

“SHH SHH SHH!”

The dogs began a collective effort to tear down the partition. The hinge was loosening. I leaped back into the middle of the empty unlit road which excited them even more. “HOLA, ALGUIEN ESTA?! POR FAVOR VENGAN!”

Before my echoes reached the orphanage, one shepherd was loose and running toward me at full speed. I stayed stone still.

“Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuckfuckfuckfuckfuckfuck!”

I was never one for battle instinct. I just got used to the fact that I’d be dead quite soon, and that my last words would be cowardly imprecations.

But before the dog reached me, he fell. And before he fell, there was a gunshot. The dogs that stayed behind to cheer on their friend were silenced. The night was quiet again and the orphanage lights turned off. The sun was starting to come out.

I let my heart beat again. I was vaguely disappointed that I was still alive since I had so thoroughly prepared myself for the end of perception. The dog was still breathing on the ground and I wondered if anyone would take the time to save it.

“Chica!” said a voice from close behind me, “Are you a friend of the gringo?”

I turned around and noticed that I was standing in front of another open gate, and a particularly

tall European-looking man was standing just behind it. If he was carrying a gun he was hiding it well.

Very embarrassed about my movie-like entrance I apologized like hell at first, “I am sorry! I apologize! I have such shame! Thank you! Thank you! Me salvaste!”

He silenced me politely with his hand, “It’s not important. I hate those fucking dogs.” He summoned me. “Come, that’s the girls’ side over there. The boys stay over here. Tyler is waking up now to meet you.”

I wondered what jokes Ty would make about the distinct gender divisions. I wondered what jokes I would make about my sudden appreciation of Ecuador’s lack of gun control. Within two hours the German shepherd was gone and I never asked what happened to it.

It’s a narcissistic habit to look through my adolescent journals, but I can’t help myself. Who was that creature who hated herself so much?

She was a girl with time on her hands. It wasn’t the wealth itself that made her harm her body on purpose. It wasn’t the reliable college funds that wrote her hypothetical suicide note drafts, obsessed about weight, and loved nothing but the family canine. It was all those drawling hours spent with nothing else to do but think. Think about her own



too chubby too pale too dark haired reflection. Think about the intricate details of every social encounter so she’d have fodder for gossip. Think about more and more reasons to feel bad including the neighbors’ god awful vinyl siding. Vinyl??

My point: at the end of the day Ecuador simply has no time or energy left to tolerate gays, starve their bodies, or groom their pets. She has far bigger fish to fry.

“This is Hor-Hay. He’s my favorite. He’s fourteen but looks about seven, doesn’t he?”

Ty’s favorite was presently vomiting in the backwoods of the orphanage. Ty stroked Jorge’s little head and spoke to me nonchalantly, rightfully confident that the kid had no idea what we were talking about.

Jorge was a small black boy with no body fat. I couldn’t fathom

that he had anything to heave but innards.

Actually, the puke did begin to resemble intestines as it collected on the ground. Ty looked repulsed, but I couldn’t detach my eyes from the strange buildup. Was he actually losing his intestines?

“Bichos,” mumbled Jorge between heaves.

We all became transfixed with the pile. The intestines were beginning to wriggle on the grass. Fucking. Wriggling.

TY: “EWWW!”

JORGE: “Bichos!”

WEBSTER’S: *bichos* (zoología) small animal (*insecto*) bug; creepy crawly; *bicho malo nunca muere* – the devil looks after his own.

Jorge was sick for an entire week. A small indigenous orphan named Tito—after I bribed him with American lollipops for an interview—told me that Jorge drank from the tap the day he got sick. So he vomited live worms. Apparently it happens all the time.

#856: American Vomit is Often Stationery.

The newspaper never printed my story. I wish I could say that the article would have caused uproar, but I think it went unpublished

to look around for marijuana. Ty was leaving Quito the following morning to work at a Catholic orphanage somewhere about the coast. He adored the hell out of kids, but he knew the kids would have trouble adoring him back. Ty is gay. The weekend prior he was forcefully dragged to mocking crotches in the discoteca because he danced like he talked, and Ty and I made out to save him from some miserable beatings that night, and to save myself from the horny jaws of machismo.

