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Third Year

“Alcohol dot edie-you,” I verbalized as my fingers, as resigned as my person, obediently typed. “More like alcohol-adiou,” I scoffed to myself precociously. I was logging onto a website I felt well below me, not only as a twenty-four year old, far removed from house rules and curfews, but as a transfer student, supposedly acclimated to the stresses and pressures of college life. I thought myself impervious to the strain of living in a new area and making new friends.

I moved to Westwood before my first quarter at UCLA eager to immerse myself in the social scene. Students began to trickle into town, returning from visits back home and those dreaded ten words, “you’re living under my roof, and you’ll follow my rules.” Seemingly suddenly, the streets were teeming with enthusiastic youth, energetic, a little kooky, and full of aspirations—to party. They traversed the streets in packs, gregarious and jocular, as if they’d known each other for ages, at least from a newcomer’s perspective. They were all dolled up, a confounded cornucopia of clutches, curls, and crop-tops. I watched wistfully from the balcony of my new apartment; sometimes a group of giddy girls, other times a herd of upwards of twenty. They would pass by at about five in the evening dressed to the nines, and I’d fantasize about their night at the theatre, their group date with the frat boys, or salsa dancing at a local club. I wanted to be one of them. My balcony seat felt like the nosebleed section because I wasn’t a part of the fun. They all seemed so stylish and popular parading by in the evening, ready to take over the world, paint the town, or—get smashed? Strangely, the view grew increasingly sobering as last call approached. I did a double take when the same group that had gallantly cavalcaded by before would stumble and sway back home around two a.m., looking like a train wreck. Their perfect coils fallen, stilettos in hand, these once enviable socialites now looked downright pathetic; bent over planters puking, or yelling obnoxiously so the neighborhood could hear those relationship issues only heightened in importance by liquid courage. They wasted no time in getting back in the habit.

My nosebleed section vantage point turned out to be front row seats to the bigger picture. These vivacious and enviable social mavens were spending hours primping and preening until every lash was lusciously curled, only to hit up a bar and pass out, but not before spending a few quality hours behaving like obnoxious dummies.

How advantageous that, on the heels of my recent observations, I got an email informing me that I was due for my second session of AlcoholEdu. I logged on with revitalized interest because the messages and images before me on the screen were faces and situations I now recognized with a startlingly fresh, yet familiar, perspective. I realized that I had seen that girl. I had witnessed that aftermath. I had felt that pressure. Even as a twenty-four year old transfer student, I had adopted the silly belief that everybody that was anybody was drinking. Outside The Classroom was right all along: there's nothing cool about feeling drunk, so drunk that you leave your dinner on the sidewalk. Moreover, it's very un-cool to look and act drunk, especially after spending so much time and energy on reputation and appearance. The prettiest, most popular girl still looks like an imbecile three sheets to the wind. I took the second session of the AlcoholEdu process to heart because I had seen first hand that these cool-looking kids weren't leading romantic and enviable lives, they were compromising their dignity and losing their perspective—things more easily maintained in a sober state.

This is not to say that I've bid alcohol adieu completely, I like to have a drink or two when I can do so responsibly. I've found a healthy balance based on AlcoholEdu's advice to get involved in activities that don't center around drinking and choose friends with whom you have common interests; interesting people with hobbies and goals. I have no desire to drink under the guise that it helps me make friends because I have learned that I am my funniest, friendliest and most attractive when I have my wits about me.

I hit all the local bars when I transferred. I met countless people there, people I haven't seen since and probably wouldn't recognize if I did. Alcohol didn't introduce me to any real friends and didn't make me popular. In fact, every worthwhile friend that I have made I met in a class, or through group activities, or through other worthwhile friends. Those friendships were made based on our personalities and shared interests, not over a drink.