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Epiphanies Whilst High Out Of One's Mind

EPIPHANIES
WHILST HIGH
OUT OF ONE'S
MIND

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OUT OF ONE'S
MIND

H.T. YIM

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To Mary Jane,

My muse and everlasting love.

Mary Jane, my muse – no simple flower
Bestows a light, a clear and different view
When answers hide in vex'd times and dark hours,
And casts fresh sight, the old told now anew.

Sweet lady love, her arms offer respite;
She soothes stone shoulders at each week's long end.
High I soar – on journeys of taste and sight!
And bask in shining eyes she so oft lends.

She eases aches and pains, both nurse and friend,
Gentle, her hands heal all my sores and wears.
Those blinding migraines she can swiftly end,
No chance they stand 'gainst Mary's tender care.

Urge swells the heart to profess and decree
Undying love for this magic green tree.



CONTAINS ADULT READING MATERIAL

NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED

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Letter from the Stoner-Author

First and foremost, let me assure you that the inane ramblings on these pages, though undoubtedly shameless, are not intended as an unconditional promotion of marijuana. It is ill-advised for expecting mothers¹ and individuals vulnerable to psychotic disorders,² cardiovascular complications or strokes,³ and paranoia⁴ to use cannabis, as well as for those prone to respiratory problems⁵ to smoke marijuana cigarettes. And even for the physically compatible, daily use is inadvisable:⁶ moderation, as with all things in life, is the recommended course of action.

Second, allow me to refute two common misconceptions regarding marijuana. Contrary to the gateway drug theory,⁷ the use of marijuana did not lead me or any of my close friends, including the most severe of potheads, to the use of more dangerous drugs. Contrary to the widely held perception that marijuana induces apathy,⁸ I nurture

many things to be passionate about and have in fact developed several hobbies during my years of smoking.

Ironically, one of the things I've become passionate about is marijuana itself. My passion and appreciation renders me a cannabis enthusiast or, to drop all pretence and euphemism, a stoner.

I love weed. I love its enhancement of physical sensation as well as its promotion of creativity and abstract thinking: the way it increases the amount of pleasure derived from food, music, and sex, and the way it can endow you with a slightly altered pair of glasses with which to view the world; the sight through which, at times, can blow your mind.

However, I confess that it was a long and rather painful journey to arrive at this point of appreciation.

My relationship with marijuana, like many love-hate relationships, did not start off on the best of footings. Here, I use the terms 'love' and 'hate' relatively lightly: my body's initially unfavourable reactions to the substance never led to any vows of abstinence; and despite thorough enjoyment, I did not feel the need to get high on a daily basis or even to learn how to roll a proper joint for years. After all, that's what all of my pothead boyfriends had

been there for.

By the time I was twenty years old, it became apparent that I had a distinct taste in men. My first three relationships revealed a penchant for males with an outrageous sense of humour, an admirable vocabulary for their age, and a profound appreciation for pot.

From my adolescence to early twenties, the lessons I've learned about love, life, and marijuana have thus felt intimately entwined.

—Hayoung Terra Yim

Painful Beginnings

It was a cool summer night, the gentle breath of wind refreshing against the skin. From a wooden rooftop terrace, I looked into the garden below. With a tall tree laden with blackberries looming aloft, it was nearly pitch black; a darkness that would have been indiscernible but for the decorative white lights coiled around the railing and the light pollution of the city, visible even from the quiet residential neighbourhood.

‘You sure about this?’

John stood with an unlit joint in hand, shifting his feet uncertainly. He was my very first boyfriend, a tall youth with sandy hair and freckled skin; mature for his age, athletic and academic, but mischievous. *If only his parents knew what we’re doing right now.* They had obeyed his request that they ‘leave us alone’ and we were able

to enjoy a sense of privacy which was rare, considering we were only thirteen years old,* yet which was welcomed greedily.

‘Yeah, I’m sure,’ I said, attempting a convincing smile. ‘I’ve done it before.’ A blatant lie: told out of a desperation to fit in, at long last, with the cool kids.

Nodding, John lit the tip of the joint, turning it in the flame so it would start burning evenly. He took a drag and handed it over. I held the little white stick to my lips, hoping that my face would not betray the excitement and nervousness filling my chest, and inhaled. The smoke burned my throat and lungs; my eyes grew teary and the instinct to cough and splutter was overwhelming. Using all of the willpower I could muster, I tried to look nonchalant, as if I had done it a thousand times before.

For a while, or at least what felt like it, I was fine. Happy under the open sky and savouring the first taste of rebellious behaviour, I was content despite facing some difficulty in moving my body.

*There is increasing concern regarding the effects of marijuana on the developing brains of adolescents. See *Resources on the Health and Sociological Effects of Cannabis*.

The sensation, though peculiar, was not immediately alarming. As I mused over this change and observed that the stars, the decorative lights, and even the light pollution appeared much more enthralling than I could have sworn they had before, John brought out a tray; the contents of which were obscured from view.

‘Have some peach, babe,’ he said, feeding me a piece. ‘Is it good?’

‘Mmm,’ I responded in approval, mouth full of the best peach I had ever tasted: juicy, tender, succulent.

‘But Terra,’ he added, ‘that’s not a peach. It’s an apple.’

The moment he said those words, or perhaps as he was saying them, the substance *transformed*, now with the certain taste and texture of an apple. But surely, that wasn’t possible; I must have been mistaken.

I tried to mask my confusion. ‘Oh.’

He fed me another piece. Now that he mentioned it, this slice of fruit was definitely an apple, crisp and crunchy.

‘How is it?’ he asked. ‘Like I said, it’s an apple, right?’

‘Yeah,’ I mumbled, covering my mouth with a hand,

‘dunno why I thought it was a peach.’

John looked at me in mock bewilderment. ‘What’re you talking about? That’s not an apple, silly. It’s watermelon!’

But I had been so sure, so positive that it was an apple. Did I seriously lack the ability to distinguish one food from another? I continued to chew slowly, brows furrowed in concentration. I wanted to be absolutely certain this time. After a moment of scrutiny, mystery fruit still in mouth, I thought, *Oh my God, it is watermelon ... what’s happening?*

I vaguely wondered if I was experiencing what was referred to as ‘tripping balls’.

John’s smile was full of mischief. ‘But Terra,’ he repeated, ‘it’s not watermelon – it’s a strawberry.’

I widened my eyes, confusion now bordering fear. Once more, the moment he finished speaking, the substance changed. The flavour and texture, more tart and fleshy than before, and the tiny seeds lodging themselves between my teeth clearly indicated that it was a strawberry on which I was chewing.

According to inductive reasoning, if it tastes like a

strawberry, smells like a strawberry, and feels like a strawberry, then it probably is a strawberry, no?

And so, even in the unstimulating and safe environment of John's home, I experienced hallucinations that were both fascinating and disconcerting; the recollection of which remains vivid today.[†]

The next time John and I smoked up, we did nothing but simply sprawl out on his bed. As we lay there lazily, I felt an odd sensation in my feet: they felt cold and wet, as if soaked in iced water.[‡] I wanted to tell John about this curious feeling and ask him why I felt this way, yet I was unable to. The joint had rendered me thoroughly incapacitated and I could barely form coherent thoughts, let alone speech.

While I struggled to get the words out, John spoke. 'Terra, aren't your feet cold?'

I made no response but was overcome with confusion. How did he know exactly what I wanted,

[†] Cannabis exhibits a combination of properties belonging to the stimulant, depressant, and hallucinogen categories.

[‡] A common somatic effect of cannabis: a sensation of cold or hot hands and feet.

but was unable, to convey to him?

‘Well,’ explained John, ‘it’s ‘cause your feet are in a bucket of ice, silly.’

This, of course, was not the case. However, it described precisely the sensation I was experiencing, and I was frightened by the fact that he had said it *after* it began.

The influence John wielded over my physical senses of taste and touch was unnerving; it was as though he were playing some sort of omnipotent puppeteer.

I never experienced cannabis-induced hallucinations again. Regardless, I’ve had enough non-hallucinogenic mishaps with pot to establish the ‘hate’ aspect of our relationship.

I did not enjoy marijuana in the remotest sense the first dozen times of smoking it. In fact, the substance caused me considerable anguish. For me, getting high had what is best described as a dulling effect: my body would become lethargic and slow, incapable of articulating the simplest things or even of eating properly. The basic tasks of moving, speaking, and chewing became astoundingly difficult, exhausting

concentration and time.

The one thing marijuana did not dull for me was the sensation of cold. It intensified cold to the point of conviction that it was now a permanent state, warmth a bygone memory.

With John, there was an instance when suddenly, after smoking with friends, we were forced to evacuate the house. His parents came home earlier than expected and seeing as we were all unmistakably high with our bloodshot eyes and pungent clothing, we had to leave for a few hours until we became passably sober. Climbing down the stairs, placing arms through the sleeves of a jacket, fitting feet into shoes ... each step felt unbearably long and hard, even impossible to complete. To exacerbate this misery, it was the transitional period from autumn to winter and as typical of a bunch of thirteen-year-olds with no money, we had nowhere to go aside from the public park. Freezing to the core yet high out of my mind, I was unable to even express to my companions the depth of my distress; I could only sit or walk beside them in silent agony.

Such were my very first encounters with marijuana.

The effect weed used to have on me was that of reducing me to an observer: while I was more or less aware of what was going on and could tag along, I was hardly a participant. I could (just barely) follow my friends but could neither converse with them nor execute any decisions on my behalf, let alone that of the group's. Had circumstances not forced me to move about, I would indeed have been more comfortable (by which I mean less miserable) curled up in a corner waiting desperately for the effects to wear off. Marijuana would instill in me the feeling of being trapped in my own traitorous body, of being completely helpless.[§] In this manner, I became more familiar than I'd have preferred with the experience of *greening out*, of consuming more cannabis than one can tolerate.[¶]

After these episodes, I would not have another encounter with cannabis for three years.

§ A potential psychosomatic effect of cannabis: ataxia, a lack of complete control of bodily movements.

¶ A common side effect of overconsumption: dysphoria, a state of dissatisfaction, depression, and discomfort.

During this hiatus, I did not make a conscious decision to stay away from pot; the abstinence was made possible by the circumstances in high school. First, I was immersed in a completely different clique of kids, none of whom smoked up, at least not in the ninth grade. Second, I had outgrown the short yet violent phase of angst I had undergone at the age of thirteen, which made me inclined to do anything that would merit parental disapproval. Last, there always was alcohol.

What reacquainted me with weed was self-enforced repression in grade ten, during which I devoted the entire year to being good; to abstinence from parties, new and less wild friends, mention on the academic honour roll, and participation in extracurricular activities.

Once capacity for commendable behaviour had run dry, I conveniently met Adam, my high school sweetheart and intermittent boyfriend of two years. On the honour roll and the student council, Adam was part of a popular group of kids who partied and indulged in alcohol, marijuana,

and the occasional sexual interaction. Such duality was likely what drew me so strongly to him: he was at once a party animal and an outstanding young man. His guiding principle was to ‘work hard and play hard’, if not a bit harder with respect to the latter; the combination of which I found highly appealing and which struck me as a way of living life to the fullest.

It was not so much Adam himself who re-introduced marijuana to me, but a group of his female friends with whom I had grown very close after our first breakup. They provided indispensable support, which came twofold: they consoled me emotionally with ample girl talks and took me out to the best parties of my youth.

It all started out, as per usual, with peer pressure, yet not exactly in the conventional sense. Unlike when I was thirteen, it was not a matter of maintaining a façade of coolness but rather a peculiar matter of affection: the girls did not say ‘Don’t be lame,’ but instead cooed on several occasions, ‘Baby, just one toke? For me? ‘Cause you love me?’

And so, step by painful step, I was reunited with marijuana.

A Bitter Reunion

The hotel's executive two-floor suite, a vision of sophistication with its mahogany furniture and view of the heart of downtown, was teeming with teenagers. An extravagant party was being thrown in honour of our friend Lynette's birthday. At least a hundred kids attended; a significant percentage of whom were meeting Lynette for the first time yet nonetheless celebrated her sweet sixteen with great, and perhaps excessive, enthusiasm.

I was there upon check-in at three o'clock, immediately after which we commenced the drinking.* By the time everyone arrived, those who had been present from the beginning were already considerably intoxicated.

While lounging on one of the couches with drinks in our hands and mirth in our voices, Jay, a dealer at the

* The combination of alcohol with cannabis may lead to unpredictable results, especially for inexperienced users; a lesson learned through intense suffering.

tender age of sixteen, brought out of his pocket what looked like a cigar yet strongly smelled of marijuana: a *blunt*.

He passed the blunt around, and after Lynette had taken a hit, she looked at me.

‘Your turn?’ she asked, her face deceptively innocent.

‘No, hon, but thank you,’ I replied, trying to reject her offer as politely as possible.

‘But,’ said Lynette, lines of disappointment etched between her brows, ‘but it’s my birthday!’

I opened my mouth to counter this, to protest that the date of her birth should bear no influence on my preference or lack thereof for weed, but fell silent once she started to quiver her lips, making an irresistible puppy face.

‘Happy sweet sixteen,’ I toasted resignedly, raising the accursed blunt. I wrapped my lips around the end and took a large inhale, making the classic mistake of a novice.

‘Whoa,’ exclaimed Jay, watching all of the smoke I expelled. ‘Terra’s a *gangsta!*’

The effects of the blunt, along with the deepest of regrets, were immediate. My body felt heavy, my mind

slow. Time itself seemed to have been warped.[†] I made my way to the second floor, the ascendance to which was made even more complicated by the spiral staircase. Feeling as if I had vertigo, it was with utmost care and less dignity than I wish I could describe that I crawled up each step.

I slipped onto the bed in one of the rooms, joining half a dozen other kids. I listened to their chatter and smiled lightly at their jokes with my eyes kept closed and legs hanging off the edge of the bed. After an unknown amount of time, I forced myself to get up and find the washroom. Each motion required great deliberation and caused so very much pain:

OK, close door ...

Now, turn lock ... no, other way ... the other way ...

Locate toilet ...

Now, get to toilet ... oh dear God, slow the fuck down ...

Step by painful, arduous step, I reached the toilet and knelt over it, feeling as if the answer to all my woes lay within the confines of its watery bowl. I'm unsure as to how much time I spent in this state, but it was long enough to cause worry.

[†] A psychoactive effect of cannabis: a distortion in the perception of time.

There was a sharp rapping on the door. ‘Terra?’ called Hannah’s voice. ‘Are you OK?’

The last thing I wanted was for anyone to witness such disgrace. *Tell them you’re OK ... that everything’s fine ...*

‘Mm kay,’ I managed to croak.

I heard them whisper amongst themselves outside the door, clearly not believing my pathetic attempt to reassure them. Then, I heard a male voice.

‘What’s going on?’ asked Adam.

‘Terra’s locked herself in there and we don’t know if she’s all right,’ reported Candace promptly, ever the responsible and maternal one.

‘Can she speak? Did you call out to her?’ he enquired.

‘Yeah, she said she was OK,’ answered Hannah.

‘Well,’ reasoned Adam, ‘if she can respond, it means she’ll be fine.’

I wondered what it meant if one could respond, but only with vivid agony.

‘Terra, open the door,’ pleaded Candace. ‘We’ll help you.’

Docilely I obeyed, not knowing what else to do. I returned with assistance to my post in front of the toilet, hair held back by gentle hands. Still, I could not throw up.

With the door now unlocked and more company being the last thing I wanted, others paraded in. To my increasing dismay, the washroom was now filled with chatter. Most carried on their own conversations; some generously gave suggestions.

‘Pat her on the back.’

‘We should give her some space.’

‘Does anyone know how to make coffee?’

‘Give her more weed!’

I heard Hannah ask for advice.

‘What should we do, Jay?’

‘Give her some water,’ he answered. ‘It’ll help bring it up.’

A glass of water was conjured in front of my face.

‘Drink it, hon,’ urged Candace. ‘It’ll make you feel better.’

Again, I obeyed. Not long afterwards, Jay’s advice proved worthwhile. I finally and rather violently threw up, to the boys’ cheering.

‘That was a big one!’ one guy shouted with queer enthusiasm.

To my further mortification, one of the boys and Hannah engaged in a discussion regarding the former

contents of my stomach.

‘It’s all liquid,’ he observed casually.

‘Yeah, I don’t think she ate since breakfast,’ replied Hannah.

Attempting to scrounge what shred of imaginary dignity I could, I got up to wash my face and leave. On the way out, I realized that there had been approximately ten others present, just lounging about in the vicinity; nearly everyone was holding a drink.

Before I could reach the door, Jay grabbed me by the waist.

‘Where do you think you’re going, beautiful?’ he asked, pulling me close.

My world was still in chaos, the walls wavering, the floor not quite solid. After what felt like grueling eternity, I disengaged from his arms and escaped the washroom. I returned to the corner of the bed, legs hanging off the edge once more. Eyes shut, I was vaguely aware of someone removing my shoes on my behalf.

I curled up into the fetal position, intending to sink into unconscious bliss. Unfortunately, a boy named Enzo, harbouring a slight crush, deemed this his opportune moment.

'You know Terra, we party together a lot but we never really get to talk. But I wanna get to know you better. What kind of music do you like? Do you like movies? What's your favourite food? We should hang out sometime. What're you doing tomorrow? Wanna hang out tomorrow?'

