



A Day in the Life of a Harvard Student

by Faiq Habash



I open my eyes to darkness, again. Judging by my wristwatch, it is 3:00am, but I usually misread the numbers in the small hours of the morning. It doesn't matter; it's another day where I must crawl out of bed, fighting off sleep that I barely just managed to surrender to, to finish another paper at this forsaken hour.

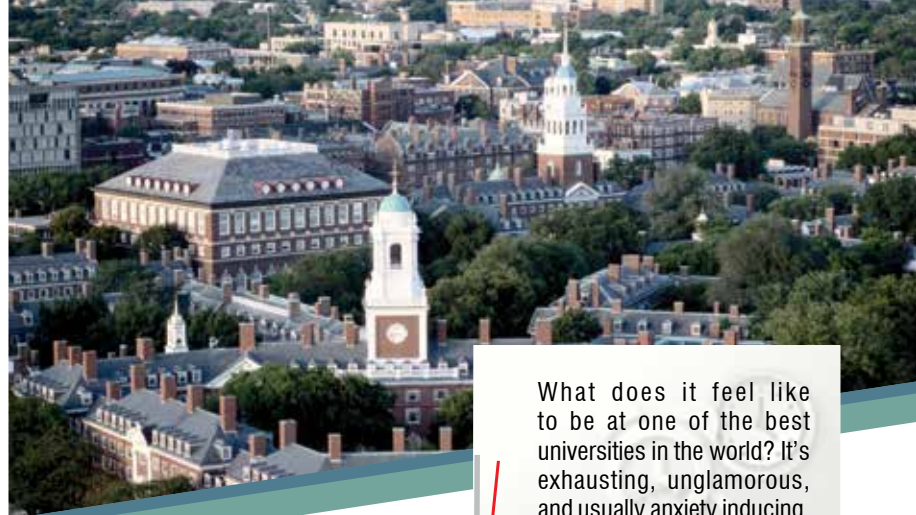
The first light creeps in through the window behind me. "The rowers must be getting back from the river by now," says my Turkish roommate who hasn't slept yet, in a disbelieving tone. His sunken eyes voice our disbelief about how some people choose to abandon such precious sleep to get soaked in minus-twenty-degree weather.

7:30am. It's time for my Californian roommate to respond to the chimes of his alarm clock. Walking as if he just had a lobotomy, I wonder if I looked as pathetic climbing out of my own bed.

With hair uncut for two months and a shaggy three-week-old beard, I ask myself if the tourists bustling over our campus can tell I'm a student, or if they see me as just another homeless man looking for where to sleep next.

8:00am. A light tap on my shoulder. I take off my headphones, which are buzzing with Tareq Al-Arabi Tarqan's songs that anyone growing up watching Spacetoons would know, and turn around to heed my roommates' invitation to go to breakfast.

"Breakfast?," I reply, eyes glistening with a slightly mad fervor, a little muffled with exhaustion. "Breakfast?," I repeat distastefully,



What does it feel like to be at one of the best universities in the world? It's exhausting, unglamorous, and usually anxiety inducing. Nevertheless, it teaches you about art, poetry, cheese, and maybe a little bit about who you are.

as I see the regretful glares they give me—eyes fearing the rant I have so often repeated upon their half-listening ears.

"The only bread they have is sweeter than Oreos," I tell them. "I'd rather eat my toothpaste before eating the mud they call 'hummus.' They serve recycled car tires repainted orange as cheese. Cheese, of all things!"

This would not be the first time I preferred some dignity to the miserable meal the university passes off as breakfast. Truth be told, I've only had breakfast five times in two years; each time only because I had missed all three meals the day before, followed by a night of no sleep.

Hungry, in the land of plenty. This constant feeling that drapes me most of the time, only second to drowsiness, usually turns to anger at all the lies I was told about cheap, oversized meals in the U.S. that can feed two people, and that make your mouth water for it all day.

9:00am. The church bells ring; I'm late to class again. Hastily assembled, paper printed, the short marathon to class begins. The run is not all that bad; it's the freezing temperature that made me rename Ramallah's cold nights as hearth-fire warm that is the worst.

I finally make it to class. I don't really remember the specifics of what goes on next, it's not really that intriguing. Some graphs on the board, some hum in the background. The heavy accent of the teaching fellow, which I still cannot not pinpoint its origin, is as daunting halfway through the semester as the first day. I've been told my accent is very pronounced, but as long as they understand that I don't care, I have no objections.

