical Consulting practice instead of the Transfer Pricing practice that I had done the internship under. This comes after savvy networking and correct timing, as well as being transparent with my bosses and higher-ups. I treat everyone with respect as well as contribute interesting questions, and, a key part in my opinion, writing things down and remembering things makes people like me far more than if I did not. I continue me reading promise I made myself the year prior, and during the summer read about Ptolemy the First, Hawking's A Brief History of Time, and Edgar Allan Poe stories. Once the internship at KPMG ends, I plan on working on my dissertation for the 9 months of the academic school year in order to prepare for a new job. I also get interviews/offers from Fannie Mae and Moody's Investment Services, but they do not pay as much or they focus on too much technical things that I think will pigeonhole me as a person. I don't want to just develop on the technical side as so much as I do on the holistic side. Perhaps this is the business school training speaking, the one I received in college. I also do more networking with people from ASCAP and other companies, increasing my visibility and network even before I start my last year. I continue selling myself as a competent economist, now with both Central Bank of Chile and KPMG stints which make people see me differently than just a person doing his dissertation. Further, many of my new, and old, connections seem to tell me that going into academia, even in administration, may not be as lucrative as industry. This makes me rethink my approach though I am still hopeful one day of returning because I do believe that higher education can change lives. Look just how much it has done for me, providing me a space to grow during indelible years of my life and even as a formerly undocumented immigrant from El Salvador! Other notes: the school year starts in late August and the countdown is on for me to finish the dissertation. My presidency begins just fine with most things according to plan except the growing discomfort of having to play political football with the union demands and administration considerations. My role, unfortunately, is one of a tightrope and I have to play both sides.

September 2022

Nicole and I enter a formal relationship at the beginning of the month, prompting me to feel a huge sense of stability and confidence in running with this academic school year. However, Hiu Yan makes uncomfortable displays of anger and I have to exhibit cool restraint and let those scandals just pass over me. This also leads to Nicole feeling tension about us, not enough to

leave of course but enough to have difficulty in navigating such an early relationship. I seem to be able to hold my anger pretty well. Why do my emotions immediately skip over anger and go into survival, where I don't get angry but rather strategize ways to get away from or defeat the threat? I cannot find reasons to get angry and I am too averse to direct confrontation. Is it because I am still feeling like that scared immigrant kid? I pride myself in being well-known and reaching high positions, speaking with people in those positions too, but ultimately, I know I am where I am mostly because of charm and quick-wittedness. I make slight progress in chapter 1 of the dissertation, working on chapter 2 in the background without really showing much to anyone else. This second chapter is borne from this unpublished study I find on the internet which spurs my interest in looking at credit market expectations and economic activity and relates to a lot of the reading I did back in 2019, thus making me feel confident in my approach. Student government work goes as planned and I continue changing many systems in my own image, cementing my legacy at Fordham. I also explore the deanship idea by going to Princeton and expanding my network through speaking with deans there. Nicole is very encouraging and loving, still providing a safe space for me. Something she does note, however, is how she sees how I am so done with school. This reinforces my idea that I am not cut out for academic research as a career and need to find value through some other capacity.

October 2022

I connect with my brothers again this month, which makes me really happy. I am also continuing my reading, this time *Memories of Hadrian* by Marguerite Yourcenar (which speaks to me so much about exploring life and being mindful of all your dealings). My first trip to Europe takes place here and brings me the feelings of my first solo trip about 5 years prior to San Francisco. It was an incredible journey to Madrid, Toledo, Gaitegiz de Arteaga and the castle there (which fulfills a childhood dream of mine), San Sebastian, Pamplona, the Basque countryside, and then drove up to Bordeaux in France. This trip marks so many firsts for me, but it also lets me understand how challenging it must be to move to a new country without knowing anyone, even if you do speak the language. Let alone moving somewhere without speaking the language, as so many immigrants do. It makes me feel grateful for my journey, despite of its challenges. I also know that going to Europe made me question a lot of the paradigms and societal structures in the US. Nicole and I also become stronger this month through many dynamics of spending time apart but in contact, discussing life, going through important personal events together. Reading wise, my trip to Princeton last month spurs me to read more about higher education and its changing landscape, and I think of ways I could, as an economist, contribute to this from an administrative capacity. I think my career preparation during my PhD years, and even before during college, make me a good example of what other students can do in order to leverage their education into success. Perhaps that kind of path would be fruitful for