I made a sort of whimpering noise, trying to indicate that I was not, in fact, in a condition to functionally partake in a conversation, let alone deepen our acquaintance.

He fell silent, and after a few moments settled for stroking my hair.

You've got to be kidding me, I thought as I closed my eyes tighter, trying to pretend this wasn't happening.

However awkward, the events of the night made for an amusing conversation for the girls the following day.

'I felt sorry for you when Enzo kept asking you questions,' Hannah sympathized. 'You looked like you wanted to sleep so bad.'

'I can't believe he was *petting* you,' said Lynette.

'That doesn't beat Jay. I can't believe he wanted to kiss me right after I threw up!' I exclaimed. 'Since when did vomit become the new sexy?'

We burst into laughter, staggering arm in arm as we commenced the search for a greasy, and hopefully hangover—ameliorating, breakfast.

The next time I got high was at an even wilder festivity, during which five different birthdays were being celebrated at once. It was held in the home of Jasmine, one of the birthday girls, when her parents were conveniently away on vacation. This time, the drinking commenced before noon.

It started out with what seemed an innocent picture: a group of youths barbecuing on the balcony on a shining spring afternoon.

Adam's close friend Noam brought a cake in honour of the event. This particular celebratory treat contained an entire ounce of marijuana; an amount which initially impressed people as festively generous yet which proved to be downright goddamned reckless.

As one of the birthday boys, Adam persuaded me to have a single slice of cake, claiming that the gesture would be a part of my present to him. I finished it without pleasure: the cake not only was dry but also contained the occasional stem for an experience that was less than

enjoyable.‡ Though I cannot attest to Noam's baking abilities, I can most definitely testify that his chocolate creation served its purpose: it got people spectacularly high.

Then, in a manner he clearly perceived as covert and surreptitious, Adam placed a second helping on my plate when I was not facing his direction. Feeling sober and believing for a wildly naïve moment that feigning ignorance would be hilarious and could do no harm, I ate what he put in front of me while pretending not to notice.

This party marked the first time that I ingested cannabis. It also marked the point at which I learned that orally consuming pot differs from smoking it in a few ways: first, the elapsed period between the time of administration and the time at which the psychoactive effects manifest is longer; second, the duration of the high is far greater, lasting as long as ten hours; last, ingesting marijuana gets you *way* more messed up.[§]

After a while (I couldn't say how long), I started feeling peculiar. Having learned by now to recognize

‡If interested in making homemade goods, look up cannabis-infused butter (CannaButter).

§As orally consumed pot reaches the liver first, standard delta-9 THC is metabolized into a more psychedelic 11-hydroxy THC.

the early signs of greening out, I wanted to get to a comfortable spot before it would become excruciating to do so. I scrambled out of my chair and made a bee-line for the entrance back indoors, trying to ward off an impending sense of doom. Sadly, it was too late. I had barely made it to the door when the green-out hit me fully; the prospect of moving now seemed impossible. I resorted to standing beside the door, body propped against the wall.

Jasmine walked up to me. 'You're *really* high, aren't you?' she asked, grinning.

I believe I gave her a helpless look in reply.

'Wanna know how I know?' A devious smile lit up her gorgeous face. She stuck out an opened hand close to my face and then withdrew it, closing it into a fist. She continued this motion in quick repetitions, so that her hand looked like it was flashing.

It was positively alarming.

After an indeterminate amount of time spent with her tormenting me and my begging her to stop, she doubled over in a fit of laughter.

'C'mon,' she said, still giggling, 'I'll take you inside.'

Jasmine assisted me indoors, holding my hand gently

as if to negate her previous torture, and led me to the couch where our girlfriends had congregated. I followed meekly, hypnotized by the long, shiny hair that trailed behind her.

I regret to say that I was one of the four guests who had gotten intoxicated to the point of freaking out. However, the difference was that my panic was kept internal, for the most part conspicuous to no one.

In contrast, one individual had gotten so tanked that he required my friend Arianna's assistance in traveling to his nearby home. She accompanied him to his house in the afternoon, assuring me that she would be back in fifteen minutes; I would not see her again for several hours. Her return had been delayed because the individual in question, immediately upon arriving at his house, started a long bout of vomiting in his own foyer. His mother, having the misfortune of seeing her son in such a state, was concerned that he was suffering from alcohol poisoning. Concern was both natural and manageable; her hysterics were neither. Only until some level of sanity was restored to the household was Arianna free to return to the party.

Another individual succumbed to hysterics himself,

certain that he was going to die. With a shameless face wet with tears, he called the police around two o'clock in the morning, inducing an end that was actually befitting: by the end of the night, having spent most of the average human's waking hours intoxicated in one form or another, no one was upset about getting kicked out and sent home by the cops.

The last individual yelled incoherently through the night, holding herself. During the eviction of the party, the police officers watched her stumble feebly down the stairs.

'And what are you high on?' asked one policeman, raising both eyebrows.

'High on life, officer!' she answered, grinning at him.

It's likely that he was stunned into silence.

As for myself, I sprawled across the couch that Jasmine had led me to with my head on Hannah's lap, trying to ignore the pain and chaos of it all.

As I lay there staring at the television and struggling to understand the events that were taking place on the screen, Candace came up to the couch.

'Oh my God, Terra is so *done*,' she said, making quite the unnecessary observation. 'Terra, sweetie, are you OK?'

I estimated how much effort it would take to respond and decided it was excessive.

‘Terra, are you OK?’ she prodded again. ‘Terra, can you say your name?’

I bristled, mildly offended. Of course I could say my name – did she think I was stupid? I put forth the effort and whispered.

‘Terra.’

There was a rupture of laughter.

‘Tree!’ cried Candace. ‘She said her name’s “tree”!’

I was still trying to process what had just happened when Candace slid her hand slightly up my skirt.

‘Oh my God,’ she repeated, still laughing. ‘She probably wouldn’t even *know* if she was getting raped.’

Aggravated and determined to prove her wrong, and with what felt equivalent to the effort required in pushing a boulder uphill, I managed to push her hand away, feeling sensationally pleased with the accomplishment.

At this point, they moved me to what was referred to as the ‘High Room’. With a few mattresses strewn on the floor, the lights kept mercifully off, and a couple of garbage cans standing at attention, it was a well-prepared

safe haven for those ill-suited to stand, let alone socialize.

I spotted Lynette and curled up next to her, spooning her barely conscious body.

While the High Room was crowded, it wasn't uncomfortably so; over the course of roughly ten hours, the inflow of wasted kids was balanced by the outflow of those who were able to sober up enough to either venture home or bravely return to the festivities.

One of the newcomers, Herman, positioned himself behind me and for some inexplicable, godforsaken reason was curious as to my identity.

'Yo ... Terra? Is that Terra?' he asked, nudging me.

The nudging did not make the room spin, but rather twirl and do a fantastic back-flip. I didn't, or couldn't, respond.

'That looks like Terra. Yo, Terra, is that you?' He nudged me again, instigating a fresh wave of nausea and suffering.

There was nothing I wanted more than to answer him, to put an end to his ceaseless interrogation. Unfortunately, despite desperate desire, I still could not respond.

Before Herman's infuriating nudging had ceased,

Lynette rose, disentangling her limbs from mine, and streamlined to the closest garbage can. The sound of her retching was too much to bear and I could suppress my own nausea no longer. Escaping my tormentor at last, I joined Lynette as we shared a garbage can. Oddly, the disgusting experience only strengthened the bonds of our friendship.

After the party was broken up, the dozen people who were spending the night started to clean up the house. Feeling much more in control of my body by this time, over twelve hours after ingesting the cake, I wanted to help. In the kitchen, I walked up to the sink so as to wash the dishes and immediately threw up in it. Grabbing my wrist, Valerie dragged me to a couch in the living room and ordered me to sleep.

In marijuana's defense, such wreckage or freak-outs were not the typical products of being high. It's straightforward sums: *chronic* (one of the many names for weed) plus *drink* makes you *crunk*. Only after much unnecessary suffering did I learn the rule on the combination of alcohol and weed, composing the most important rhyme I know of: *smoke after drink and your high will stink; drink after high and you'll touch the sky*. But

before the age of twenty-one, I never had the intention of getting drunk; as I had always started off with drinking, I would end up completely wrecked if convinced to take a toke.

However, even without the complementary effects of alcohol, marijuana alone had the power of complete wreckage.

On a school night at our usual hangout also known as Adam's basement, at the coaxing of Valerie, I agreed yet again to a hit of their joint. After a single inhalation which everyone including myself assumed would be harmless, I was wasted; reduced once again to lying down, useless, on a girlfriend's lap.

When it was finally time to go home, I mechanically stood up, thanked Adam for his hospitality, followed my friends out the door and through the front yard, and, without breaking a calm yet brisk pace, heaved the contents of my stomach onto the road the instant I reached it.

Genuinely shocked that someone could throw up from one toke of weed without even alcohol to justify the level of wreckage, my friends thenceforth lessened their peer

pressure.

The opportunity to deepen my relationship with cannabis, thus far cold at best, arose during the summer after graduation. Since I had smoked approximately a half-dozen times to date and had resumed my amorous relationship with Adam, he decided it was time to teach me how to actually enjoy marijuana.

‘Let me show you what getting high is really about, Terra,’ said Adam, his eyes practically lighting up at the prospect. ‘I’ll put you in a safe and comfortable environment – at my house, just you and me. We’ll smoke up, eat some bomb food, watch movies, fornicate – I’ll show you how amazing you can feel.’

I looked at him doubtfully; bitter experience and inference left me unconvinced.

‘Baby,’ implored Adam, ‘I’m your boyfriend. Trust me.’

I groaned. *Not the boyfriend card.*

As he had guaranteed, Adam’s house was indeed safe and comfortable. Out of the norm, none of his friends or family was present. There was no one to trip me out, intentionally or otherwise.

After giving me a single toke, Adam guided me to his kitchen, where he sat me down and made salmon

steak burgers garnished with wasabi mayonnaise and sun-dried tomatoes. I narrowed my eyes at one of the burgers; though I had not been hungry, I now was in the mood to eat, to munch out for once.

Sadly, anticipation proved more enjoyable than the meal itself. Weed, instead of enhancing my sense of taste as Adam assured me it would, seemed to have done the exact opposite. It was as if my taste-buds were benumbed from smoking up: the flavours of the ciabatta bread, salmon, tomatoes, and mayo were indistinguishable, so that the meal was one depressing blob of blandness.

Regardless, I was quite pleased: for the first time, I could actually chew with very little struggle. Excited that I wasn't helpless for once, I slowly ate the entire burger despite the lack of taste.

This marked the first time I was able to perform without anguish the most basic, indeed instinctive actions, such as eating, opening and closing doors, ascending and descending flights of stairs, and forming short sentences. Initially, Adam made it all as easy as possible, preparing everything so that I barely had to lift a finger; gradually, he promoted me to carry out menial tasks such as heating up food in the microwave or starting a movie on the laptop.

Though it took an absurdly long time to perform such tasks, I was contented. *At least I'm actually doing it!*

At this stage, I did not exactly enjoy being high. While I found the experience interesting, I felt dazed for most of the time; and while I was no longer comically helpless, doing anything required such effort that it detracted from the fun or pleasurable aspect of it. Regardless, I essentially underwent training: Adam was teaching me to do more than just sit in a remote corner, mute and motionless.

We only had five of these training sessions, for at the end of this summer awaited Adam's long-scheduled, two-year program overseas. The years following his departure passed without any marijuana-related incidents on my part. Of course, my pothead friends continued their pothead activities. However, no one pressured me to smoke up. My formal conjecture is that having become legal adults, we had outgrown youth culture's fascination with excessive intoxication; though it's more likely that my friends had grown sick and tired of taking care of me in my frequently incapacitated state.

The next time that I toked up was, incidentally, after Adam's return. The wreckage of that night was entirely self-inflicted, due to no one's will but my own. Unlike in

high school, no one tried to persuade me to get high by abusing the comely concepts of affection, friendship, or birthdays. Perhaps I had been in a festive mood due to the fact that Adam, whom I now considered a precious friend, had just come back from a very long trip; perhaps I simply didn't want to feel left out.

Regardless of reason, I wanted to get high on my own initiative for the first time in years.

It was a typical summer's eve, our friend's two-year absence now a forgotten fact. In Adam's backyard, a group of young men and women mingled and laughed from beneath a large canopy, its white fabric fluttering in the warm air.

Two joints were being passed around and after three light, tentative tokes, I still felt sober. Feeling a strange sense of disappointment, I found myself inclined to take a hit when they brought out what looked like a large volumetric flask. This was my first time smoking weed from a *bong*.

The moment I finished inhaling all of the smoke that bubbled up from the neck of the bong, the moment I lifted my head and stood upright, I was destroyed. Sadly,

everyone packed up their weed paraphernalia and made their way inside the moment I finished my hit. Alone and confronted with the daunting problem of getting back into the house, I tried not to panic. After what felt like an epic journey through a desert wasteland, I slipped through the back door. The sheer scope of my gratitude towards Adam's furniture arrangement, towards the fact that there was a couch precisely in front of the door to the backyard, cannot be exaggerated: I nearly fell to my knees.

I sank into what I thought would be a safe haven for the night: just that single spot in which I could curl up in a speechless, motionless state in peace.

I was gravely mistaken.

The events at the start of the night weren't too overwhelming. I observed the flurry of motion as they wreaked havoc in the kitchen: a powerful spell of the munchies had possessed the guests, leading them to pillage the refrigerator, the cabinets, and the bread basket. The stoners showed no mercy.

Valerie plopped into the seat next to mine, returning from the raid with arms full, and was generous enough to share her plunder. She placed an oven mitt over my left hand, a microwavable burrito still in its clear plastic

wrapping in the grasp of the oven mitt, and a fork in my right hand. She then split open the wrapping and equipped herself in the same fashion. I merely turned to stare at her.

She glanced at the look of confusion on my face. 'Less dishes,' she explained.

Her idea can only be described as the most brilliant display of laziness I've ever witnessed.

Unfortunately, I couldn't reap the fruits of her indolent ingenuity: by the time I managed to manipulate the fork, I was spent from exertion, and the burrito itself seemed to have turned into sand in my mouth. I forced myself to chew and swallow one bite, a harrowing task, and then closed my eyes.

Valerie, presumably having ravaged her meal, turned her attention towards me; or rather, towards the remaining burrito.

'You gonna eat that?' she asked.

Without opening my eyes, I jerked my head from one side to the other.

Valerie plucked the burrito from my clutch and proceeded to eat it herself, leaving me with mitt and fork still in hands.

Hannah, one of the few sober individuals, joined us on the couch.

'Is she OK?' she asked Valerie.

'I dunno,' answered Valerie, distractedly. A rustling sound suggested that she was now occupied with a bag of snacks.

'Don't you think her top is too low?' asked Hannah.

'I dunno,' repeated Valerie.

Hannah giggled. 'Like *always!*'

Though I was unable to say anything at the moment, my mind was functioning with clarity. *Note to self: when sober, make Hannah pay for offensive comment.*

Once the kitchen raid was over and everyone had munched out sufficiently, the boys thought it would be amusing to chase the girls while pretending they were zombies. Finally able to open my eyes, I watched as they lumbered around groaning like the living dead. Of course, the effect they produced was silly; the girls ran around enjoying the chase, all the while giggling and laughing. However, the boys' behaviour amplified the unease from which I was already suffering; I was seriously tripping out. Even though I knew the zombie-play was anything but

frightening, I could not help but feel terrified.[¶]

‘Stop it, it’s not scary!’ I yelled with great effort, trying if anything to convince myself. ‘You’re being stupid!’

The boys, aware that I was tripping out as I was the only girl not laughing, locked on to their ideal target. They advanced upon me, surrounding the couch. Barely audible amidst their groans, grunts, and moans were rather pitiful pleas.

‘Don’t, please!’ I cried, to no avail. It is with great shame that I confess I succumbed to whining. ‘Nooo, stop it ... *stop!*’

Adam laughed his head off throughout, recording the ordeal on camera. ‘I’m going to show this to your kids one day,’ he cackled, clearly the embodiment of evil.

As I drew close to the verge of tears, someone mercifully interrupted them.

‘Stop it, guys,’ said Kurt, an individual who had recently joined our group of friends. ‘She’s tripping out.’

I turned to face my saviour, feeling a rush of gratitude towards him.

‘It’s awful,’ he continued, ‘when—’

In the middle of his sentence, he started to choke. I

¶ Anxiety: the most common side effect of cannabis.

stared, aghast, as Kurt gasped for air, clutching his chest, and as he dropped onto his knees with his eyes rolling back. I was bordering the edges of hysteria staring at his body, a motionless heap on the ground, when with a great jerk, he started to rise. He lifted himself, swaying and emitting disturbing growls. Then, with his jaw dropped, eyes still rolled back, and hands raised in front of him, he lunged towards me.

Only after the truly ear-splitting shriek that ensued did they cease their nonsensical behaviour.

Such was one of my very first interactions with Kurt, simultaneously rescuer and tormentor; such would be the nature of our relationship for the two following years.

A Deeper Connection

In many ways, Kurt seemed more a private instructor than a romantic partner. He taught me a great many things, all of which I remember and appreciate to this day. He trained me to play videogames, taught me how to snowboard, tutored me in French, and as a fierce history buff exposed me to an ample amount of North American and European history.

