

Harriet Bradley

There has been a change in your application.

This is what the email says. Click, heart pumping, sign in, sweat forming, as your whole future waits just a loading page away. When it does, see the screen blur away behind forming tears as you realise you've done it – you're in – you're going.

In the lead up to September 19th, the first day of the rest of your life, order stacks of books in preparation for the course you're itching to start: English. Some books fill you with anticipation and excitement: Mrs Dalloway, A Visit to the Good Squad, Jane Eyre. Others make your heart drop to your stomach: The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. Wonder how much you can sell it for second hand after you've finished with it. You have no way of knowing it now, but this 2800 page anthology will become your single most referenced book throughout your University career.

Once at uni, books fill your head with different perspectives. You walk whole lives in other people's shoes. You are an immigrant. You are a slave. You are an ageing woman in New York City, a child on the autistic spectrum. You live in the 1920's, you're a doctor, a soldier. You see a man die, you see a child born. In books you can be anyone, and with a heavy reading list, you are often three different 'anyones' in a single week. But you thrive on it.

Take risks. Take an out of subject module. Take two out of subject modules – Writing for Film and a Philosophy module about the existence of God. Feel your horizons expand. You are changing, but it is good. Befriend the resident cat on campus. Discover a secret garden. Join societies. Start meditating. Become vegan. Grow into your adult self.

Work furiously hard. Do eight hour stints in the library. Finally, gloriously, receive your first First mark at your boyfriend's house at 00:01. You have been waiting in the darkness for the numbers to turn. Grin and swell as you perform an internal victory dance from under the covers, so the light from your phone does not wake your partner. After handing back your screenplay, your tutor will shake your hand. You have done a good job.

Become inspired over and over again by your lecturers. Read their journal articles. Stumble across your tutor's novel in the public library of your home town. You are being taught by the best. Wonder if maybe, one day, that could be you.

Achieve your highest ever marks for creative writing and gradually feel your uncertainty about the future slip away. Start writing every day, rehearsing, improving. Stop browsing teaching programs and internship websites. They are not your future. Your future is a creative writing MA.

But at seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, you don't know that. How could you know that? You can never know what University will help you discover. It might even be your future, it might even be yourself.