me. Outside of this, rendezvous with friends keeps me sane, and admin discussions with the Deans have become other staples to which I can look forward to. A lot of this work (whether for my PhD, career outside the academy, student service role) is rather strategic in nature and I am thankful to be able to think ahead in this way. I also see a friend of mine whom disappeared for a bit: Kent. I am grateful that he is going to be well through selling his company and doing data science at this other place in New York, though he still going to be living in Texas. I miss him quite a great deal and have taken a lot of guidance, especially about feeling less unsure about my ability to be an economist, from him. Additionally, I try to be friendly with my vice president and buy her pastries for her birthday, keeping her morale up. The student government meetings have been a mixed success thus far with many representatives arguing over how best to organize and I, trying to be diplomatic, guiding the discussions. Lastly, research wise, Sinha tells me to take my first chapter down one notch to only be empirical, which is great for me because that means it is basically finished. I then hit her with chapter 2 in the next few weeks and wait for a while since it is a machine learning and computational linguistics paper that tries to create an index of credit market expectations. Unlike years prior, where I used to spend hours on end at the library, I find myself seeking out cafes, the solitude of my student government office, or working from my desk at home.

November 2022

I am applauded by my efforts to make the graduate student government more transparent, which makes me feel good about my work thus far on that front. Alexis and I speak for the first time in many months and she asks for us to file the divorce paperwork. This makes me feel like at last the story is nearly over. I reconnect with my old roommates from my first semester, Brandon and Will, who now live in Brooklyn. They all look at me with a level of respect for sticking to getting my PhD and I am again grateful to be here. This month also marks the beginning of a new streak for Nicole and I which is getting involved with the arts scene in New York. We start by going to The Shed and a play by Ralph Fiennes, as well as a concert for Post Malone at Madison Square Garden. Networking wise, I somehow get approached by JPMorgan for a position and also get interviewed with the McKinsey group again. Neither of these actually pan out and I already have a secure job, so I don't really feel like I need to be super serious about them. However, it is good to exercise the interviewing muscles and explore what exists out there since many jobs and functions are difficult to understand and or think about from the outside. I also meet Nicole's father for the first time, marking a new shift in our relationship where it now extends beyond just our little discussions and into a family dynamic. Further, Nicole and I solidify our bond with a really great weekend trip to Washington D.C., our first trip together. Even though I don't get the JPMorgan job, Nicole reminds me that my self worth is more than just the PhD. I spend Thanksgiving with Joseph and Alexey, a triumvirate of disparate

individuals brought together by fate. I am so thankful for Joseph as he is the spiritual mentor I always needed, the grandfather I never had. I continue working on the student government things, including new ways to do reimbursement and student grant applications, as well as get the majority of my second chapter completed. I am shocked at myself with how quickly I am able to get the research done. One aspect of this, however, that is helping is that I have stopped second guessing myself on every avenue. What this means to say is that unlike my younger self which felt analysis paralysis every time I thought about certain parts of a paper, I took the first and second chapters as given structures. I had a main question and would go with the first thing that came to mind to answer it so that, at the end, the questions were not really over the approach but rather what the results meant. This only worked because I had read so much over the last several years in the literature which relates to my dissertation and I had an idea of what was considered a norm, what could be seen as innovative, and what would be novel. The idea of using things from Machine Learning came from the fact that it is growing in popularity and I wanted to have something relevant that people outside of my niche could appreciate.