More significantly, he taught me the value of logic; he brought me to realize the liberating experience of self-expression over peer acceptance; and together, we taught each other numerous, invaluable lessons regarding relationships.

Finally, it was Kurt who taught me how to find intense pleasure in food, music, entertainment, and copulation while under the influence of cannabis.

When we first began our courtship, it was clear that while we had quite a few things in common, we differed

on one important subject: appreciation for marijuana. Kurt had been for years a passionate advocate and frequent user of cannabis, convincing even his strict parents of its relatively less harmful nature by providing them with research findings: studies which indicate that it is nearly impossible to overdose on marijuana⁹ and that the legally and socially acceptable substances of alcohol and tobacco are considerably more detrimental as well as addictive.¹⁰

‘Care to blaze with me?’ asked Kurt one night as we were hanging out in his room, sitting in front of the television playing *Street Fighter*. ‘It’ll make the game more interesting.’

‘Oh,’ I said, shifting a little uncomfortably, ‘no, thanks.’

‘Can I ask why not?’

‘I dunno. I’ve done it like a dozen times, and I don’t think it’s really my thing.’

‘If you don’t know how to appreciate it yet, I can teach you.’

I wrinkled my nose in doubt. ‘That’s exactly what Adam tried to do – to teach me how to appreciate it. I dunno. I *still* trip out – you’ve seen me.’

He paused the game and turned around to face me.

‘Listen. I stopped the guys from tripping you out that night because I know exactly how it feels to green out – it’s not a pretty place, and it can be painful as hell.

‘But I’m not asking you to blaze so much that you start tripping – I’m asking you to let me show you how good this can be. I guarantee I’ll take care of you.’

It was not his words but his earnest and confident expression which convinced me. With a faint nod, I expressed my approval.

Kurt proved a man of his word. Paying close attention, he gauged my level of tolerance so as to ensure I wasn’t taking more than I could handle comfortably. In fact, he started me out not with tokes, but with *supers*.

There are two versions of supers. In the first, person A will place the joint between their teeth, the lit end facing inside their mouth; A will proceed to blow the smoke either through a tunnel formed by linking their right hand with the left hand of person B (or vice versa) or, more intimately, directly into B’s mouth. In the second version, A will take a toke from the joint and exhale either through the same hand-tunnel or directly into B’s mouth.

Starting out with the latter version of a super, in essence a diluted toke, Kurt built up my tolerance in a

very gradual process. Finally, when he gauged the amount of ganja I could handle and consistently gave me that amount, I was able to feel the pleasure of getting high.

Indeed, the effect of weed was that of enhancement, just as my pothead friends and Adam had described for years. Basically, everything felt as if I were experiencing it for the very first time, only much more intense; marijuana heightened my senses and appreciation for whatever it is I was enjoying.

Hearing

Enjoyment of music became a physical experience: I never failed to get gooseflesh every time I heard an outstanding song; it was as if I could literally *feel* the music on my skin. The thrill of listening to a good song while high was equivalent to that of listening to it live in concert; I had never imagined that listening to music on a car stereo or laptop could be so exciting. Vocal trance, with its conventionally lengthy build-ups, was like tortuous foreplay. Every branch of rock, whether folk, experimental, progressive, indie, or punk, physically demanded a rhythmic shake of the head. Even with a lack of lyrics, classical and jazz felt

overwhelmingly expressive. Regardless of genre, music could leave me enraptured, struck with awe at the genius of its composer.

‘We can create this?’ I said aloud in wonderment as we listened to an old favourite, Led Zeppelin’s *Stairway To Heaven*. ‘Humans can actually create something *this* beautiful?’

Kurt replied simply by smiling, pure contentment on his face, and singing along with the lyrics.

‘Our species is awesome!’ I proclaimed. Kurt gave me a fist-bump, followed by a kiss.

Taste

And the food. The food! The food!

It was as if my taste-buds were now areas of intense, indeed almost sexual stimulation. With a mouthful of the simplest dishes, relishing the delightful sensations which danced on the surface of my tongue, I could only moan in incoherent appreciation.

There were two problems. First, it could get confusing if there were too many choices: as each bite was bewitching, it took effort to tear away from one dish to start on another. Second, as marijuana increases

appetite, I could overeat without feeling bloated; with enough overindulgent munch-out sessions, weight gain would only be a brutal reality. For the most part, I tried to manage the latter predicament by eating a health-conscious diet when anticipating a sinful munch-out session at night; or alternatively by indulging in a health-conscious munchies menu with bananas and strawberries drizzled with honey, roasted chestnuts, yogurt, or any type of fruit or vegetable.

Touch

Sex with Kurt while sober was incredible; sex with Kurt while high was truly mind-blowing. The bed became a blank map, full of possibilities for us to explore and discover. Reveling in an ideal combination of lust, passion, and tenderness, we consumed each other thoroughly; it felt as if every cell of my being was writhing in pleasure.

And so, I learned the true meaning of the word 'ecstasy'.

Sight/General

Entertainment provided levels of amusement I had never before imagined.

Watching childhood cartoons such as *The Simpsons* or *Futurama*, I became a kid once more, completely engrossed and delighted by what was on the screen. Recordings of stand-up comedy became almost physically unbearable to watch; Louis C.K. would frequently reduce me to a curled-up ball on the floor, alternating violently between laughter, snorts, and whimpers while clutching my stomach in pain. Re-watching movies allowed me to notice details which had escaped observation in a sober state.

For instance, while watching *The Matrix*, a longstanding favourite, a revelation dawned upon me.

‘Kurt!’ I exclaimed suddenly. ‘When they’re in the real world, everything’s tinted blue, but in the Matrix, it’s all tinted green!’

We gazed fixedly at the screen. Indeed, the true reality in the movie was distinguished by a blue hue which had a softening effect, making the characters’ faces seem gentler; whereas the simulated reality of the Matrix was marked by a green hue with a sharpening effect, making everything appear more angular and harsh.

We looked at each other, the same expression of delight mirrored on our faces. We were both avid fans: we

had both fallen in love with its dystopian lore, rendering it a science fiction masterpiece; of its unique characters, each with their own remarkable strengths; of its social commentary, cautioning against unquestioned conformity. We had both zealously believed that we knew more or less all there was to know about *The Matrix* as well as the anthology film *The Animatrix*.

But here was a subtle yet symbolic nuance, giving further testimony to the genius behind the movie; here was another artistic aspect to appreciate. I don't believe either of us had ever been so pleased to be so wrong.

And thus, seven years after my very first joint, I learned to truly enjoy marijuana.

My newfound appreciation for weed was extended to Kurt himself. I began to appreciate the benefits of having a pothead as a boyfriend beyond the fact that he generously smoked me up, so that I never even had to purchase my own stash. Kurt taught me not only how to enjoy marijuana, but also all about paraphernalia such as the *vaporizer*, a device which offers a less unhealthy (with no carcinogens) and wasteful alternative to burning weed; the difference between the two main cannabis strains,

Cannabis sativa, which offers a higher cerebral stimulation and enhances creativity, and *Cannabis indica*, which offers more sedative effects and enhances physical sensation;^{*} smoke tricks such as the French inhale, in which smoke is simultaneously emitted from the mouth and inhaled through the nose; jargon and acronyms that sound less incriminating, such as a *jay*, an *eighth*, or an *H.Q.*; and various practices such as a method of minimizing odour residue when smoking indoors (through a *splroof*, a simple yet ingenious device comprised of a laundry dryer sheet wrapped over one end of a paper-towel tube), the optimal way to encourage a joint to burn more evenly and slowly (by mixing the ganja with tobacco or by slightly wetting the tip with saliva or water), and the most efficient technique of getting high and conserving weed amongst friends (by following the Two-Toke-Pass system, in which each person takes two inhales and immediately passes the paraphernalia to the next person in a clockwise order).

Of course, there were downsides to dating a pothead. Many a time I would tease a stoner friend for their poor memory, finding it both hilarious and endearing.

^{*}See blog entry *Cannabis Sativa and Indica Compared*, posted online December 6, 2011 by the Golden State Collective Cannabis Laboratories.

However, in dating Kurt, I was given a more intimate view of the consequences of memory impairment.

One night, lying in bed exchanging soft words, we reminisced about the development of our relationship. It was a highly touching conversation, until I whispered, 'Do you remember the first time you told me you loved me?'

My whisper was met with silence.

After a few seconds I lifted my head off his shoulder, only to be greeted by an expression of utter confusion and panic.

'Kurt?'

It was clear that he was racking his brain, searching in vain for the answer. Instantly wounded, I drew back from him. He grabbed my arm in desperation.

'I'm so, so sorry, babe,' he pleaded. 'Please tell me.'

'No.'

To further indignity and resentment, tears were now threatening to fall from my eyes. I decided rather childishly that his punishment for not remembering would be to not know at all.

'I'm not going to tell you.'

'Terra, baby, *please* don't be like that. What happened the first time I told you I loved you?'

‘I just ... don’t understand,’ I blurted. ‘How can anyone forget the first time they told someone they love them?’ The traitorous tears refused to stay in place and rolled down my cheeks. ‘I mean, it’s that single moment when you feel so ... so *vulnerable*, when you don’t want to assume or expect the same response but when you dare to hope they *do* feel the same ... all that excitement and nervousness – what kind of person could forget that?’

‘A pothead,’ answered Kurt immediately, his face the picture of seriousness.

I stopped crying, sobered by his reply; in all honesty, it was a pretty fair answer. After all, he possessed a daily habit widely known to have an adverse effect on memory.¹¹

While I understood that allowance had to be made since Kurt as a severe pothead was inevitably forgetful, I could not help but feel some resentment. After all, marijuana use does not necessarily impair memory; in fact, studies have indicated that cannabinoids, the active chemical ingredient in cannabis, may actually be beneficial for memory and offer a potential treatment for Alzheimer’s disease.¹² The crucial element determining whether the substance will improve, impair, or not at all affect

memory, however, is dosage and frequency. Kurt was clearly aware of this, having been the one to tell me about these research findings in the first place, and yet persisted in smoking at least one joint every day.

Nonetheless, the pros of the use of cannabis far outweighed the cons for me personally. Marijuana's enhancement of physical gratification, though extremely enjoyable, was nothing in comparison to its intensification of abstract and philosophical thinking, which I learned to achieve while sober and which I value as an indispensable part of my life today.

The Epiphanies

The wind was bone-chilling and relentless, attacking from every possible front and transforming my hair into a hundred thousand lashing whips. I stood outside the metro station, eyes focused firmly down the street, scanning for a familiar vehicle. A wave of warmth and relief washed over my body as I at long last entered Kurt's car, escaping the harshness of yet another winter night in Canada.

It was one o'clock in the morning: we had both been relieved from our shifts at our part-time jobs in the restaurant industry. We spoke little on the ride to Kurt's home, for which I was silently grateful. It was a Friday, the busiest night of the week. We were both senselessly tired and, immersed in the intense panic, stress, and self-hatred inducing experience known as final exams, I was caught in a mild spell of depression. Constantly feeling the pressure of school and working just to pay rent and other

seemingly never-ending bills, I lamented the futility of life, of slaving away only to perish, in what can be construed as the last remnants of adolescent angst; it all seemed so ...

Damned pointless.

As we drew closer to his house, Kurt pulled over in front of the nearby park to light up, as per usual after a shift.

‘You want some?’ he asked in a choked voice as he held in the smoke.

Normally, I would have refused his offer. Though I had learned to appreciate marijuana, I was not quite comfortable doing it on a frequent basis. Yet on a night such as this, exhausted and stressed out for various reasons ...

Fuck it, I thought. Why not?

‘Please and thank you.’

Once we were satisfactorily ripped and had reasonably aired out the car, we drove into his garage and entered the house. After shedding our coats we turned the television on, chose *Clone Wars* as the Netflix selection of the night, and scoured the fridge to lay out a little feast for an obscenely late dinner. Sadly, even the enhancing effects of weed could not dissolve my melancholy mood; at least,

not immediately.

After we finished our meal, Kurt revealed his surprise. Having noticed my gloomy state of mind, he had brought back a slice of chocolate-encrusted caramel cheesecake from his restaurant; a gesture that normally would have thrilled me. I pulled him into a hug, appreciating his thoughtfulness. Though I did not much feel like eating it, I tiredly picked at the dessert.

The moment cake and taste-buds made contact, my eyes widened; it was as if my brain exploded in a whirl of delight, pleasure, and revelation. *This ... this is it. This is the point! Sensations ... food, laughter, sex, music. This is the point of life!*

For a more coherent (and sober) explanation, I was referring to the sweetest sensations, both physical and mental, that life has to offer: of food that makes you feel inundated, indeed almost intoxicated with pleasure; of humour that makes you feel certain you must be developing abs from laughing so hard; of a book that absorbs you completely, pulling you from and simultaneously enriching reality; of physical intimacy that makes you feel like you wouldn't even mind if life were to end immediately afterwards; of music that truly

moves you, instilling in you a strong, almost physical urge to share it with the whole world; of the first distinguishable scent of a new season in the air, stirring up old memories and promising new ones to be made; of a soft bed that makes you feel like you never, ever want to leave its warmth and comfort ...

For me, such delightful sensations were what made life truly beautiful and worthwhile, whereas the painful experiences of sadness, anguish, and heartbreak served as reminders not to take anything for granted.

Like the ephemeral firework or flower, I mused, finally swallowing. *Beautiful despite its brief existence – perhaps even more so because of it.* Smiling to myself, brimful of satisfaction and meaning, I proceeded to shamelessly and unrestrainedly stuff my face with cheesecake.

On a later date, Kurt dropped me off at Valerie's house while he went to spend time with Caitlin, one of his female friends – the occurrence of which was not uncommon. Well-liked amongst his peers, Kurt had a wide assemblage of friends, both male and female, with whom he hung out on a one-on-one basis. Initially, I was unfazed: it was common for individuals our age to have

a lot of friends, regardless of gender. However, as time passed and as I learned more about these girls, I realized just how compatible they were with Kurt.

For instance, there was Caitlin, whom Kurt met in a course abroad to improve his French. They had spent the entire summer practically living together. During those four months, they shared their groceries and cooked together, partied hard and embarked on drunken adventures, and clearly cherished each other's company, especially with her occasional I love yous and I miss yous.

Having met her in person, I knew that she was remarkably pretty and friendly; I myself was very charmed.

Once, as Kurt told me of another one of their escapades, I became increasingly curious.

'Why didn't you date her?' I asked directly. They genuinely seemed to be a good match.

He paused, taken aback. 'I don't know,' proved the only answer he could give.

Such a response and the apparent fact that he was unable to think of a reason why they did not date was, for me, the implicit admittance that he could or might have.

For months, I pondered over a newfound sense of

insecurity which I had never felt with Adam. Kurt was surrounded not only by beautiful girls who sought his attention, but by girls with whom he was actually compatible. They got along amicably and their interactions were mutually enjoyed. Whereas with Adam ...

Adam had also been surrounded by girls who vied for his attention. However, neither the objects of his fleeting infatuations nor his female friends were able to waver my confidence that I was able to give him something the others could not. This sense of arrogance stemmed from the mindset Adam and I had jointly adopted.

With Adam, the two of us had naïvely and melodramatically gone on about how ‘no one else could compare’, how ‘irreplaceable’ each was to the other, how we were unable to find rapport similar to the one we shared. My experience with Adam had thus influenced me to believe that love, then, was when you were with someone because you simply could not be happy or satisfied with anyone else in your surroundings.

I carried this conviction as if it were engraved on a stone, which I took with me everywhere; I repeated its words over and over, as if to reinforce its veracity. *Love is when you feel like you can't be with anyone else*, I maintained.

When you feel like it has to be that specific person.

However, the dogma I had espoused for nearly three years was in no way useful as I was now confronted with the question of why Kurt, who had every opportunity to be with other girls who were attractive both physically and mentally and with whom he shared a similar level of compatibility, was with *me*. And suddenly, a very different answer dawned upon me. It was as if after years of obsessively carrying around the engraved stone, I turned it over to discover another inscription, hitherto unnoticed.

Sometimes, I learned, high out of my mind and not quite registering the words coming out of Valerie's mouth, love is also when you feel you fully can be with someone else, but choose to be with this specific person instead.

The thought that Kurt, despite the fact that he could be happy with another, chose to pursue happiness with me soothed away insecurities.

Such were my new outlooks on life and love, respectively; such were the very first two of countless high epiphanies which I would enjoy and which would significantly better my life.

In this manner, I discovered that marijuana was capable of granting sudden, shining bursts of insight, illuminating long-sought answers to vexing questions. Of course, not all the insight weed granted me bore any practical merit. In fact, much of the high insight I gained led to analogies and revelations which, despite any stimulating qualities, tended to be abstract and impractical. My high epiphanies could be crudely organized into three categories: Random Analogies, stemming from whatever it is I was doing (or more often than not, eating) at the time; Answers such as the two described above regarding life and love, explaining questions that had left me baffled; and General Revelations, providing a critical perspective on topics I had never before considered.

