

Intermission

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Opening the admissions response letter is a rare, uniquely stressful yet exhilarating experience—so much is promised in those short lines that detail the conditions of your acceptance, the requirements and expectations and repeated congratulations; the paragraphs I believe most roaming the grounds of this campus have read over and over, washed over with a rare mix of disbelief and humility. Soon after, though, you must face the excitement and panic that accompanies the fact that you, *you*, have been accepted to one of the most prestigious institutes in the country.

The promise of prestige is that every person you will meet during your college life will likely possess a level of intellect or achievement equal to—or more often, better than—yourself. Inevitably as a student of this school you would also have achievements of your own—an award or two from state-level competitions, maybe even a national or international recognition. While you are most certainly proud of such accomplishments, there is always, in the back of your mind, a voice, that, *you know*, you were just fortunate to pick a topic that you already knew about in that extemporaneous speech contest, or that college credit math course wasn't *really* that “college-level” to be honest. When you're surrounded by everybody that seems intellectually, artistically, or socially superior to yourself, the notion of inferiority, that *you are not worth it*, only intensifies.

This feeling of inferiority and falseness erodes our identity. Our confidence as the most academic, the most athletic, the most

creative in our high school degrades, and while the persona of the university student is yet to settle in, we must find a way to orient ourselves without an externally-defined compass. Mental and physical self-care is neglected as the orientation week schedule is compounded with information sessions, activities, dinners, socialization, and our overstimulated souls forget to wind down and decompress, with the day's endings and beginnings decorated without any routine or ritual—practical, but devoid of personality. You feel as if your actions are disconnected from the self, and still somehow you realize that they actually hold something unique and different, as they reflect off of the sheer diversity of characters in the people you meet. I can call my high school friends to remind myself of who I was, but they can only provide glimpses into the *past* self that I was—now, irreversibly altered by the dorm life and exhaustion, I will inevitably have changed from such a self.

Those who suffer from social anxiety or are simply introverted might find such a process significantly more difficult and mind-numbing to navigate, especially if you are from—quite literally—the other side of the world; more so if you do not follow any strict religious doctrines; increasingly so if you see human personality as a fluid system morphing according to context; and exceedingly so if you, despite your philosophical inclination, have no particular schools of thought you subscribe to. It seems to be the case that I am—particularly unfortunately though, like every other person—in the intersection of multiple Venn diagrams spanning nationality, social class, belief systems and personalities that make me, seemingly even maliciously, incapable of resolving this *ambiguity*; the inexplicability of how the hard-

won achievements of your own that are—for the first time—overshadowed so easily; the indecisive emotions of the likely short-term relationships with the numerous people I meet every day; the distance between the lifestyle and routine between myself a month ago and now; the mediocre disappointment of dorm life against a vague fantasy of an ideal college lifestyle; the question: “Is this all there is? Or are there more?”

Inevitably, though, and quite fortunately, there always seems to be a flip side, a silver lining that inexplicably always points a way out. Ambiguity, in this case, might find light in the fact that it is a useful tool in redefining oneself—the beginning of college life is a context for a transition in identity that we occasionally and necessarily undergo during our lives: as we enter school, as we experience friendship or love or loss, and evidently, as we enter college. It is a period of time when we must embrace ambiguity in order to change and identify the gaps in our ego, and amend them in order to better ourselves, to move on. Every hobby we had, friends we loved, belief we held is up—everything that we are made of, is in the air for reassessment—and hopefully as they settle down, they will be better versions than the ones we had before.

Maybe because of my frequent moves, I often find that after a week or two I occasionally pause to recognize the changed scenery—the significance of this undertaking; the unfamiliar scenery the gothic buildings that is now, astonishingly, my *living space*; the people passing by—each and every one of them *talented* and *fascinating*; the cozy greenery of the quads; the nightlong conversations with barely befriended acquaintances; the lectures and

the professors. There is a sense of uncertainty but reassurance, as if your world is broken down but somehow rebuilt with those shards there may be a better one, waiting for you to embrace it and appreciate it. As I then look up at the sky, the sky of an ambivalent season caught up somewhere between summer and fall, I am reminded that it was me who was accepted here, that was welcomed here, that maybe, it’s just okay to for me to be here.