December 2022

The monotonous pace of this month has me thinking about Macbeth: "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day, To the last syllable of recorded time; And all our yesterdays have lighted fools The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!" After the high of finishing the second chapter, I decide to put the brakes on research for a few weeks since I want to focus on prepping the following semester for the student government. This, and other tactics that I have used in the past, may be a way to prevent burnout for me and I think project management is an important skill in completing a PhD, or doing anything correctly. Nicole and I romantically spend Christmastime in New York City; she finishes her internship at ABC and accepts a full time job offer at NBC News as a data analyst. I am beyond proud of her and am encouraged to finish my degree because my partner is of such high-quality caliber. This also reminds me of the goal I wanted for myself in finding a partner who inspires me to strive for better. I host a town hall for the graduate students and am left to fend off any concerns by myself since my vice president was not there. This allows me to practice being a politician and I also provide them budget numbers that they had never been shown before, again a push for transparency. As the token representative, I get a lot of hate for the current state of affairs, especially the budget surplus, but I try to let it all slide and cannot treat it as personal. The Union situation continues to be tenable but I don't know if that will continue as students grow more and more restless with things. In order to provide more solutions without that kind of involvement, I call for a reorganization of department representation and give the representatives a month to present their proposals. During the holiday break, I spend time catching up with people, sending out the cards that I am now on my

fourth year in a row sending and happy about, and seeing my own and Nicole's family. I discover that I may have gotten the bug to go to school from my dad who expresses that he loves learning; these conversations with him, while revelatory, also remind me that he does not know me and I am my own person. From my year-end summary, on the professional front, I write that: "Professionally, I went from having little clue and direction in research to having two chapters of my dissertation completed. I am proud of this achievement and will graduate in May with this momentum. Further, I took on a gig at KPMG for the summer and will be pursuing a full time role there as an economist when I graduate in May. Yay, security! I wanted to make six figures post PhD and will get my desire. I also took up the mantle of president for the Graduate Student Council. I am pleased to say that it has been rewarding, not just for the prestige it brings but also for personal satisfaction wise."

January 2023

The year begins with two things: a stronger connection between Nicole and I by creating safe spaces between us (and through another trip, this time to Philly and Boston), and lots of self-reflection for my birthday. Of the latter, I focus on a number of areas: (i) I feel like I yearn for a romanticism in my life, not quite sure where it comes from. Perhaps it comes from a combination of the religious upbringing which posits that a God is all merciful and allows my life to be a protagonist's journey, though we know that many of us lead insignificant lives and do commonplace things. The other half must be that I grew up listening to show tunes and legendary musicals which make everything in life seem as it is full of grandeur. I don't think most of my friends share this type of feeling, though; (ii) I have had a number of women fall in love with me thus far. Why is that? Joseph says that it is due to my sensitive nature, my ability to listen and make people feel seen, the warmth of my understanding, my poetic musings and musical ability, my thoughtfulness, and obviously the fact that I am going to be wealthy doesn't hurt. How tragic my backstory is and how stark the life I lead now is. This duality of who I am, and the romantic care and thoughtfulness I put into everything I do, is reflected in the Mardoqueo / Marc paradigm. Marc is not the romantic; Mardoqueo is not the corporate leader. Mardoqueo suffered at the hands of immigration law and was kicked out of his home; Marc networked his way into a full scholarship and the doctoral program. Marc will write the dissertation; Mardoqueo will give the speech. I think I am graduating from that despair of adolescence. In its place, the maturity of a man in his late 20s that is confident not because I think I have gifts from a God or nature, but because the obstacles in my way as a youth have