Whether abstract, philosophical, creative, practical, or impractical, the one thing these epiphanies had in common was that they were likely to be forgotten by morning. The greatest complaint I now bear towards marijuana is that it endows you with random, intriguing revelations with one hand and takes them away with the other. *

* A neurological effect of cannabis: a disruption in short-term memory formation.

After several occasions of remembering that I had a fascinating revelation the night before only to have no clue as to what it was that fascinated me, I decided to diligently write down any epiphanies at the moment of their conception.

Sadly, so-called 'diligence' was short-lived. It was rare to write down fully formed sentences, if anything at all, thanks in part to a reduced attention span.

This frustrating dilemma marked the turning point for my love-hate relationship with marijuana. While I loved the insight it can bestow upon its users, I despised the fact that it took away the ability to remember most of such revelations. *How unfair*, I thought, not without resentment. *It's like the biggest tease in the world ... just like Shakespeare says about alcohol.*

Just as alcohol endowed the poor drunkard in *Macbeth* with sexual urges yet paradoxically rendered him impotent, marijuana endowed me with epiphanies yet rendered me too forgetful to remember and often too distracted to write them down at the moment.

Occasionally, however, I was able to defy astounding laziness and write out at least a single line, no matter how fragmented and rambled. When reviewed

the next morning, this line would usually trigger my memory, so that I could recall what it was that had so intrigued me before.

For instance, one night I wrote: **'pet store – setting yourself up – love at first sight, only to walk away.'**

While making plans to visit a suburban super mall the next day, I eagerly asked Kurt if we could go to the colossal pet store inside.

'Sure,' he said, 'so long as you control yourself and remember we're just browsing – I know you love animals, but you're also an adult. You can't just be randomly bringing pets home, Terra.'

I was on the brink of sticking my tongue out at him when struck with an analogy.

Going to the pet store despite knowing you can't actually get a pet is like setting yourself up for heartbreak – because you know you'll instantly fall in love with some sort of puppy, kitten, hamster, Green-cheeked Conure or chameleon, and that you'll have to make yourself walk away without giving in to impulse.

And that's just what young love is, I continued, a little forlornly. *Because rationally, you know it most likely won't last, that the odds are against you, that it's likely to end in*

tears. But you do it anyway – you set yourself up.

I looked at Kurt, realizing truly how young we were – barely twenty years old – and the near certainty that I would one day have to bid farewell to this beautiful, wonderful boy, not quite yet a man.

How do you even brace yourself for such a goodbye? I wondered. Whatever. We bring each other happiness right now – and when it's over, hopefully we'll walk away from each other as improved versions of our current selves.

Quite a few of these epiphanies consisted of such abstract analogies which seemingly came out of nowhere, amusing me with their randomness.

'phone reception/fault in fight'

'Hello?' I spoke into my phone, to no reply.

'Hello?' My attempt to have a conversation with Kurt while he drove home from my apartment was foiled again and again, as the call kept dropping. Only after several tries was I finally able to get him on the line.

'There's something wrong with your phone,' I said, exasperated.

'How do you know it's my phone and not yours?' asked Kurt.

I made no reply. How *did* I know it wasn't my phone?

I don't, I answered internally. I had made the instant assumption that it was his phone that was dropping our calls, as mine had been functioning normally the whole day. But the fact that one's phone was performing regularly before was no guarantee that it was not malfunctioning now.

The same thing applies to debates, I realized suddenly. *When you argue with someone because you disagree, because you have opposite perspectives, you might be so opposed to the idea that you might be wrong because you've been thinking that way for years.*

But just because you've had a certain mindset, a certain belief about something your entire life with no issue doesn't mean it's infallible – that you can assume the other person is wrong.

'Hello? ... Terra?' said Kurt. 'Anyone there?'

How immature! I thought of myself. *Twenty years old and as egocentric as a toddler!*

'swirled ice cream = girlfriend + sex'

We sat on Kurt's L-shaped corner couch, re-watching a marathon of *Firefly* episodes. Kurt was sprawled out

comfortably, his head resting on a pile of cushions while I sat upright with legs crossed, monopolizing a tub of Ben & Jerry's 'half baked' ice cream. As I indulged in sinful, brownie and cookie-dough embedded, vanilla-chocolatey goodness, I noticed in myself a habit: with every spoonful of ice cream, I made sure that there was an equal distribution of chocolate and vanilla, even if it required extensive digging. Apparently, I refused to eat the chocolate portion without its vanilla counterpart.

Instantly came an answer to a question that had vexed me for years about certain boys. A common behaviour exhibited by several acquaintances and Adam which bemused me deeply was that of young men breaking up with their girlfriends, with whom they shared happy relationships, on the grounds that they wanted to 'experience the world' and 'make most of their youth': a feeble excuse to go sleep around. I never judged these boys. After all, they merely wanted to do exactly that which is normalized and glorified in a society that applauds male promiscuity. A committed relationship would be the biggest hindrance to participating in this social norm and glory; I understood that the tears their girlfriends had shed were collateral damage.

What I failed to understand was why every one of them after a year or so of casual encounters tried to come back to the girlfriends they had so easily abandoned. They had been eager, indeed almost desperate, to get away to enjoy their freedom, and enjoy it they did. Wasn't meaningless sex what they desired most? Why were they coming back now? It left me baffled.

But, staring at my spoonful of chocolate and vanilla ice cream, I formulated a theory. Just as I never realized until in a high state of mind my liking of chocolate ice cream only when eaten together with vanilla, perhaps these boys never realized their appreciation of physical intimacy when shared with an individual for whom they actually cared. Having always had both at the same time, perhaps they'd taken for granted the combination and assumed that the two components could be enjoyed just as much separately.

I smiled in spite of myself. *I suppose that's understandable.*

While this last high epiphany was a combination of a Random Analogy and an Answer, most of the Answers I arrived at while high were done so directly, rather than through a medium as above with ice cream.

'FINALLY UNDERSTAND DIFFERENCE

men and women – angry at Nothing'

There had been a question which puzzled me for years about both men and women, regarding the popular and hilarious, yet very real issue of 'nothing' being wrong.

Since a young age, I'd laughed at jokes that made light of the common situation in which a female, once asked 'What's wrong?' by a man answers with 'Nothing'; I laughed when Homer Simpson explained to his son that a woman's 'nothing' was the equivalent of 'everything'; and I laughed at the various attempts by males on the Internet to 'decipher' what females say, translating 'nothing' as 'the calm before the storm'.

I understood why so many of my friends and I insisted that 'nothing' was wrong. One of these reasons was due to a tendency we observed in our partners to get angry when we would disclose the cause of our emotional disturbance. This would place us in an unpleasant predicament: on one hand, we knew from inference that our partners would grow frustrated if they discovered that we were upset over something they perceived as trivial and/or irrational; on the other, we knew that they would be aggravated if we didn't tell them why we were upset.

A shitty, lose-lose situation.

‘I *know* I’m being emotional – which is why I don’t want to tell him in the first place. But then he gets all mad if I don’t tell him!’ I grieved to Hannah.

‘They get angry either way – so really, we might as well not tell them why,’ replied Hannah. She paused, perplexed. ‘But what I don’t get is why they get mad if we don’t tell them.’

‘I have no idea,’ I said, completely bemused. ‘I guess they’re just creatures that think differently.’

However, the exact nature of this difference remained a mystery. *In what ways have so many men and women been conditioned and socialized to think differently, I wondered, to the point that they can’t even grasp the other gender’s perspective on the same situation?*

I was able to posit a theory when Kurt and I encountered the Nothing Controversy while high.

I had been upset over a relatively trivial matter: his tendency to accidentally use the name of his new friend Ellen. Already feeling uncomfortable with the disproportionately large amount of time they were spending together, his apparent preference for her name disquieted me further, making me wonder if his slip of the

tongue was a simple accident or a Freudian slip indicating subconscious desire.

After we blazed, Kurt made his third slip, saying Ellen's name in place of another friend's. Immediately, I felt confused and insecure, growing unusually quiet and distant.

'Is something the matter?' he asked. 'What's wrong?'

'Nothing,' I said, repeating perhaps one of the most common lies uttered by the female population. I knew that he would be angered if I disclosed to him my highly emotional reason for being upset; I resolved to keep my mouth shut.

'... if you say so,' Kurt replied, sounding unconvinced.

We prepared for and climbed into bed, where he tried to spoon me; not receptive to affection at the moment, I did not return his cuddles.

Now certain that something was awry, Kurt attempted to coax it out of me.

'Baby, what's wrong?' he cooed gently. 'You can tell me.'

'Nothing,' I repeated.

After more cajoling to no avail, Kurt finally lost patience.

'Jesus Christ,' he snapped, 'what is it? Why do you have

to be like this? Why can't you just come out and say it?'

Normally, such a rebuke would have upset me further. Stoned, however, it was as if I could see the situation from his perspective:

Above all else, I just want to keep things simple and enjoyable. And when she does this, she makes what's otherwise a normal, good night into something complicated – something difficult and unpleasant.

If this happened only on the rare occasion, it would be fine. But for her to do this on anywhere from a weekly or biweekly basis means that I'm spending a good part of my days, a good chunk of my very life this complicated, difficult, unpleasant way.

This is why it gets so annoying, so exasperating – it's like, 'Goddamnit, what is it now? What is it this time?'

It's so unreasonable to spend a significant portion of my days, my life this way, having to stress out about trifling things that have no real practical consequence.

And what's more, it's clear she thinks I messed up in one way or another – and that I should just accept that I screwed up without even knowing what I did is just ludicrous!

I stared at Kurt, my mouth agape.

No wonder he gets so angry!

Beyond providing possible explanations regarding my personal meaning of life, the workings of love, and various mysteries regarding gendered attitudes, cannabis also helped provide answers about myself, explaining my own reasoning behind certain beliefs or behaviours.

‘food waste – why against it’

In Kurt’s kitchen, I stood in the optimal position, immediately next to a bag of rice crackers on the counter with a clear view of the television in the living room. I tore into one package after another, refusing to take the bag itself to the couch, assuring myself that I wouldn’t eat that many, that I surely possessed some form of self-discipline.

After annihilating about two dozen rice crackers, I decided that the cracker itself overpowered the deliciousness of its coating; I started licking off its salty, sweet exterior before chucking it into the compost.

‘That’s out of character,’ observed Kurt, clearly taken aback.

‘Huh?’ I replied quizzically, struggling to open yet another package, trying to reach the bounty trapped within.

‘You’re always so adamant about not wasting food, but

here you are throwing out crackers.’

‘Oh,’ I said with a blank stare, ‘but these have like, no nutritional value whatsoever.’

‘So?’

‘So, what I’m against isn’t the act of throwing out what’s edible, throwing out food itself – but the thought of wasting something that could’ve saved a *life* in a third-world country. It’s the fact that people literally die of malnutrition – the thought of what a measly dish of leftovers could mean to those people, and of how unfair it is that we in the developed world take that all for granted.’

Kurt looked a bit stunned.

‘I didn’t know you were thinking all that when you preach about how we shouldn’t waste food.’

‘Neither did I, ‘til just now,’ I admitted honestly, once again highly appreciative of marijuana.

‘nitpicking – why’

Amongst the din and clatter of the other diners and the music blasting in unnecessarily high volume, I struggled to listen.

‘*What?*’ I said for the third time, practically yelling.

‘I *said*, you nitpick like crazy in relationships!’ half-

screamed Lynette.

I had been told this for years by friends, family members, and boyfriends themselves. I merely humoured them all, never quite taking them seriously.

'I know I'm really anal when it comes to the guy I'm with,' I protested with a scowl. 'Is it so wrong to have standards?'

Lynette giggled. 'I know, boo,' she assured me. 'But if you're always unhappy no matter who you're with, you just might end up old and alone.'

I was struck by the truth of her words: I was indeed unhappy for the major part of my relationships, but had never examined the trend critically. *Are my reasons for being unhappy as valid as they seem to me? Or is there something else at play here?* I wondered, fishing out a slice of frozen peach from a blended cocktail.

Under the influence of the pre-meal joint we had shared, I made a hypothesis. *Maybe the reason I'm always so picky and unsatisfied with my romantic partners is that, deep in my subconscious, I'm unsatisfied with myself. Maybe I project some sort of inner unhappiness outwards, in my expectations of significant others.*

If I don't address this, I continued to meditate, *I might*

actually end up the way my friends joke I will – alone.

But in that case, I thought lightly, I'll just live a rich and fulfilling single life – I'd always have family and friends, and hopefully some sort of fulfilling career.

'If that's the case, it'll be fine. I'll just spoil the shit out of your kids!' I said, raising my drink.

But thank you anyway, Mary Jane, I thought, beaming at my friend as we laughed and clinked our glasses, for yet another therapeutic session.

Hence, marijuana was able to help me answer questions I wasn't even aware that I had, shedding light on matters I accepted without wondering why I did so; and these were in no way limited to questions about myself.

**'lol lap dogs – just taking it – Cici baby – dominance –
race evolution'**

It was yet another comfortable, lazy day of winter vacation; a glorious day, a day without obligations and entirely centred on the PS3 and Netflix. Resolutely staying in our pyjamas, Kurt and I slowly fused with the couch while my Shih-poo, Cici, fused with my lap. Shifting to counter eventual numbness, I straightened up and as per a tendency since the age of twelve, made

the little dog sit upright as if she were a human infant, her back supported by my torso.

‘Be a baby, Cici!’ I cooed.

Chortling, Kurt lifted Cici out of my arms. Holding her similarly like a baby, he grabbed hold of her little paws and made her act out the proverbial Three Monkeys.

‘See no evil–’ said Kurt in a sing-song voice, placing Cici’s paws over her eyes, ‘hear no evil–’ he placed her paws over her floppy ears, ‘speak no evil!’ he placed her paws over her muzzle. Both dog and physically matured man looked at me, Kurt with the satisfied grin of a child and Cici with utmost docility, as if she were a stuffed animal and not a real dog.

‘Look, she just *takes* it! She doesn’t even resist!’ Laughing, I realized the remarkable human achievement represented in toy and lap dogs.

What complete domination we hold over the domestic dog – I mean, these used to be wolves for God’s sake! And now, through generations of selective breeding, we’ve basically turned them into living stuffed animals whose sole function is to literally sit in our laps and just let us do whatever we want to them. I wondered if the gentle canine would be

able to survive in the wild and seriously doubted it. *And whose survival depends entirely on a different species.*

Pets, I continued, epitomize human dominance, and how we use animals not just for food and clothing but for company – even as surrogate babies. We use them to fulfill our need as social creatures – we use them for companionship and affection.

I tried to imagine what would happen if there was a species just as, if not more intelligent than our own and who had physical superiority.

We could easily be the ones being dominated – dependent and kept solely for the benefit of another race.

Holy shit. That's what evolution is: literally a race – and the prize is planetary dominance.

I looked at Cici, eyes wide, and scolded her.

'Your ancestors would be ashamed!'

'high alone at home – cold water for once – ecstatic!'

'Sure you'll be OK?' asked Kurt from the doorway, leaving to meet up with his friends.

I nodded. 'Mm hmm. I'll be fine, safe and sound. Don't worry and have so much fun.'

He planted a kiss on my forehead. 'Text me.'

I closed the door behind him, left alone at the peak of a high for the first time ever.

I grabbed a bag of zesty Doritos and sat cross-legged in front of the laptop, watching episode after episode of *Frasier* and thoroughly enjoying stoned solitude. Lulled by the soothing cadence of Kelsey Grammer, I realized that I was parched. In the kitchen, I filled a cup with the coldest possible water the faucet could provide, lukewarm at best, and opened the fridge to forage for other potential munchies. Eyes falling upon the new Brita dispenser I had purchased, which I had forgotten all about while stoned, I gasped.

Cold water! I thought ecstatically. *I have cold water for once!*

True to the stereotype of a poor starving student, my discretionary income was virtually non-existent; though I had purchased a Brita faucet system when I first moved in, I hadn't known that the tap in my apartment could not dispense cold water, and it was a few months before I would purchase another filtration device.

I quickly dumped the lukewarm tap water in my cup and refilled it with water from the fridge. I

greedily gulped down the sweet, ice-cold water and placed it on the kitchen table, wiping my lips with the back of a hand.

After returning to several more episodes of *Frasier*, I grew thirsty once more. I walked into the kitchen and, almost passing by the cup of water about which I had completely forgotten, relived the exact same experience.

The extremity of my own excitement made me literally laugh aloud.

How ridiculous! I thought grinning, water dripping down my chin. *To appreciate a cup of water to this degree ...*

I gazed intently at the cup in my hand. *If all we are is the product of exposure, maybe it'd be best if everyone lived alone at least once – ideally on their own as students, when income is usually low.*

To experience a shortage, if not a complete lack of comforts could perhaps increase appreciation of future advantages and standard of living, and hopefully increase empathy.

‘girls – so small that it’s big – blocking fb – made the minute detail into – out of the way to do that small thing?’

Frowning, I read over the text message once more, wondering if I was too high to understand it properly.

Sarah’s pissed cuz she thinks u blocked her on fb.

Having found the constant surveillance afforded by social networking to be suddenly overwhelming and tiresome, I had temporarily deactivated my Facebook account. Apparently, an acquaintance had interpreted this act as a personal rejection of her friendship.

Well, that explains why she hasn’t been messaging me lately. I thought it was strange – turns out, just insipid.

Kurt glanced over. ‘What is it? Did something happen?’