We got all subsequent rants out of our systems the following day and it was back to joking as usual.

“Ah, nothing like a lungful of exhaust in the morning!”

But a harrowing feeling remained that Quito had more power over our sarcastic souls than we realized. A lot of the people we called shrimpy would rob, rape, and hit us with their tiny speeding Fiats in a minute. And anyway, it was us who looked like asses for being so pale, so light haired, and for speaking oh so functional Spanish all the time.

“What do you study?”

“Anthropology,” I respond, “But I enjoy the journalism.”

I’m not a fan of kids so I interned at a newspaper during the day, following reporters and occasionally understanding what was going on. At night I moved from host families to \$6 hostels to kind people who pitied me. It was easy to find safe ac-

commodations because everyone always thought I was in grave danger. They wondered why I wasn’t staying at the Hilton in the Amazonas district with the rest of the gringos.

I couldn’t possibly explain that I’m a masochist. I couldn’t even explain being vegetarian.

But beside all that, every small pretty American girl needs to put her life at risk once in awhile. It distracts us from the surplus mental fat we deem as suffering. I’ve even stopped whining.

The neighbors in my New Jersey cul-de-sac love to talk. And ever since we moved here my mother started talking too.

“I swear that dad and I are moving, if not for the leaf blowers wailing twenty four fucking hours a day then for Pam’s horrendous new vinyl siding.”

To be fair, the leaf blowers never do stop wailing, and the vinyl siding is horrendous.

“Jersey suburbs are New York City’s artificial consumptive neighbors. Prosthetic obese appendages,” I wrote in my journal that night.

It was fun to play fill-in-the-concept-with-words in the English version, nuances and all. But they were really just words. In truth I couldn’t have been happier to be home to America’s amenities. Hot showers. Double ply toilet paper. Bagels. Abortions.

“No, I mean I’m heading back to Jersey.”

“You lucky, lucky slut.”

I smiled peacefully at the bottom of Ty’s mattress. I predicted that within two months Ty would fall straight through the rusty springs of the bed frame and come tumbling down with his mosquito net.

“Ohmigod how was it?”

“Um, fucked up.”

“Yeah I read your online travelogue thing. I can’t believe you hung out with a crackhead! Did you smoke crack?”

“I took a hit.”

“Ohmigod!”

I sipped my Natural Light, the cheapest beer and it cost over a buck.

I always hated drinking beers in

New Jersey living rooms, watching the boys play video games and pretending I was still close to girls I had grown apart from. But this time I was thankful for the stagnant stimulation level.

I sank deep into the couch and avoided any more questions.

Harpo



BY HALLEY BONDY

My mother has been pissed at me since the moment I returned from Ecuador. She's getting more pissed because I'm pretending not to notice.

To make a long story short, my buddies live at least 1 hour away. I was gone for 1 month and 3 days, and will be gone again in 4 weeks for 1 semester. I am 20 years old. In America, it would be considered normal that I am never home.

My mother however has deemed me selfish, probably rightfully so, because throughout my antics I neglected to love the family dog Harpo. It's not enough that I drop by, feed her, and manage her droppings. And I do it so reluctantly too. I admit the few non-obligatory en-

counters I've had with Harpo since my return involved shoving her violently off my bed, kicking her in the face for begging, and shouting that if she doesn't get the fuck out of my way I'll slice off one of her erect ears.

My mother wonders, and now I wonder. What has happened to me that I'm not drawn to that fluffy and spirited terrier anymore? What did that nation do to me that I've lost the passion to spoil her? Where did I get the heart to resist that wittle face?

She would not be eaten, sacrificed, or made to pull cannery carts in Ecuador or anything like that. She'd probably just be mangy, cancer-ridden, and ignored. In Ecuador