been won due to my intelligence and my network. In other words, experience has tempered that despair. My research continues now as I defend my dissertation proposal while having two ideas for my last chapter required in the back burner. I think Sinha likes me but I know that me going into corporate instead of academia makes them worry less about my progress. Like Roger Ferguson said to me a year or so ago: A PhD is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition to succeed at the degree I hope for. I suggest that Nicole go find therapy since it helped me get through a lot of anger, and she says she feels a lot of anger now about her past and things that have happened to her. I reflect on finishing 13 books last year, fulfilling a promise I made myself to finish at least one book a month. I want to repeat it again this year. I read about machine learning and artificial intelligence in an open network from a quant at a hedge fund which spurs my thoughts about using a similar approach to my third chapter of the dissertation. My visits to the first floor of the Walsh library, where Chapter 1 of my dissertation was written, are often accompanied by the migratory patterns of a flock of birds which dominate the adjacent field. Hungry travelers, they stop for a while at Fordham's gate to nourish their body and soul before, one at a time and then all at once, departing to the skies. As if they were never there. Who knows where they go, or if they will return. In them, they carry a faint reminder of their stop here. But for those of us who are lucky to be here and bear witness, we carry that happy memory for a time as we see a true wonder of nature. I visit that library again to work on chapter 3 and think ahead to the coming semester. Also get interviewed again by JPMorgan.

February 2023

I reflect on my anxiety and preparedness I embark to have finished that dissertation proposal, but most of my feelings about that are not so seriously upset. For one, I think I have accepted that I know the most of the research I have done. The only real job is selling it in a way that makes sense to those who know the space my research exists in, similar to the whole 'selling is like romancing' theme I learned about last year. Second, I know that I have a job secured and I need to pass this. So I need to show that conviction in my presentation. Also, therapy talks are about two main points: Talking about my father and mother side of families. Weird feelings of them being poor and me being so removed from that; does this make me feel guilty? In part, sometimes, and I don't know what to do with it. I feel like I am very thankful for the intelligence that I have though I don't know where I attribute it to. My dad? Romanticism and music. My mother? Work ethic. But neither of them are the levels of smarts that I have garnered and how lucky am I that I can grab the opportunities in front of me? Each junction so far has been me making a decision that has only thrived once I have it. Is the current predicament about jobs the same thing? I also feel good about the machine learning class I am taking right now because it is refreshing/teaching me a number of things I needed to learn in order to be a better economist. It is also making me think of methods to apply for my third chapter, and validation of the fist

two chapters. I make a promise to myself to synthesize my journals whenever I finish my dissertation in April/May, though this lofty goal is only possible if I actually work on Chapter 3. This proves hard this month as I try to help Nicole find a new apartment to move to since she does not want to live with her father anymore. I also grapple with more union issues, trying to assuage the frustrations that my vice president, who is deeply involved with the union, expresses to me. I try to warn her about being too vocal about it on a public stage since she is a figurehead but my concerns go unheard, much to my chagrin. I wonder how next year will go without my visionary leadership, but I conclude that my proclivity to expect students to be their biggest advocates and rather proactive in their career pursuits makes me ill-suited to lead in an environment like Fordham. I don't have the community and or social clout to encourage people *en masse* and think that maybe someone like my vice president, who is much more involved with the Fordham graduate student community through her service in teaching, would make an effective leader on that front. Perhaps my presidency, which occurred during a new year with a new Dean and changes to many processes, was meant to happen during this transition year where the foundation needed to be laid. I think that I have done what I could and will be taking my hands off the reins as much as possible. I also try to start decluttering my apartment.

March 2023

It was difficult to continue writing at length during this month. Nicole moved out from living with her father and into a new town by herself and I helped build the apartment in its entirety. With the comments I received from my proposal at the end of January, I moved ahead with chapter 3 at full steam. Thankfully, I was able to find code online that served as the basis for the information acquisition model that I modified to serve my purposes, and this saved me an immeasurable amount of time. I used that time to develop the story for the third chapter and wrote it in a span of three weeks from start to finish. This was written almost entirely in my apartment or on Nicole's kitchen table. I worry about my attention span at times, though, as the progress I make on this paper is more sporadic (writing at like 10pm, for example, instead of having set hours when I do it) and my concern is about whether or not I can sustain such work habits into the future. Of course, this may just be the dynamics by which I finish the dissertation and not my actual work ethic. Also this month was seeing my brothers and going to MSU again to present my first chapter of the dissertation, fulfilling a goal I had set out in my first year of the PhD where I said I wanted to return to present a paper of mine eventually. My network at Fordham grew exponentially this month, including the new president of the university, the provost and vice provost, a number of alumni, etc, and I am not sure if my reputation as president of the graduate student government has helped influence all of this. Regardless, I am proud to be able to represent and enjoy my position incredibly so. In an expression of joy and hope, I feel inspired to write poetry and send off a few to see if they want to publish me again.