After I told him, he scoffed in answer. ‘Why do girls make such a big deal out of Facebook anyway? If anyone blocks them or removes them from their friend list, they blow the whole thing *way* out of proportion.’

With this query, I instantly speculated as to the reasoning behind a behaviour I had never questioned but simply accepted as a norm.

‘It’s a big deal precisely *because* it’s a small matter,’ I said, hypothesizing to both Kurt and myself. ‘Having some-

one on your friend list or not is such a minute detail, something of barely any consequence, unless there's legit concern they'll be keeping tabs on you ... which is why the thought that someone would actually go out of their way to block or remove you translates into sending a really petty, virtual slap in your face!

'Whoa,' said Kurt, 'that actually makes a lot of sense.'

I sat in silent dignity, starting a game of *Lumosity* on the phone and trying not to be offended by his surprise that girls could 'actually' make sense.

'kurt: my longer term is bomb but my – even if it wasn't fun and it's failing it's because i forgot the last time that i failed that makes it so bomb lmao'

... I have no idea what this means.

'nature of being alpha – burn into memory'

With hands deft and sure from years of practice, Kurt ground up his new stash of weed as he began describing a situation that had unfolded at work. He told me about Andrew, a shy videogame-fanatic who at the age of twenty-eight had never had a girlfriend; and about Peter,

a boisterous person who apparently believed himself to be the epitome of masculinity and who at the age of twenty-six was a bully. The latter constantly ridiculed the first for his love of comics and games, as well as for his lack of sexual experience.

Finally, Kurt had had enough of Peter's antics and decided to give him a taste of his own medicine. Each time Peter would mock Andrew, Kurt would aggressively insult Peter, humiliating him in front of their co-workers much as he had done Andrew and daring him to retaliate, to 'do something about it'. After a few of these incidents, Peter became quieter, leaving his former target alone.

I was happy, proud even, that Kurt had put an end to such intolerable behaviour. Yet I couldn't help but feel that his form of chastisement had been a little excessive, that his own taunts had been almost shockingly cruel. *Couldn't he have accomplished the same thing less brutally? Maybe just take him to the side and tell him to stop his bullying, that it's not acceptable, that it's not cool?*

I continued to ponder in silent confusion as Kurt finished rolling a joint for us, wondering whether his method had been necessary and if so, why. We entered his bathroom, opening the window and draping a towel

over the gap at the foot of the door. Once it was burned down to the filter, Kurt dropped what was left of the joint into the toilet and flushed; although his parents knew we smoked marijuana, we avoided presenting constant reminders.

I waited on the couch while Kurt jumped in the shower and turned on the television, cuddling with Cici. The little Shih-poo wriggled free from my grasp when Kurt emerged from the bathroom, his damp hair slicked back, water still beaded on his skin. The two began to play-fight, both with such enthusiasm that it was difficult to say who enjoyed it more. The fifteen-pound dog ran in circles around the fully grown man; whenever she got caught, she would nip playfully as Kurt tussled her about only to release her once more. After this repeated a few times, Cici became visibly overexcited, her snaps now more vicious than playful.

'Alright, buddy,' said Kurt, 'time to calm down.' He lifted the little dog from underneath her front legs and placed her gently on her back, hovering one hand over her chest. At first, Cici squirmed, trying to get back up only to be held in place. Gradually, the Shih-poo yielded to her submissive position, as psychological as it was physical.

Because that's what it means to be an Alpha, I thought watching them, jaw dropping slightly. Yeah, Kurt could have accomplished the same thing with Peter in a much more polite way – or at least in private. But that's the point – to really drive the lesson home, so that they're less likely to do it again, less likely to forget, it had to be an experience he felt with every fibre of his being.

A memory burned into his brain.

'You're an Alpha!' I proclaimed to Kurt, sharing my revelation with him. Once I was finished, he was gloating, a smug smile spread across his face.

'Obviously,' he said, his chin jutting upwards.

In a flash, I leapt up and patted him on the head, ruffling his hair. 'Good boy,' I cooed.

I darted away laughing, just escaping his reach.

'you're a baby – changing personas, introspection'

At the end of a shift at a new workplace, my colleague stretched his arms in relief. 'It's finally over,' he said brightly. He turned to me. 'Wanna grab a few pints? There's a pub just down the street. We go pretty much every Thursday.'

'Sure,' I complied.

Once we reached the pub, though, my fellow workers did not enter. Instead, they formed a circle off to the side, beckoning me to join them.

I have the coolest co-workers, I thought happily as I accepted their joint.

Afterwards, we settled into our seats. Sitting across me was Isaac, a tall, broad man reaching around six feet in height, with chestnut brown hair that didn't quite reach his shoulders and a matching full beard.

'So how old are you, anyways?' he asked.

'Twenty-one,' I answered. 'How 'bout you?'

'Nineteen.'

My eyes widened in surprise. *I thought he was older than me.* 'You're a baby!' I proclaimed.

Isaac threw his head back in laughter. 'You're only two years older than me!'

'But you'd be amazed at the difference those two years can make for a person,' I began without thinking. 'Compare yourself now to yourself when you were seventeen. Incomparable, right? Almost like a different person?'

'Yeah, that's true,' he agreed.

'It's fascinating, the extent to which we're progressing,

improving, or just changing every year,' I thought aloud.

We sat grinning at each other across the table until the person next to him pulled him into a conversation of their own, and I was left free to delve deeper.

There was a punk rock phase when I was nineteen, I remembered, smiling at the memory. And an inappropriately hypersexualized phase at seventeen. I reminisced about all the stages, the transformations I had gone through, each one highly distinct from the rest. *If all my personas past and present could be assembled in a room ... would a stranger be able to tell they're all in fact the same person? Would they all necessarily get along?* I wondered in what way and by how much I would change in another two years, or even one; what kind of image and habits I would exhibit in a decade, in three.

That's the importance of introspection. Though it may no longer be relevant to your life, you should still remember, and pay even a moment's homage to a former self—and in doing so, appreciate your current form.

I resolved to assess the changes I've undergone on a yearly basis and place more value in self-reflection, as well as to keep an open mind about the possibilities of future selves, as I quietly sipped on beer at the local pub.

'tattoos – underappreciated artists'

In the vacated parking lot near campus, an old classmate Neil and I sat in his car, catching up over a joint.

'I'm getting my tattoo next week,' he informed me.

'Oh, really? I didn't know you wanted a tattoo – what're you gonna get? And where?'

'Astraea, on my side.'

The word sounded familiar, yet I could not place why. 'The who and the what now?'

'Astraea – goddess of justice in Greek mythology? She ran away from Earth and humans, saying she'll return one day and restore the world to a utopia. Remember Spenser and Milton?'

'Yeah – *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*.'

'She's mentioned in both.'

'No, I think I remember now.' I furrowed my brows in recollection. 'And Dryden, too – his poem *Astraea Redux*.'

'Exactly.'

'Cool ... can I ask why? What meaning will it have to you personally?'

'Well,' he answered, 'it'll serve as a reminder for me to

always have a strong sense of justice and to have hope in humanity no matter how bad things may seem, regardless of the disappointments, the countless atrocities.

‘And because I think *Paradise Lost* is one of the greatest things ever written,’ he admitted bashfully.

I began slowly, turning to him. ‘That ... that’s fantastic! It’s not just for aesthetics – you picked something with so much personal significance, in more ways than one. I can’t wait to see it when you get it.’

‘Yeah, me neither. I spent–’ he broke off, chuckling. ‘God, I don’t know how many hours researching, but I finally found the right tattoo artist.’ He grew visibly excited and began to describe his vision in detail. ‘She’s going to be standing tall, holding a scale high with a sword at her side – she’ll be beautiful but she’ll look a little sad, and she’ll be in a flowing dress ...’

What extraordinary people tattoo artists are, I thought suddenly, smiling at Neil’s animated description. You explain your vision, the image you see in your mind’s eye, as best as you can to them. From your words, they construct an image in their mind’s eye in turn and translate it onto paper, working on it until it’s an accurate portrayal.

I considered how their work generally was not as

respected as conventional art and thought it a shame. *And what they do goes beyond art – they're literally the medium between what's in your head, something that's extremely personal and meaningful, and physical reality. It's not just artistic skill – it's creative empathy.*

I sat in the smoke-filled car on the verge of tripping out, my mind blown over something I had never before conceived.

**'managing anger – close interpersonal relationships –
exercise'**

Furious after a fight over the phone with Kurt, I paced my apartment back and forth. Fuming, I thought of the things I wanted to say to him, one after another; things I wanted to yell at him, to fling at him, to load into a gun for the battle that was our argument.

I itched to unleash my fury on him; to counter his claims point by point and back up my own with clear supporting facts; to drive him into a corner. I picked up my phone to call him, only to cast it aside in disgust. *Why should I let him ruin my day any further?* I thought pettily. I wanted to ignore him for days, to wash my hands and head of him, to demonstrate that he wasn't worth getting so riled up

over.

But he is worth it, a calm voice inside me objected.

With those towards whom you haven't an ounce of respect, whose feelings you would have no qualm with hurting, there is no compelling reason to hold back your anger. You could lash out, call them horrible names, even dismiss their existence. *But for those you care about, there's a need to remember what's more important: having that person in your life, or the idea that you're right and they're wrong, that they messed up. You need to swallow the pride of being in the right as well as the anger from being wronged.*

No, this is a good thing, I thought, perceiving the situation from a different light. *The best way to strengthen control over emotions is to be involved in a close interpersonal relationship with a non-relative. To be in close proximity to someone you value greatly – for chances to exercise patience and self-restraint. After all, it required willpower to not raise one's voice, or curse, or give someone the cold shoulder when consumed with rage.*

Or flip a table over, I thought grimly, closing my eyes and taking a deep breath.

**‘old essay – what the hell did i really write this? –
memory loss’**

Organizing the closet after a joint, I came across an essay written two years beforehand. Curious and more than open to a distraction from chores, I sat down and began to read. *Topic: Friedrich Nietzsche – On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense.*

I cocked my head to the side. *I read that?*

I read the introduction paragraph twice, quickly the first time, eyes scanning through the lines of black ink to gain a general sense. *Whoa. Nothing.* Not a single bell of recognition rang. During the second attempt I took my time, reading each sentence over slowly to absorb its meaning.

The effort to comprehend the contents of my own essay was straining. *Jesus. Did I really write this? I barely understand this.* Apparently, it had made sense to the teaching assistant or professor, depending on how big the class had been; a grade of 86% was scribbled on the corner of the title page.

How terrifying it is, I thought, high out of my mind, to become so disconnected with a part of yourself that you can't even remember being that way. When a former part of your life, a part you knew so well, becomes completely foreign.

Forgetting course material from classes you took years ago which no longer bears any relevance to your life is one thing, quite insignificant. *But what if it was a bigger part you lost? Forgetting something that defines you, that helps make you the person you are.* I imagined a composer in his old age being unable to recognize, let alone play, a song of his creation; I imagined forgetting the faces of a beloved life partner, of precious children.

I shoved the paper back in the closet, unnerved, glaring at it fearfully.

‘grapes plastic – ideal mass production’

I heaved the large box my mother had insisted on giving me, deaf to my stream of protests, onto the kitchen counter. It contained two kilograms of grapes. *Well, I thought, guess I'll be living off grapes this week.* I opened the box and to my surprise found that each bunch of grapes was individually sealed in plastic packaging.

I stared for a moment, then raised a package to my face. *This is an ideal company – one that simultaneously appeals to consumers and presents a solution, no matter how seemingly minor, to a social issue. This is mass production done right.*

With such a simple change, the fruit company gives

incentive to customers: less product, ideally none, will go bad and have to get thrown out, thereby maximizing utility per dollar spent. At the same time, individual packaging will ideally help reduce the vast amount of food waste generated in developed countries.

Now if only they'd use some sort of biodegradable packaging, things would be perfect ... I narrowed my eyes.

Or, if we were all required by law to recycle and compost ...

'advertisements – addictive unhealthy appeal holy shit'

The cavernous, dimly lit theatre was largely vacant. My friends and I had arrived far earlier than anticipated; even the trailers had yet to start. Excessively high and pre-occupied with snacks from the concession stand, no one complained. I leaned back comfortably in the seat with a huge bag nearly overflowing with popcorn on my lap, prepared for the stimulation of sight, hearing, and taste. *Only two senses short of the feelies.*

The movie trivia games ended and the commercials began. Eyes glued to the gigantic screen, I sat in contentment, placing in my mouth handful after handful of popcorn drenched in melted butter.

The first commercial was a series of security

camera footage from all over the world, capturing moments soft and sweet; touching moments, silly moments, moments that spoke of selflessness, of valour and altruism. It showed lovers sharing kisses on park benches and inside elevators, men dancing on the streets and inside grocery stores, and friends embracing. It showed numerous incidents of strangers helping strangers, ranging from kind gestures of retrieving a dropped wallet to heroic acts of pushing a passenger-filled car off the railroad tracks in front of an oncoming train. And, of course, it showed a clip of two friends sharing a drink in front of a Coca-Cola vending machine. It then transitioned into a collage of all of the footage playing simultaneously, which unfolded cleverly into the shape of a bottle of Coke.

A following commercial depicted an African-American adolescent inside a McDonald's restaurant opening a burger container and pouring his French fries into the lid. He looked up, making eye contact with an elderly Caucasian man who had done the same. They exchanged a knowing look and a nod of acknowledgment, and proceeded to eat their meals.

I stared at the screen, stunned, the popcorn clenched in

my hand forgotten for a moment. *They literally took the fact that their unhealthy products are addictive to all – regardless of age, gender, race, or nationality – and made it an appeal.*

For years, research has indicated the adverse health effects of the products in question, including increased risks of kidney stones, diabetes, obesity, and even cancer. The use of ingredients such as caffeine and high sugar content relative to other nutrients as well as additives such as pesticide residue meant that the products being advertised were as addictive and scrumptious as they were detrimental. *They've concocted something as delicious as it is unhealthy, something nearly the entire population enjoys and which millions indulge in on a dangerously frequent basis, which anyone could potentially get addicted to if not careful, then presented it as something that brings people together – as a ground for unity and empathy, turning it into a reason to have more.*

I sat in silence, struck with disquiet and awe at such manipulative, exploitative prowess.

‘water – music – physical manifestation harmony’

Hand in hand after a date at a waterfront restaurant, Kurt and I strolled to the man-made beach nearby. We walked along a pathway that cut through a small stretch of grass lit up by LED lights, beds of flowers and a grove of trees off to the side, the white sand and bright yellow umbrellas visible ahead. Kurt looked sideways at me, grinning.

‘Know what would make this even better?’

I grinned at him in turn. ‘Do you even need to ask?’

We stepped off the grey pavement towards the trees, seeking concealment under the foliage.[†] We lit a joint, stashed away in Kurt’s cigarette case, and smoked up as fast as we could.

‘Two-Toke-Pass,’ said Kurt.

I answered by taking two deep inhales in succession. I held the smoke, burning sweetly in my chest, and quickly passed the joint to him. He repeated the process and after two rounds put out the burning ash with the bottom of his lighter, stowing the half-smoked joint back in the case.

Kurt sighed happily. ‘Efficiency at its best.’

Once we reached the beach, we kicked off our shoes

[†] Perhaps it is worth noting that consuming pot in public is illegal.

and reclined comfortably on the heavy Adirondack chairs pitched in the white sand. I wiggled my toes in the coolness, appreciating the sensation of the tiny pebbles against my feet, so coarse on their own yet inimitably smooth in their millions. I turned my gaze to the lake and was entranced. *It's so beautiful.* The lake and sky fused together to form a vast darkness, embedded with light from the sparse urban stars and the nearly fully waxed moon and its reflection. The image of the moon was stretched across the surface of the water, so that it seemed an illuminated, wavering road, its end nowhere in sight.

Staring at the water, I found myself unable to look away; it was mesmerizing, to the extent that blinking felt a waste. Every spot I focused my vision on moved in a unique yet repetitive motion, a large ripple or wave arising out of and falling into stillness, only to be replaced by an identical copy, again and again and again. They were of different shapes and sizes, and rose and fell at different times. Yet together, the waves rolled in at a constant and calm pace.

This is music, I thought with a sharp intake of breath. *Made up of all sort of aspects that repeat themselves, each*

having a cycle of its own, that move differently from each other yet work together as a whole. This is the physical manifestation of harmony. And that's what musicians do, that's what they create – harmony. They take an array of separate sounds and bring them together under one cohesive theme.

I closed my eyes and inhaled deeply, basking in the scent of the lake as well as a newfound respect towards music artists, and felt incredibly at peace.

‘twenty dollar bill – nature of change’

Dragging behind leaden feet, I reluctantly walked into the convenience store in search of that dreadful, domineering substance: tobacco. *No*, my mind objected, *you've been oh so good, don't give in!* Unfortunately, my body demanded nicotine; miserably, I complied.

‘A pack of Craven’s, please,’ I said in a defeated tone.

‘They discontinued Craven’s,’ replied the cashier. ‘It’s Benson and Hedges now.’

‘What? Oh ...’ I gaped at him stupidly. *I am way too high for this.* ‘Wait, what?’

‘Would you like a pack of Benson and Hedges menthol?’

Confused yet irrationally persistent, I shook my head.

