Stella was used to having strange dreams. Unlike some people, she dreamed every night; sometimes, she dreamt about real things, like her quickly approaching midterm season, and sometimes she dreamed about fantastical worlds where she could leap continents in the blink of an eye.

Sometimes, when she woke up, the dreams lingered in the back of her mind, tinting her perception of the world until midday, when the power of reality finally ate away at the flimsy fantasy.

When Stella woke up on Tuesday, October 8, however, the power of her previous night’s dream didn’t seem to fade. It had been an odd dream, so tangible, and the oddest part was that she hadn’t been herself. She had been in someone else’s body, someone that she knew. It was a boy in her seminar on democratic voting practices, Tom, whom she had pined over for the majority of the semester. And the dream hadn’t had that foggy quality that most dreams have, when you’re somewhere one second and somewhere else the next and you don’t question it at all. And nothing strange or fantastical had happened. In fact, it was almost like she was watching him live his life from behind his own eyes.

“What an odd dream,” Stella thought. Usually, when she dreamt, the majority of the actual content faded minutes after her alarm’s harsh ring, leaving her with only the feeling of the unconscious journey she had just taken. But this time, as she sat at the edge of her tiny twin bed, listening to her roommate breathing deeply across the room, she realized she could retrace the steps of the lengthy dream clearly and with ease.

She had come to in Tom’s mind when the clock on his computer read approximately 12:35 AM. She could sense the buzzing of his thoughts but couldn’t decode the specific content. She didn’t seem to have any control over his body, but she could detect the gentle breeze from his open window and hear the leaves rustling outside. She smelled that distinct boy’s room odor of his day’s sweaty gym clothes and the empty bowl Hamburger Helper spaghetti he must have had for dinner. He didn’t seem to be aware that she had entered his world.

As time passed, Stella bore witness to Tom’s every activity. She giggled internally as he sang Katy Perry songs to himself in the shower, and she zoned out as he played Call of Duty in his warm, dark room in the wee hours of the morning. At 3 AM, after hours of puttering around and doing everything but sleeping, Tom got up and left his house, entering the cool night. He popped in his earbuds and began listening to the Avett Brothers. Stella began to sense a loneliness as Tom dropped his head and began a somber stroll to the beach, where he sat and looked at the moon’s distorted reflection on the waves until the sun began to warm the edges of the horizon. Just as it peaked, Tom drew out his phone and opened a text to a group message named “Fam,” typing, “I miss you guys.” As he took the steep steps back up to the road, he caught his toe and scraped his shin against the stairs, drawing a slow trickle of blood. “Shit.” He continued home, patched the wound, and fell asleep. Stella’s world went back to black.

“It couldn’t be real,” Stella thought. “Can I enter the minds of whomever I desire in my sleep?” She wrote it off as another whimsical fantasy, a haunting desire to get to know this fascinating boy. She decided to go about her day, figuring she would forget about the whole thing, until she got to her political science class and saw the fresh scrape on Tom’s shin.