April 2023

This month is again a blur as I stop writing as much. With Nicole having moved, I spend a prodigious amount of my time traveling between my apartment and hers. I usually sleep over in bursts of 3 – 5 days, coming back to my place only for a night or two before heading out again. This month saw my preparation for my dissertation defense happening on May 1st, but this only increases my anxiety about it since I don't like the idea of having to wait too long to do something. In the waiting, I feel like I constantly critique whatever is at hand because all I do is stare at the thing. To help, I present my third chapter to the economics department and receive generally positive comments. I think the most important thing that happened this month was a life lesson from the graduate student government. At our last meeting in which I presided over, my vice president confronted me with a group of other students about a number of things, including my past actions as vice president when I was involved with Hiu Yan, and an accusation that I was not supporting graduate students' best interests as I claimed to be. She also accused me of talking badly about her behind her back. The entire ordeal, which was quite harrowing, made me feel extremely uncomfortable as the accusations were public and to our peers, and I left the university feeling disoriented. In my brain, I own up to my behavior with Hiu Yan as a mistake but did not think it had anything to do with my vice presidency. I also recognized that my position in student government was more beneficial to my professional development than anything I did to help other people's professional development. However, I did not speak about my vice president behind her back in any way. I did express my disagreement with her vocal union efforts and badmouthing the administration on social media to a professor in my department, but the vice president's stance on the union was rather well known. In any case, I was quite shaken and had to seek comfort from the Deans, with whom I had become personally close with throughout my entire presidency, as well as my cavalcade of friends who told me that the vice president's actions were unwarranted. I don't know about that, but I do know that I spent 3 weeks feeling anxious about my future and whether this accusation, without evidence, would hold up and affect my graduation. It certainly affected the legacy I was going to leave behind.

May 2023

I defended my dissertation on May 1st and was officially bestowed the title of "doctor". What a feat. Almost a full decade after I was kicked out of living with my family for disagreeing with their rules and being told to go figure it out on my own when I was 18, and at that time having Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, no money, no education opportunities because of my status, no financial support, nothing(!), I sat there triumphantly being congratulated by my

committee for producing three “impressive and innovative” chapters that contribute to the economics profession. I am, of course, very proud of myself. The slew of congratulations come in and I revel in the moment, though I know that this is a temporary high without an actual graduation. When the actual graduation comes, my friend Carlos takes photos of me to mark the occasion. I get hooded on that stage, graduate with Nicole who finished her Masters of Science in Applied Psychology, and effectively turn the page on a huge chapter of my life. Even now, I get goosebumps and an elevated sense of sentiment as I think about what this means for me moving forward. If nothing else, it means I can and have given my word to myself and kept it. Some other happenings: the accusation from the previous month turns out to be a dud and an internal investigation finds that it was based on a misunderstanding. What this teaches me is to be more mindful about how I express myself to people when in positions of authority. I need to also be averse to getting involved in anything less than transparent, even in my personal life, so that my conscious stays clear. I don’t like how I spent 3 weeks with anxiety. But I am not angry with anyone because I know that there was some truth to the disapproval of my colleagues and vow to become a better man moving forward. If nothing else, the president (and vice president) taught me more about myself than I ever thought. I also get my wisdom teeth taken out, finally, at long last removing that issue which had become a growing problem in the last several years. I celebrate with Nicole by going to the opera, seeing plays, eating out with delicious food, meeting Joseph for a huge celebratory dinner, and buying myself a new wallet to mark the occasion. How do I come out of Fordham and this chapter? Totally scathed and all the better for it. I spend the rest of the month planning a few things: I want to take myself and Nicole on vacation, so we book going to Hawaii. I also allow myself some time to write and just live without the structure of academia. I am grateful to be able to have this time to myself.