‘What would you like, then?’ he enquired.

‘Craven’s?’ I asked hopefully.

The man frowned. ‘No,’ he said, more slowly. ‘They don’t make those anymore. But Benson and Hedges menthol is the same thing.’

Eyes narrowed slightly in suspicion, I finally assented. ‘OK ...’

He placed the package on the counter and I reached into my wallet and handed him the only bill inside: a thin sheet the colour of terracotta.

The cashier handed back some change, which consisted of bills of assorted colours and a few coins. While I instantly recognized the blue-gray and violet bills, there was a pale green one which was unfamiliar; it even felt different, made out of coarse paper instead of glossy plastic. I stared at it, wondering what kind of currency it was. *American?* Only after a few moments did I recognize the middle-aged female figure as Queen Elizabeth and notice the word ‘CANADA’ printed beside her.

It was a twenty-dollar bill from two generations past; although bills from the previous generation were still in circulation, it had been years since I had seen this

version.

That's the nature of change, I thought, gawking at the handful of money. What may seem new and foreign at first can subtly yet completely replace the current norm over time, until the latter becomes what's unfamiliar.

On the one hand, I considered, maybe that's what makes the concept of change so frightening for most of us – the idea that the things we know would become abnormal, unfamiliar, alien. On the other, there's comfort in the fact that we'll get used to it, so long as we're willing to – over time, it'll be as if it was always the state of things, to the extent that we won't be able to imagine returning to the way it used to be.

I thought of the staggering technological progress made in mobile phones and personal computers over a mere two decades, and of the social advancements made in gender and race relations in less than a century. I thought of gladiators and how forcing human beings to fight to the death, now barbaric and unthinkable, was once equivalent to a football game or the theatre. I thought of—

'Excuse me,' interrupted a baritone voice, tinged with annoyance.

I snapped back to reality, becoming aware that I

was blocking the way of the next customer in line. I mumbled an apology and turned to leave, head bowed in embarrassment.

As I pushed open the door leading outside, its bells ringing cheerfully, I wondered if they suspected that I was high out of my skull. *Either that, or they think you're a dimwit.*

'stairs – exercise – society and the individual'

Dear Residents,

Due to maintenance of the tiles, service from P1 is unavailable until further notice. Please take the stairs to ground level for access to elevators. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause and thank you for your patience.

-Management

Casting a reproachful look at the sign, I turned away from the elevator hall towards the flight of stairs and trudged up the steps, resenting the exercise that had been thrust upon me. I hunched over panting at the top of the staircase, completely out of breath.

You're so out of shape, it's as funny as it is shameful, I criticized, sparking an internal debate:

Start working out.

I would prefer not to.

You really, seriously need to get in shape.

Actually, I don't 'need' to do anything.

Actually, you do. Forget the case of an apocalypse, zombie or otherwise – what if the day comes when you need to defend yourself physically? Would you be able to run, let alone fight back? Or would you just get all out of breath, you fat bastard?

Well, realistically speaking, what are the chances I'll need to physically fend for myself in this day and age? That's what society's for.

I paused, breath taken away once more; this time by the magnitude of my own laziness and the lengths to which I'd go to rationalize it.

Yeah, the fundamental purpose of human communities, of socially constructed obligations and constraints, is to minimize physical threats. And yeah, you're lucky enough to have been born in one of the safest societies out there. But trust in the state can't be absolute – just like you can't assume it'll indefinitely have your best interest at heart, you obviously can't expect it to always protect you.

Honestly, how could you have forgotten about social contract theory?

Self-disdain was temporarily replaced with giddiness as I became aware of the first time I had ever thought of classical political theory outside of school context, and I grew excited that the discourses of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, which I had always perceived as more fascinating than practical, were still applicable nearly four centuries later. *If sovereignty and responsibility ultimately lies with the individual, they surely must be able to have some confidence in their own abilities.*

So hit the gym, and take up a martial arts class. Take up Krav Maga.

... I would prefer not to.

I let out a sigh, demoralized by my deeply ingrained physical indolence.

‘chivalry – playing field – patriarchy’

Blowing out the last wisp of smoke through my bedroom window, I took in the sight of the city, a river of lights sweeping across the abyss of night, ever admiring.

It never got old. *Marvel at our minds, our resourcefulness, the skyline seemed to boast. See how we’ve transformed our surroundings, changed the very surface of the planet. Every inch conceived in our minds and converted into*

reality – every brick and mortar a product of our consciousness.

Putting away the vaporizer and sacred stash, I crawled onto my bed. Reclining comfortably on a small mountain of pillows, I opened a book, flipping through a dozen dog-eared pages to a favourite chapter, and plunged into the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

I followed George R.R. Martin's dragon queen and her siege on a city in an eastern land, as a former arena-fighter prepared to do battle with one of the city's defenders. When one of her knights indicated that for single combat, chivalry would demand a warrior on horseback alight from his steed when facing an opponent on foot, I stopped, eyes focusing on a single word: *chivalrous*.

The late medieval notion of chivalry had always puzzled me: it seemed bizarre that a society would largely deny a gender of rights yet idolize its members; that a society could at once view women as property and cater to them. Yet in reading this work of epic fantasy, something seemed to click in my mind.

Courtesy and consideration were paramount to the chivalric code, and it would have indeed been courteous

and considerate of the champion to dismount. *But what if it's also about getting rid of any unfair advantages? About leveling the playing field?* I wondered what the significance of the concept, if plausible, would be when applied to the treatment of ladies of the court.

Maybe all the polite things, the gallantry and heroic acts made in the name of love and begging for a lady's blessing before war – the courtly love – maybe all that stuff wasn't just about distractions or sex or justification for violence, I considered. Maybe it was about implicitly acknowledging the fundamental disadvantage of females, both social and legal.

But if that's the case, I interjected, it could also have meant inadvertently keeping them at a disadvantage – by constantly doing things on their behalf, possibly curbing the desire to even want to do it themselves.

Systemic infantilization, coupled with placation bought by perks like special treatment and material items and security.

A double-edged sword. Hospitality in a hostile world.

I frowned down at the beloved book, deeply perturbed by my own thoughts.

‘dancing alone – missed out – insecurities’

Armed with a variety of snacks, a role-playing game set in a land filled with magic and dragons (a.k.a. *Skyrim*), a steaming bubble-bath drawn and waiting, and just a little bit of marijuana, I was prepared to make my night alone indoors lavishly enjoyable.

In the midst of creating a mellow, bubble-bath appropriate playlist on the phone, I was hit with a realization.

My roommate left for vacation today ... I thought, mind slow to process. That means ... that means I can do anything I want.

Forsaking Radiohead’s album *The Bends*, I started blasting the energized electro numbers of Calvin Harris.

I had always been an awkward dancer, having even been likened to *Seinfeld*’s Elaine Benes. A trip to the nightclub always entailed furtive glances at nearby dancers in an uncertain attempt to figure out what the hell I was supposed to be doing. But in this moment, for the first time in my life, my body began to move on its own accord. Hips, feet, shoulders, hands, and head: all moved in unison with one another and with the music.

Dancing while not caring how you look, I considered,

raising a twirling hand towards the ceiling and having the time of my life, *is freaking liberating – being uninhibited so you can wholly express music through your body.*

This feels so good. How have I never done this before? I wondered.

Insecurities, even the small ones, are in a way crippling – they can make you miss out on so much for so long.

Without a single care for my appearance, with zero concern as to whether or not I looked silly, I danced to my heart's content.

All alone, stark naked in the living room.

Multiple Epiphanies:

**'mind altering substances – give consciousness rest',
'heels – confidence – fawns', 'people variety – shells at
beach', 'bouncer so surprised – rarity of manners'**

Sitting in front of the mirror, I dusted my eyelids with a bronze powder that shimmered in the light and lined them with a pitch black gel. Reaching over the dressing table, I grabbed a loaded vape in place of the usual glass of wine that accompanied me in preparation for a night on the town. I took two successive hits, holding my breath as

I walked over to the window. After exhaling through the wire mesh and watching the cloud of smoke vanish into the night, I returned to the dressing table to resume the meticulous feminine ritual of getting ready, which involved plastering at least three more colours onto my face.

This will be the first time I go out just high, I considered, *and not just drunk or a combination of the two.* I had not been in the mood to drink and was curious as to how a night out might seem from a solely stoned perspective.

The subway was flooded with drunk individuals: a demographic I normally would have been a part of on a Saturday night. The sight of one particularly inebriated young woman caught my eye and I retreated a few steps, placed my back to the wall, and observed.

Struggling to work the turnstile, she clutched at the metal bars while pushing her body against the wrong side. Her more sober friends tried to direct her, yet she seemed unable to hear them.

Fascinating, I thought, *that it's socially acceptable, encouraged even, to get intoxicated to a point where we lose common sense.*

I vaguely wondered what such behaviour, if actually

exclusive to humans or animals under human influence, might imply. *Maybe consciousness is a taxing, cumulatively stressful thing – and we just need to dial it back a bit every now and then?*

I went through the turnstile myself and walked down to the train platform. Ahead was a group of young women dressed up for the night, all beautifully adorned, their hair styled in perfect loose curls and their feet snug in high heels that were as dangerous as they were sexy.

A few of the women seemed to have been born in heels, strutting completely unhindered by the four-to-five inch podiums strapped to their feet. Others faced more difficulty. One walked with her hands raised slightly in front of her, resembling an awkward ballerina. Two walked with their knees bent every step they took, their gait reminding me of that of *Velociraptors*.

The key to walking in heels, I thought watching them, really is about confidence – not in physical appearance, but to not fall. You have to assure yourself that though the risk of spraining an ankle or cracking your skull open on cement is definitely there, you should just not be afraid.

A task easier said than done.

And this is the only time you'll see fully grown humans

stumble about like a herd of newborn fawns, I reflected on another note. *Just for the illusion of longer, slimmer legs*. I smirked. *What practical creatures we are ...*

Emerging from the metro, I stepped out into the entertainment district where the streets were bustling with people, with lights and laughter and music everywhere, almost overwhelming the senses. I walked along the sidewalk basking in the liveliness and The Strokes playing in my ears, and casually observed the sights, drinking everything in. Every patio was brimming with diners and drinkers alike. A music festival was taking place at the nearby park, its shaggy-haired performers displayed on a giant screen above. Standing outside the brightly lit theatre were groups of cigarette smokers, sharply dressed and getting their nicotine fix during intermission.

The crowd moving in the opposite direction was full of attractive people, male and female alike. There was a girl sporting a rocker look, her short indigo hair swept to the side of her face; a slender girl with long, more traditionally feminine locks, clad in a soft pink dress that flowed behind her; a couple in perhaps their early forties dressed to kill, the man in a crisp black blazer

with a charcoal shirt underneath, the woman in a white, slightly off-the-shoulder dress that covered all yet outlined every inch of her body; a tall young man with copper skin and jet black hair, his muscular build discernible through a rather tight black T-shirt, for all the world looking like a modern Persian prince; a woman in a tight scarlet dress that showcased her ample curves, which moved up and down with every step she took, hypnotizing to the beholder ...

Individuals dressed in their respective best and ready for their respective definitions of fun; of different heights, different builds, different skin tones and hair colour, different fashion styles, different curves for the ladies. *Like rocks and seashells at the beach*, I mused. *No two the exact same, but there's something to be admired about each of them.*

I smiled, recalling a class on John Stuart Mill. It wasn't just collective strength that could be found in diversity. There was also beauty.

At last, I reached my destination: a restaurant where you needed to be of drinking age to enter. I handed the bouncer my ID.

'Have a good night,' he said mechanically, returning the card.

‘You, too,’ I replied with a faint smile.

The bouncer snapped his head around so fast that I thought I heard it crick.

‘Thank you!’ His expression was full of surprise and gratitude.

Taken aback by his response, I wondered if most customers simply ignored him other than to give him their ID’s. *It’s pretty sad*, I thought, *my good spirits mildly dampened, if common courtesy becomes so rare as to be surprising.*

At the end of the night, I plopped into a seat on the train, feet aching and begging for clemency in my own impractical heels. Across me was a young man crouched over, his head in his hands.

Poor thing, I sympathized, resting my eyes. *Lots of water and sleep, and you’ll feel better tomorrow.*

A few stops later, I felt something wet lightly spray my ankle and the top of my feet. I opened my eyes to discover that the young man had thrown up on the train floor.

There’s a suitable end to drunk-people watching, I thought with a heavy sigh and wrinkled nose. *Partially covered in vomit.*

‘assumptions – sports games – try something new’

The air outside was damp and chilly. I crossed my arms as I waited for Kurt to pass the joint, partly to maximize body heat and partly to press fruitlessly against an empty, growling stomach. Cold and hungry, I was less than happy to be outdoors but knew the delay would be well worth it.

Once we went back inside, I streamlined for the kitchen, grabbed a bag of Lays and a bag of Popchips, and nestled myself into the couch. Immediately after the television screen sprang to life with a flurry of colour, I opened the bag of chips and dove in without taking a second to note what was playing or which channel I was on. A few moments later, with one hand lovingly hugging the Lays and the other now greased and salted, I was unable (by which I mean unwilling) to change the channel, which was set on the sports network.

Usually, my knee-jerk reaction to seeing a sports game of any sort was to change the channel; having accepted without question the common assumption that most girls do not enjoy watching sports, I never even gave it a chance. However, with hands occupied by chips

and a mind opened by marijuana, I watched a game of basketball, Celtics versus Heat, and found myself utterly transfixed.

Make the shot! The shot! Yes! I thought, thoroughly absorbed. *Oh my God, no! Block it! Block it, LeBron! YEAH!*

At the peak of my excitement, Kurt came down the stairs: he had taken a shower while I started the munch-out session without him.

‘Can you go to OLN?’ he asked, opening the pantry door to see what else we could ravage.

‘Oh,’ I said distractedly. ‘OK, one sec.’ I continued to watch the game.

‘Terra?’ he asked, his tone perplexed.

‘OK, I will,’ I mumbled reluctantly.

I stayed on the sports channel for as long as possible, until Kurt finished his raid in the kitchen, until the very second he reached the couch. As per his request, we were now watching *Storage Wars*, of which I was no fan. Luckily, I was pacified by the goodies he placed on the table: a bag of crunchy Cheetos, a carton of chocolate milk, and a bag of ketchup-flavoured chips. Now with an assorted line-up of extremely delicious and equally unhealthy treats in front of me, I watched the show

without complaint, my mind on the change that had just occurred.

What other hobbies, interests, and life's pleasures have I missed out on because of the assumptions I've made? I wondered. If only everyone gave things a chance despite whatever assumptions and expectations of how we should act, we might all be pleasantly surprised.

As I continued to watch *Storage Wars* without the usual trace of annoyance I felt while watching such specific reality shows, I thought appreciatively, *Oh Mary Jane, how easy-going you make me. What can I possibly complain about?*

After all, I now had three things to look forward to: the bag of Popchips to open immediately after I let go of the Lays, the replay of the game to watch the next morning, and a completely new and unexpected hobby to enjoy for the rest of my life.

The Lesson Wrap-Up

Through Kurt, I learned of another one of marijuana's useful applications: it could act as an indirect mediator.

Kurt had a distinct pattern when it came to fighting. At the end of the altercation itself, he would request personal space and time so as to mull over the argument in a calmer state of mind. Then, he would arrange a meeting a day or so afterwards, during which we were to resolve our issues in a more composed manner. Near the beginning of every one of these meetings, he would light up a joint, never failing to offer me some.

Initially, I declined these joints, each time feeling a mixture of annoyance and disdain. I had thus far perceived weed as a form of recreation and nothing else: I believed that it ought to be kept separate from matters of a more serious nature. Strictly believing that absolute sobriety was essential during lectures, study sessions, and my part-

time job, I naturally assumed that it was just as necessary during arguments.

However, during one meeting after an altercation when I was starting to get overly high-strung, Kurt handed me his joint.

‘Trust me,’ he said. ‘It’ll mellow you out.’

Deeply disinclined to trust him at a moment during which I was trying my best to hate him, I was nevertheless tempted; partly by the thought of relieving the tension which I began to suspect might be clouding my judgement and partly at the idea of finally shutting him up about my needing to ‘mellow out’. I took the lightest toke.

‘Thanks,’ I said coolly, handing him back the joint. I was still feeling upset and resentful towards him. However, slowly but surely, I felt both body and mind relax. Perhaps it was due to the relief of tension, of the removal of the resentment and ill will that tends to compromise one’s judgement during an argument; or perhaps it was due to my now more open and receptive state of mind. Regardless, under the influence of cannabis, I was better able to understand the basis of Kurt’s arguments, which I had hitherto dismissed on the grounds that they made no sense at all.

If only there was a custom of taking a toke right before trying to resolve an argument ...

Perhaps had Kurt and I shared a spliff prior to engaging in what would be our biggest altercation, our relationship would have been spared a great deal of grief and damage; perhaps a single joint would have ironically prevented the first time in my life when I abused marijuana, using it as a means of escape rather than for a delightful experience.

Sadly, my relationship with Kurt would last for a mere six months after this fight, most of which was spent wondering whether or not a break-up was in order. Near the end, I had two random analogies which, for once, proved quite practical: they helped me make the decision to leave Kurt.