Noon. I should be rejoicing that lunchtime has come, but tonight I must be fancy, so I ditch lunch to get a haircut between classes. With the Harvard Arab Weekend coming up, our honored guests Marcel Khalifa and Bassim Youssef should see student representatives of Harvard, rather than have to play the student-or-homeless guessing game in our yard.

The Algerian barber is there this time, the one who never got to tell me his arrival story. Unlike the other Algerian in our dining hall, Rifqi, who continues cursing the day he left Germany to work in the U.S. Or the Moroccan, Noor, who drives from Massachusetts to Rhode



Life at Harvard University!

Island, to buy fresh *hala* meat. But it's the Argentinian woman who is to cut my hair this time.

A woman cutting my hair. For so long have we talked about gender equality and equal job opportunities. Yet, it was such a strange notion. I had always imagined women in engineering jobs when we called for equality; I was more surprised that the idea of a female barber simply never occurred to me. I won't be surprised like this again until I see a female butcher in China. You always get enlightened from angels you don't expect.

Once I get past the initial bewilderment of a female barber, I realize I had no clue what to say. Back home, I went to the same barber for 16 years, so I could explain in Arabic how I wished my hair to be cut. But not so this time. It is surprising how powerless one feels without any authority over his barber; but this haircut must happen.

Feeling almost naked from the excessive trimming, I leave the barber simply glad I didn't end up with a bowl cut like the one my roommate had gotten once.

2:00pm. Sleep is calling me, but carrying boxes under the direction of Raja is helping distract me from my exhaustion. Raja, the Syrian senior who'd sing the theme song, "Hazeem Ar-Ra'd" with me before marching together to the Syrian national anthem, before joining Tunisian Mehdi in a chorus of "Nassam 'alayna al-hawa." Raja, the guy who got me a bottle of Arak to give to my friend's parents for Thanksgiving, the one who entered into a duel of Abu Al'Ala' Al-Muarri's poetry, the philosophy department vs. the law school. Most importantly, Raja is the guy who convinced me you can know what true cheese is, yet live without it for years.

8:00pm. The guests arrive, nametags are dispatched, hands are shaken, and speeches are about to begin. I've finished my role for the day so I head back to the dorm. Debating if I should do my homework half-awake now or half-awake in the morning, the fist of hunger strikes me as I realize I have missed dinner. Again.

With a deft hand I pick up my phone.

Two buttons pressed, and my phone rings. Teoman, my Turkish roommate, asks what's up. All I have to say is the same thing I say many times a month: "I missed dinner. You thinking what I thinking?" Heedless of my deliberately broken English, "Be there in five," is nothing short of what I expected.

Felipe's Taqueria: the only edible meal in Harvard Square is found there. Balancing between reading history books on the Asharites and the Khawarij on Saturdays for my job, and the reality of high prices in Harvard Square means working more hours in order to enjoy the luxury of a well-wrapped burrito.

With burritos in hand, we return to the room to set up our computers to watch yet another episode of the Walking Dead. We missed

respective countries speculated upon, we declare another burrito-eating ritual complete.

I check my phone: 11:00pm. Teeth brushed, computer stowed, I turn in for the night. I send a text message to my mother; my daily confirmation that I'm alive. I ask my Californian roommate to make sure I'm up before 8:00am, and then begins the surrender to sleep.

It's 1:00am. I know this because this is the time our fourth roommate comes from his sorority parties on weekdays. Sleep has not yet come. I get up, reach beneath the bed for any of the rare books I have discovered while wandering around the library's underground stacks. *Diwan Aftaha Shir: 17th Century Poems of Rab Salem Ash-Shabazi*. It's not the first time the jumping back and forth between Hebrew and Arabic in his poems has left me pondering if that was how I sound trying to read my friend's Hebrew homework.

One thought after the other...the last I recall is wondering whether the *hamantashen* for the upcoming Purim celebrations will be made with cheese worth eating, if only for a single day. Sleep comes at last.

Faiq Habash, 19, is a Ramallah Friends School graduate starting his third year studying economics at Harvard University, USA.



the last one because of exams, and all food was sacred enough to have its own free time. It seems the Americans never know separation of food and work; such a sad life.

Food consumed, episode watched, news checked and debated, and the future of our

Our Readers Say ...

"I wake up every morning to a new idea or thought. While sleeping apparently my brain works harder than when I am awake, since while up and alive I fight and counter fight with my clients. Funny enough, I end up almost winning most of the time, not because clients are convinced of what I do or tell them. I just do what my heart and passion tell me to do! I am a creative director, no?"

Mouna Khourchid, Creative Director