‘bus/relationship’

In the dark, empty street, I waited for the bus on the way home from a high session at Valerie’s house. Unfortunately, as with any other Torontonion, I had to tolerate an extremely unsatisfactory transit system: even at a major intersection, I waited half an hour for an alleged ‘frequent service’ bus. About halfway through this wait, I became painfully indecisive. *This is taking forever. Should I walk down the street and take a different route? But what if*

this bus is coming real soon, like within the next five minutes?

But what if I stay put and the other bus comes while this one doesn't, and I realize I should've just changed routes instead of waiting even more?

In the midst of this uncertainty, it struck me that waiting for a bus without knowing its schedule is akin to waiting for happiness or stability in a relationship.

If a couple can't seem to get things right even after a considerable number of years, is it time to call it quits? But what if the solution to their issues and happiness and stability are just around the corner, if they'd only keep trying?

But what if they continue their efforts only to realize it just isn't going to work, that they should've ended it after the first set of years instead of wasting more time in the end?

Emotionally and mentally worn out, I sighed wearily. While I hated the thought of giving up before putting forth my absolute best effort, I also hated the thought of making such arduous effort only to realize it truly was not going to work.

In the end I stayed put, only to watch three buses on the intersecting street come and go and to wait another fifteen minutes, every second of which was spent brooding over how I should have changed routes.

While I did not believe in signs or superstitions, the analogy weighed heavily on my mind.

'hot lover = cute puppy'

Re-watching BBC's *Sherlock* and munching out as per usual, I contemplated bringing this relationship to an end. I interrupted my thoughts, observing in myself an unusual lack of concern for the boy I was planning to abandon. As I questioned my own attitude, I immediately had a theory: Kurt attracted girls purely with his looks. I knew that even if I left him, he would have no trouble finding a new relationship partner.

And so, it suddenly struck me that an attractive lover is analogous to a puppy or any other baby animal. Arguably, there can be fewer feelings of guilt and overall worry in breaking up with a physically appealing lover or in abandoning an adorable emperor penguin chick, as one can take comfort in knowing that they will more likely be taken care of. After all, evolutionarily speaking, the cuteness of puppies, kittens, cubs, chicks, and of infants in general acts as incentive for others to remain and look after them: yet another one of nature's designs to ensure survival.

He'll be fine, I thought, feeling the tension in my shoulders ease for the first time in months. *He'll find someone in no time at all.*

Graduation (so to speak)

Once my relationship with Kurt was over, I did not touch marijuana for several months; perhaps as a reverse coping mechanism. The next time that I blazed was with Gareth, my romantic interest in whom broke, at last, my pattern of harbouring an attraction towards potheads.

One day, the topic of marijuana entered our discussion. He told me how he smoked weed once with his ex, and how he had a terrible experience.

'I hated it,' said Gareth. 'The room kept spinning and I couldn't really move ... I felt like throwing up, and I was so thirsty but couldn't even get up to grab something to drink – it was awful.'

Listening to him, I could not help but smile. The helpless experience of greening out was simply too familiar and nostalgic.

'Where did you do it?' I inquired, trying to gauge the

circumstances of his green out.

‘My house,’ he replied.

‘Hmm ... that’s odd – home is the most comfortable and safe place to do it. How much did you smoke?’

‘She rolled two joints – one for her, one for me, and I smoked it like a cigarette.’

I widened my eyes, spluttering in disbelief. ‘A whole joint? She gave you an *entire* joint to yourself?!

He cast a quizzical glance. ‘Why, was that too much?’

‘Yeah, it was too much! No wonder you greened out!’ I felt outraged. How could she have been so irresponsible, as an experienced smoker introducing the practice to a beginner?

‘I can’t believe it – she gave you way too much. You should’ve had one toke at the absolute *most*.’

‘I guess she was a bad teacher,’ said Gareth, cursing.

I paused for a moment, carefully contemplating my next words.

‘If you’d like, I can teach you.’

With this, I knew my transformation into a stoner was complete.

END

Epilogue

'short term memory – cut down – addictions'

'Do you really not remember?' asked my sister, her tone more than a little exasperated. 'We talked about it just yesterday, Terra ...'

I replied with a blank stare.

'You really need to stop smoking so much weed,' she sighed.

There was no possible rebuttal I could make. Four years had passed since Kurt taught me how to appreciate marijuana and appreciate it I did, on an incredibly excessive basis. I smoked up at nearly every recreational opportunity: before watching a movie in the theatre, before a night of dancing, before attending a concert, before making use of the Jacuzzi and sauna in the building, and at home before playing videogames, watching favourite shows, or eating something delicious. I also maximized marijuana's

medicinal uses, to alleviate the pains of a stomach-ache, migraine, insomnia,* menstrual misery, and the common hangover. During this period of extreme hedonism, it was not unusual to smoke up seven or more times a week.

I was beginning to see the consequences on short-term memory, at times having no recollection of entire conversations or incidents.

I'm going to cut down, I decided.

Going four days without pot was a doable yet conscious effort. At the end of the fourth day, I 'rewarded' myself by sharing a joint and catching up with a friend. *Actually*, I reflected afterwards, *four days isn't very impressive, is it. Definitely better than doing it every day, but that's just plain unhealthy except in rare cases.*

In an ironic moment of marijuana-induced self-awareness, I realized that I had an addictive personality. Though I had been told this since childhood as someone who would stay indoors for entire days to read books or to binge-watch a television or movie series, ploughing through one episode after another, I never fathomed that it would make me prone to less innocent addictions. I

*The author has since learned that while cannabis and alcohol may help induce sleep, they in fact reduce the quality of sleep, making them counterproductive measures against insomnia. See *Resources on the Health and Sociological Effects of Cannabis*.

probably didn't go longer than a few days without some form of alcohol, whether wine with a meal, beer after work, or shots on a night out; and it was outrageously difficult to go a full day without smoking cigarettes.

Tobacco is the one vice I have to quit completely ... a bloody shame it's the most addictive.

Under necessary circumstances, such as spending three weeks in a country with severe marijuana laws, I had no problem. *But in the case where it's available, so conveniently inside my dresser ...*

And that's the slippery slope, I considered. It's about how often you do it – whatever 'it' may be. The more often it is, the more reliant you become on it – the more you grow accustomed to doing it a certain percentage of the time, the harder it'll be to go without.

I realized the extent to which substances, especially for those with an addictive personality, can be frightening. Though I had no intention to quit completely, I was aware that I would have to cut down drastically one day, indulging only as a luxurious treat.

Tread carefully, I thought solemnly.

Pot and Prose

Random Analogy: Winter vs. Summer

The world was covered in a blanket of white.

The rain that had poured down during the previous two days of unusually warm weather was now frozen, sheathing everything in nearly half an inch of ice, and the snowfall that had followed added the finishing touch, lightly dusting the frozen substance with a layer of fine powder, gleaming in its pristine, untouched state.

Every surface donned a cloak of ice and snow; every tree and shrubbery a natural frozen sculpture. *A winter wonderland. A vision of Narnia in the Age of Winter.*

As I marveled at the most stunning winter landscape I had seen in years, a random analogy struck me.

Love and solitude are like the seasons, I meditated. Both have their pros and cons. If having love is like summer, where there's colour and sound and life and vibrancy everywhere, being alone is like winter. There's still beauty, just in a

different form – there are things to be appreciated, and some enjoy it, relish it. Others can't stand it, and still others prefer it.

And some just don't mind, I thought, watching my breath rise and fade into the cold air, knowing summer waits in store.

Answer: On Sex

(WARNING: Contains spoilers on Netflix Original

***Marco Polo*)**

Above a rolling green plain through an azure sky, a falcon soared.

Thousands of feet beneath its tapered wings, cold steel ripped through flesh and bone, its pointed end glimmering red in the sunlight.

The Mongol lord pulled his slightly curved sword free from his brother's chest. With both hands, he raised his *scimitar* towards the Eternal Blue Sky and brought it down, removing head from body in a single, heavy stroke.

As his kin lay slain, lifeless fingers twitching against grass seeped with blood, he turned towards a wave of soldiers, declaring the end of the internal faction; declaring the Mongolian army as a cohesive whole.

Holy. Fucking. Shit. As the screen faded to black and the credits rolled, I shook my head in appreciation.

House of Cards, BoJack Horseman, *and now* Marco Polo. *Netflix, if you had some sort of physical manifestation, I would make love to you so hard.*

I thought of my mother, from whom I had inherited my love for science fiction, fantasy, and historical drama. *She would love this*, I considered, but hesitated, thinking of the heavy sexual content which I knew would nettle her.

My intoxicated mind turned towards something it had contemplated several times in sobriety: prevailing squeamishness with sex.

But it's the most natural thing in the world – it's literally how all species survive – and every single one of us is a product of the act.

I wondered if such common disdain stemmed somehow from the purpose of sex: of procreation. *Maybe some people dislike the thought of it if it's not done with at least the possibility of reproduction?*

But it's done with zero intention of begetting life like, all the time. And that's the thing – it varies so vastly from person to person. For some, it was the ultimate sign of commitment: something to share with the single person

they wanted to be with for their entire lives. For others, the expression of utmost affection, though it in no way guaranteed lifelong monogamy. And for some, it was little more exclusive than a handshake. *If we all accepted that everyone interprets it differently, maybe it wouldn't be such a big deal.*

But, I thought on a separate note, maybe it's the same combo of fascination and disdain at watching an eating contest? There's something about watching unbridled indulgence, the consumption of so much more than's needed for survival, that kinda makes you cringe.

Though not entirely satisfactory, I accepted the theory, and could not wait to share the violent and sexually explicit show with my mother.

Versus Alcohol

I woke up in pure agony; my entire body aching, my head splitting in two. Light and sound had become mortal enemies, wielding a thousand tiny daggers to stab my eyes and the inside of my head.

How? I asked myself, lying quite immobile in bed. *How did I in such a short interval go from 'barely tipsy' to 'completely wasted'? Why did I have to have those last two*

shots? To chug that last beer as we were leaving?

What was supposed to be a simple, enjoyable night out at the nearby pub with co-workers had gone horribly awry, and I was still paying for it the morning after. *As if the violent puking out the taxi door hadn't been payment enough.* I could acutely and rather painfully feel the extent to which I was dehydrated, as well as to which I was still drunk.

Carbs, I thought desperately. *I need carbs and grease and water.* Slowly, I crawled out of bed, every inch of my body screaming in protest. I made my way to the kitchen on wobbly knees, a hand on the wall to support my pitiful, feeble self.

I emptied a glass of water down my throat, only to have it come back up moments later. *I've been poisoned,* I thought grimly, face in the toilet. *I've poisoned my own body with beer and whiskey. Why did I do this to myself?!*

Stubbornly, I made a second attempt to hydrate myself, taking more cautious sips this time, grabbed a chunk of bread, and made the journey back to bed. Eating was outlandishly difficult; I managed to swallow a single, tiny bite of bread and gave up, placing the rest on my night table.

My only wish was to go back to sleep; to spend the rest of this torture of a hangover in a state of deep unconsciousness. Sadly, sleep evaded me. I checked the time, groaning to discover that a mere five hours had passed since I returned home from the pub.

That's it, I thought, fed up with this nonsense. *Get back up – you're rolling yourself some help*. I forced myself to get out of bed once more and sat down to roll a joint with slightly shaking hands. Though crudely rolled, it got the job done. Immediately I could feel the sharpness of my headache subside. *Sooo worth the effort*.

I stuffed the chunk of bread in my mouth and retreated under the covers. In a fetal position with eyes shut tight, I chewed and chewed for what felt like half an hour, enjoying every moment of it. *Focaccia bread. Delicious*.

I could feel myself drifting off to sleep, a smile on my face and my last thought being:

Alcohol: poison. Marijuana: cure.

High Anxiety

Aside from the deterioration of short term memory that generally comes with frequent use, one problem I have with weed is that when extremely high, the tiny yet

crucial modicum of social aptitude in my possession goes out the window, leaving me to second guess the appropriateness of my every step; whether or not the things coming out of my mouth are coherent, whether or not they're making things awkward.

It can get pretty unbearable.

Gripping tightly onto the cold steel pole on the bus, I finally overcame a consuming outrage at what would be an hour's delay and the disgrace that is Toronto's public transit by losing myself in Alt-J's *Fitzpleasure*.

A sudden tap on the shoulder jolted me out of my musical trance and I pulled my earphones out, turning to face a young man.

'Hey, I just wanted to let you know I think you're really cute.'

'Erm ... thank you,' I said as I shifted my eyes, dreading where this was going.

'Did you go out tonight?'

'Erm, no ...'

'Oh? So what did you do?'

'Erm ... ate pot brownies with some friends, watched *Jay and Silent Bob* and some anime, nerded out in general ...'
And got into a pretty upsetting debate regarding the

legal, FBI definition of rape and the conventional perception of penetration as an act of dominance, I nearly added, but stopped myself in time.

He was neither rude nor aggressive, nor blatantly disgusting. Always one to converse with pleasant strangers, I continued the small talk, mildly enjoying a discussion on the national animals of Canada and the U.S.

After some time, the desire to return to music overpowered politeness. 'It was nice talking to you – I hope you don't mind, but I'm gonna go back to zoning out to music now.'

Putting on earphones once more, I re-selected *Fitzpleasure* and closed my eyes. Once the song was over, I suddenly questioned the way in which my behaviour could have been interpreted. *Was that just really rude? Will he take it personally, as a rejection?* A joke he had made in passing regarding the confidence required in approaching females came to mind, and I felt the urge to counsel him, to give him words of advice.

But then what if he gets weirded out on top of thinking he was rejected?

Unable to even enjoy the music any longer, I struggled

between overstepping normal social boundaries and refraining from helping someone due to fear of overstepping normal social boundaries.

Finally succumbing, I tapped his shoulder in turn. 'Can I talk to you for a second?'

He nodded, looking a little bewildered.

'First, earlier, that wasn't anything you said or did – I actually just wanted to listen to music. Second, regarding what you said about confidence – there's this weird thing in our society where a lot of guys tend to see romantic contact as some sort of conquest, and attach it to their egos. You don't need to do that. Whenever you speak to a woman, speak as though any attraction would be reciprocated. I mean, obviously don't be arrogant or an asshole about it – just, *like* yourself, just know that *you are more than enough*. And if it's not mutual, that's fine – that just means you guys aren't compatible.

'Also, unless what you're looking for is purely physical interaction, approaching women on the bus or off the streets is a real shot in the dark – you've literally got nothing to go on except appearance. You have no idea what she's like. She could be a terrible person, or someone who has nothing in common with you, or—'

Or a weirdo who gives unsolicited advice to strangers.

I stopped, feeling my cheeks heat up. ‘Erm ... so, yeah ... I suggest joining a club or something.’

‘Is that where you met your boyfriend?’

For a second I made no response but to blink at him, slightly dismayed that the conversation had steered back to this.

‘No, no boyfriend – I’m actually at a stage in life where being alone is healthy for me.’ I shifted my weight from one foot to the other. ‘Sorry if this was awkward, just wanted to help.’

‘No,’ he answered, smiling faintly, ‘it’s fine – and thanks, I enjoyed the conversation.’

I was still trying to figure out whether or not that was sarcasm when I jumped off the bus.

As soon as my feet hit the pavement, I was awash in regret: certain that he, and any fellow commuters not immersed in their own music or conversations, thought I was bat-shit crazy.

It was the Best Holiday; It was the Worst Holiday

‘Merry Christmas,’ wished Lynette, her eyes giddy and expectant.

‘Erm ... thank you?’ Reluctantly, I took the takeout container from her outstretched hands, wondering if she was gifting me with leftovers this year.

I opened the plastic lid to find a large piece of chocolate moulded in the shape of Hello Kitty, complete with black fudge-sauce eyes and whiskers, yellow candy nose, and red syrup bow. She did not have to explicitly say that the treat was infused with cannabis.

Best Christmas ever. ‘Have I told you lately I love you?’

A measured bite, a few hours, and several glasses of eggnog afterwards, gathered at a table laden with food, the elders had no idea that I was quickly and progressively getting drunk.

‘... asking for trouble.’

‘Huh?’ *Who, me?* ‘Sorry, Grandma – could you repeat that?’

‘You need to stop going out so much and stay home like a good girl. If you go out when it’s dark, you’re just asking for trouble.’

I smirked. *The age-old argument.* The standard response was to nod politely, agree orally, and continue life as normal. However, in an intensely yet not uncomfortably intoxicated state, I opened my big mouth.

‘Why?’

‘Because bad things can happen to girls. Because it’s not safe.’

‘Bad things don’t just happen at night, though,’ I pointed out. ‘Like that woman who got raped at High Park in like, the middle of the afternoon last summer.’

‘Well, that’s exactly why you shouldn’t go places where you know that sort of thing can happen to you.’

‘So, because I’m a woman, I shouldn’t expect to be safe jogging in a public park, in broad daylight?’

‘Can we talk about something else,’ my wise sister interjected, ‘and please not argue on Christmas?’

‘We’re not arguing,’ I insisted with a grin, trapped within the bounds of a drunken stupor. ‘We’re discussing. I’m genuinely interested in her perspective. I wanna understand.’

‘As a woman, you need to be careful about the environments you put yourself in. Some places you shouldn’t go at certain times – some you shouldn’t go at all.’

‘But how does that make sense?’ I asked. ‘That means that a part of the population – a big part, like literally a bit more than half – would be excluded from certain areas at certain times or at least from the freedom to go alone,

because of something they have no control of. No more than they do over the colour of their skin. How is that fair?’

‘Of course it’s not fair,’ she retorted. ‘But that’s just how it is. That’s just how men are.’

I scowled at my grandmother. ‘Well, that’s just not fair to men, to say that’s just how they are. And makes as much sense to say, “Genocide is something that happens, that’s just how it is and we should accept that”.’

‘How about this?’ said Grandma in a sharper tone than she had ever taken, narrowing her eyes. ‘You get a real, office job – and when you’re a success, you can say whatever you want on whatever topic.’

I finally shut my mouth.

Afterwards, sitting in the car in silence, I wondered if the tension was actually palpable or due to paranoia as a side effect of marijuana. Unable to tell, I turned my thoughts back towards the subject.

Just accepting the state of things isn't an option. But she has a point. It can't be about wishing it was different, theorizing and arguing about how to change the system. While waiting for social change, entire lifetimes are affected – possibly destroyed.

It also had to be about teaching and training, giving individuals the tools to manage within the existing system.

You really, really need to learn some sort of self-defence. If you get off your ass and do one thing for yourself, for the love of God, let it be self-defence.

And it's not just skills needed to counter extreme situations, I deflected, but also to handle the more delicate, ambiguous ones. I thought of Kane: an intelligent, respectable, and kindhearted young man whom I considered friend and who persistently provided unwanted affection, with a casual hand on the waist or an arm around the shoulder, with inappropriate jokes and comments. I had told him bluntly that his actions made me uncomfortable, had asked him politely to stop, had reproached him angrily, had cut contact for long periods of time; all fruitless endeavours. Out of ideas aside from terminating an otherwise valued friendship, I often pretended not to notice the blatant invasions of personal space.

What do you do when someone, otherwise functional in society, otherwise smart and fun and generally good, thinks it's OK to touch you when they know you don't want them to? When they're a friend, a colleague, a boss?

I wished there were some sort of brochure or program to tell me.

Self-Observation: New Year's Resolution

The birds were chirping gaily, greeting the new day in joyous song.

Please, please shut up, I thought desperately. It was eight o'clock in the morning; I had awoken for no apparent reason and spent the past hour in a futile attempt to fall back asleep, having gotten only four hours of rest.

In yet another state of tortuous hangover, I wondered why I insisted on doing this to myself.

The organ directly behind my left rib was throbbing painfully. Gingerly, I pressed on the area with two fingers and nearly cried out in pain. *Mercy*, I silently pleaded to my own body. I pressed the flesh covering my right rib for comparison. There was no pain. Anxiously, I hoped it wasn't my heart that I somehow damaged with excessive alcohol.

Forcing myself to sit up on the edge of the bed, I retrieved the emergency weed and cracked open the window.

You killed an entire bottle of wine, I recollected after-

wards, and an extra glass to boot. *What did you expect would happen?*

In a high and still slightly inebriated moment of introspection, I observed myself objectively. *Possesses zero self-control*, I noted. *Very slow to learn from mistakes. Moderately intelligent enough to be aware of own character flaws, yet lacks the discipline to fix them.*

Oh God, I lamented, shielding my eyes with the back of a hand from the malicious daylight infiltrating the room, *my poor fucking body. The abuse I put you through.*

Angry and fed up with myself, I resolved to take better care of my body, when I realized the date. It was the morning of New Year's Eve: both hangover and resolution had arrived prematurely by twenty-four hours.

I would have laughed at the coincidence, had it not hurt so much.

NPR Article: 'Does Binge-Watching Make Us Depressed? Good Question'

The most recent findings on binge-watching associated people who binge on television with depression, loneliness and an inability to control their behavior.

Eyes on the tiny glowing screen, I bit back laughter, snickering.

Of the 316 people who answered an online survey, the article continued, 237 met the researcher's definition of binge-watching. They were more likely than the non-binge viewers to admit behaviors associated with depression, lack of self-regulation or loneliness.

No, really? I mocked internally, grinning. If I gorge myself with alcohol and weed and food, what makes you think I wouldn't do the same with amazing shows?

Grin faded from lips as I wrapped my head around what had just been thought.

They're all mood-altering substances, in the literal sense – they make you feel good. Shows can offer people what they otherwise can't get from reality. They can be abused, too. I contemplated my latest soul-consuming obsession, Doctor Who, and what it offered me. Unlimited possibilities. Unhindered mobility. Freedom. A world filled with the extraordinary and the magical, as an escape from the mundane.

Doctor Who *isn't a drug*, I countered hotly, offended by my own thoughts, *it's art. When a show or movie or book actually has things to say and makes commentary on society,*

whether prescriptive or cautionary or just flat-out cynical, it ceases to be just entertainment. It becomes a way to get the public to think about an issue. It becomes activism.

Yeah, sure, sneered an inner voice, art can alter perspectives. Brave New World changed the way you perceive consumerism – but did it actually change your behaviour? I turned my head left and right, casting my eyes over all that was shiny and pretty and unnecessary filling the bedroom: a collection of mass-produced clothing and jewellery, the size of which could not possibly be practical. You still shop, and love doing it. You may not casually throw everything out like in the book, but if you just collect stuff without using it for years and years ... how is that any different?

Just because entertainment has something important to say, doesn't make it any less of an opiate.

I crawled onto the bed underneath the sheets, feeling intolerably disheartened, demoralized, *depressed*.

Answer: On Tobacco

From the government in the hands of which I place both life and trust, I ask for consistency. I ask for either the legalization of cannabis and the liberty of those

incarcerated for distributing a substance comparable to Chianti, or the criminalization of alcohol and tobacco (the latter of which truly should be illegal regardless).

Fingers hovered over the keyboard as I stopped typing, suddenly pensive. I examined the last thought encompassed in parentheses. Why exactly did I wish for cigarettes to be illegal?

Because it literally kills. Because it's stupidly addictive.

But was I not an advocate for substance use, so long as it was informed? For liberty to live life as one chose, so long as one knew the possible if not likely repercussions?

I turned confusion into justification for a break. Deciding that the minimum quota for productivity had been fulfilled for the day, I awarded myself with a hit from the vaporizer, fully informed and conscious, and a walk with the dog.

Breathing in the crisp winter air and chuckling as the little Shih-poo bounded like an Arctic hare in the snow, I heard footsteps approach from behind.

'Hi,' greeted the building's security guard.

'Hey,' I responded, turning to face him.

He held out a pack of cigarettes. 'Want one?'

I had accepted the offer in the past. 'Thanks, but no.'

‘You sure?’

The thought was painfully seductive. I could almost taste the fumes on my tongue, its flavour smoky and slightly woody like aged whiskey. ‘Yeah, I’m good.’

After some small talk, I stood in the elevator, pensive once more. *On a personal level, I think tobacco should be illegal ‘cause it’s fucking terrible.* The level of addictiveness was simply horrifying. I had observed myself make the transition from perceiving cigarettes as an easy yet temporary source of stress relief to being unable to quit despite conscious effort. I had experienced the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal: the anxiety, the insatiable appetite, the constant thought of smoking, the irritability and ensuing guilt from being short with loved ones.

It doesn’t even physically feel good. It actually tastes awful, it makes your hand and clothes stink, and it can make you nauseous. Regardless, the smell triggered strong nostalgia, of memories of parties and entire friendships struck over shared cigarettes, as well as a sense of irony towards one’s own mortality: a sense which felt somehow liberating and even rebellious.

The security guard’s temptation, almost excruciating to refuse, was a sobering reminder. Regardless of the

amount of time spent in abstinence, I would always be a smoker, succumbing to the occasional cigarette. I would forever be addicted to nicotine. *Like a bloody heroin addict.*

No, I thought firmly. Individual choice and liberty is crucial, but not at the expense of society as a whole. If it causes more deaths than tuberculosis, HIV, and malaria put together, it strains the public healthcare system. After a certain point, it really becomes society's problem.*

Despite the steadfast conclusion, I struggled to dispel the vision of a cigarette, snow-white and perfectly rolled, between my index and middle fingers; a lethal lover against my lips.

Sweet Liberty

I threw open the heavy steel-framed doors of the school building, stepping out into the sunlight. I had just finished writing a final exam for a particularly grueling summer course and was feeling intensely liberated.

To make matters even better, it was a stunning day: the cerulean blue sky dappled with cheerful cumulus clouds and the trees lush and green, their foliage rustling in a

* See the 2008 WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic.

gentle dance. The birds were chirping a merry tune, as if rejoicing with me. A refreshing wind was blowing and I opened my arms slightly to embrace the breeze. *Sweet, sweet freedom!* I thought ecstatically. *Time to celebrate.*

Taking brisk steps, I walked eagerly to a favourite spot on campus: a secluded area with a unique fountain running along a slightly inclined pathway, where water poured spurting and gurgling out of a little spout into a small pool at the top, enclosed by a smooth stone ledge, and from there trickle farther down into a smaller pool at the bottom.

About fifteen paces from my destination, I looked about, noticing that there was no one around, and felt the powerful, seductive strings of temptation pulling at me. *Why not?* I asked myself. I reached into my purse and brought out a tiny joint, rolled and stowed away precisely for this long-awaited occasion. Continuing to walk along the abandoned campus street, I smoked up with immense gratification, emptying my brain of every fact and theory I had retained long enough to regurgitate during the exam.

Blissful nothingness was interrupted by a rude noise.

It sounded like a car horn honking twice, only lower in pitch. I wheeled around to face a police cruiser, its driver peering at me with shocked disdain.

‘Really?’ asked the officer, his brows raised high. ‘You have to be kidding me.’

Doing my utmost not to panic, I held out my hands imploringly. ‘Officer,’ I said in a reasoning tone, ‘it’s finals.’

He stared for a few moments, an internal struggle clearly outlined on his face; I didn’t dare blink. ‘Just this once,’ he said grudgingly. He turned his head and with the slightest hint of a smile on the corner of his lips – or was it my imagination? – drove off.

I smoked the rest of the joint with even more satisfaction than before, as giddy as ... well, a stoned schoolgirl.

Notes

A Stoner's Dictionary

Nouns: Weed, Herb, Ganja, Chronic, Chron, Mary Jane, MJ, Pot, Bud, Dank, Green

Verbs: Blaze, Bun, Smoke Up, Burn, Spark, Bake, Light Up

Adjectives: High, Stoned, Ripped, Wrecked, Blitzed, Messed Up, Baked, Done, Buzzed, Gone, Fucked Up

Stoner Etiquette

1. Whoever rolls it, sparks it.
2. Left hand rule: always pass to the left.
3. Ash before you pass.
4. Do not complain about someone else's weed.
5. 'Corner hit' the bowl, lighting only one section at a time.
6. Never, ever, under any circumstances, steal lighters. Lighter-thieves ought to be subject to cruel and unusual forms of punishment.

Resources on the Health and Sociological Effects of Cannabis

On Adolescent Use: The use of marijuana in adolescents has been associated with high-risk behaviour, poorer academic performance, reduced quality of sleep, and abnormal changes in brain structure which persist beyond a month of abstinence yet the majority of which desist after three months of abstinence. Jacobus J, Bava S, Cohen-Zion M, Mahmood O, Tappert SF. Functional Consequences of Marijuana Use in Adolescents. *Pharmacology, biochemistry, and behavior*. 2009;92(4):559-565. doi:10.1016/j.pbb.2009.04.001.

On Sleep: Due to its sedative effects, marijuana may help induce sleep. However, its use disturbs various sleep cycles, most significantly by diminishing time spent in the Rapid Eye Movement stage and thereby reducing

overall sleep efficiency. Furthermore, impairment of normal sleep patterns may persist longer than a week after usage. Alcohol & Drug Counseling, Assessment, & Prevention Services. Does Smoking Cannabis Affect Sleep? Washington State University. <http://adcaps.wsu.edu/campaigns/sleep-mj/>.

1. On Pregnancy: The use of marijuana during pregnancy has been linked to lower birth weight, miscarriage, and cognitive deficits that can persist into adolescence. Fonseca BM, Correia-da-Silva G, Almada M, Costa MA, Teixeira NA. The Endocannabinoid System in the Postimplantation Period: A Role during Decidualization and Placentation. *International Journal of Endocrinology*. 2013; 2013:510540. doi: 10.1155/2013/510540.

2. On Psychotic Disorders: A recent 3-year study examined the connection between cannabis and non-affective psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia, finding existing patients who habitually used cannabis to exhibit increased and enduring symptoms than patients who did not use or ceased use of cannabis. Van der Meer, F.J., Velthorst, E and Genetic Risk and Outcome of Psychosis (GROUP) Investigators. Course of cannabis use

and clinical outcome in patients with non-affective psychosis: a 3-year follow-up study. *Cambridge Journals Online*. February 05, 2015. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0033291714003092>.

3. On Cardiovascular Effects: Marijuana increases heart rate and slightly increases blood pressure, and can conversely cause low blood pressure. Although cardiovascular effects “are not associated with serious health problems for most young, healthy users”, cannabis use can raise risks of strokes, myocardial infarctions, and other negative cardiovascular conditions. Jones RT. Cardiovascular System Effects of Marijuana. *Journal of Clinical Pharma*. 2002; 58S-63S. doi: 10.1002/j.1552-4604.2002.tb06004.x.

4. On Paranoia: The results of a study conducted by the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center (in which 121 subjects with paranoid ideation were administered placebo, intravenous tetrahydrocannabinol, or intravenous tetrahydrocannabinol combined with information on the drug’s effects) ‘definitely demonstrated that the drug triggers paranoid thoughts in vulnerable individuals’. Freeman D, Dunn G, Murray RM, et al. How Cannabis Causes Paranoia: Using the Intravenous Administration of Δ^9 -Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) to Identify Key

Cognitive Mechanisms Leading to Paranoia. *Oxford University Press*. 2014; 1-9. doi: 10.1093/schbul/sbu098.

5. On Respiratory Effects: One study found increased risk of visiting a medical facility for respiratory problems in individuals who have smoked marijuana for less than a decade, yet not for those who have smoked for over a decade. Polen MR, Sidney S, Tekawa IS, Sadler M, Friedman GD. Health care use by frequent marijuana smokers who do not smoke tobacco. *Western Journal of Medicine*. 1993;158(6):596-601.

6. On Long-Term Heavy Use: In a comparison of heavy users (over 5000 lifetime uses) and infrequent users (no more than 50 lifetime uses), the heavy user group self-reported lower levels of life satisfaction; an overall negative effect of “cannabis on their cognition, memory, career, social life, physical health and mental health”; and lower educational achievement and income despite no significant empirical difference between the two groups. Gruber AJ, Pope HG, Hudson JI, Yurgelun-Todd D. Attributes of long-term heavy cannabis users: a case-control study. *Psychol Med*. 2003; 33(8): 1415-22.

7. On Gateway Drug Theory: Despite assertions that the relationship between earlier use of cannabis

and later use of more dangerous drugs is causal, the findings of a 12-year study suggest instead that aspects of individual disposition and external surroundings are more influential in determining drug-use behaviour. Vanyukov MM, Tarter RE, Kirillova GP, et al. Common liability to addiction and “gateway hypothesis”: Theoretical, empirical and evolutionary perspective. *Drug and alcohol dependence*. 2012;123(Suppl 1):S3-17. doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2011.12.018.

8. On Amotivational Syndrome: Despite ongoing allegations that cannabis reduces motivation, there is little empirical evidence supporting such claims. Statistical analysis of a sample size of 487 individuals comparing frequent users (7 days/week) and non-users (never) indicated no difference in motivation. Barnwell SS, Earleywine M, Wilcox R. Cannabis, motivation, and life satisfaction in an internet sample. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*. 2006;1:2. doi:10.1186/1747-597X-1-2

9. On Overdose: Studies indicate the virtual impossibility of overdosing on marijuana. Alcohol, Tobacco, & Other Drugs. Marijuana. Brown University. http://brown.edu/Student_Services/Health_Services/Health_

Education/alcohol,_tobacco,_&_other_drugs/marijuana.php.

10. On Relative Harm: A chart comparing the level of harm (both physical harm and dependence) associated with various drugs was featured in *The Lancet* in 2007, based on the opinions of experts in addiction, chemistry, psychiatry, and legal and police services. Nutt D, King LA, Saulsbury W, Blakemore C. Development of a rational scale to assess the harm of drugs of potential misuse. *The Lancet*. 2007; 369(9566): 1047-1053. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(07)60464-4.

11. On Cognitive Defects: A study found that heavy use of marijuana leads to detectable yet temporary cognitive impairment, reversible with an abstinence of 28 days. Pope HG, Jr, Gruber AJ, Hudson JI, Huestis MA, Yurgelun-Todd D. Neuropsychological Performance in Long-term Cannabis Users. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2001;58(10):909-915. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.58.10.909.

12. On Alzheimer's: A synthetic version of cannabinoids at a non-psychoactive dosage has been shown to reduce the levels of inflammation associated with Alzheimer's as well as to encourage the germination of proteins associated with memory formation. Aso E,

Ferrer I. Cannabinoids for treatment of Alzheimer's disease: moving toward the clinic. *Frontiers in Pharmacology*. 2014;5:37. doi:10.3389/fphar.2014.00037.

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