

ENGL1101

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The Hoodie

Looking back now, I realize why I identified so well with you. You were in between concrete things, a dark slate that stood out in the sea of light heather greys, whites, and blacks. Like me, you were distant with your thickness, but underneath it all, you were warm. You were my hoodie. Tightly woven cotton on the outside, accented by a ribbed waist and matching cuffs, with buttery double-insulated cotton cashmere on the inside. Knotted, uneven drawstrings led up to your frayed hood opening. Save for the small, camouflaged knit animal logo on the left chest, you were unbranded. You were versatile. You were me. You bring back memories of days that should be long forgotten, but never will be.

Perfect for three out of four seasons, I would throw you on any chance I got. In fall I'd wear you with khaki cargo shorts and leather flip-flops, still trying to hold onto summer while fighting off the air's chill. You were as good as any jacket in winter. After pulling you over a Henley, putting on some jeans, and tying my greyed New Balances, I was out the door, in my car, and on my way. Spring would find me in bright blue seersucker pants, boat shoes, a candy-colored polo, and you with the hood up, running through spontaneous rain showers. Summer was too hot for you. Trust me, I tried to make it work. But between dancing, skinny-dipping, and running from busted parties, you just didn't have a place. You didn't sweat it, though. You knew the air would chill soon enough.

If you were a tape recorder, I swear I'd have some of the most intense conversations of my life on file. I'd have a tape of me walking around the Apple Festival in Ellijay, finding out one of my best friends just got his girlfriend pregnant, and he didn't know what to do. I'd have a recording of me sitting on top of a December cold car hood parked outside of a closed pool, having a close friend tell me his parents were getting divorced because his dad was gay. I'd have a cassette of me walking down the Seaside shore under a bruised, sugar plum sky, discussing love and life with Paul and Vanesa, drinks in hand. I'd have a priceless library of how real life can be at times. But you're just a hoodie, and my memory fades in color and clarity every time I press "play." Then again, for each of these sobering moments, I've had at least twice the amount of experiences in you where I've drunk in life and felt euphoria.

I remember Linley's New Year's Eve Party. Her parents were out of town, naturally. I threw you over a button-up shirt and kicked on my favorite pair of jeans. Starting the night at 10:00 PM somehow makes sense when you are young. In a sea of smoke, some from the fog machine, some from cigarettes, we danced with pretty girls and drank drinks with names we wouldn't remember in the morning. Someone killed the music and the countdown began. TEN. I dragged myself into the kitchen to get a drink. NINE. EIGHT. SEVEN. I poured myself a drink, and I turned. I locked eyes with her after a second. SIX. She was by herself in a corner, holding her cup, unsure what to do with herself. FIVE. I think I may have danced with her. Maybe. Girls with brunette hair and tight tops all look the same under a strobe light and haze. FOUR. I walked over to her and smiled a goofy, sideways smile. She smiled back. That was all I needed. THREE. She pulled on you, right below the hood on the left side, biting her lower lip and twisting a drawstring around her finger. She was trying to be seductive. I was trying to be older and not alone tonight. TWO. We were inches apart. She smelled like cranberry and vanilla. ONE. I

kissed her like I'd kiss any other girl. HAPPY NEW YEAR'S! In other words, I tried to make it seem special, with variety and suspense. She smiled at me and walked away. I smiled at you and the floor, my face smirking back at me from the polished wood beneath me. The music started back up. I knew the night was far from over.

I remember other good times with you, too. Spring break stands out too well. Running from parties onto sandy lawns out of the back doors of houses whose owners we didn't know was routine for us. We'd meet up later with my friends: girls with purses filled with stolen party favors and guys with cell phones that found out where the next party was going to be. More often than not, I'd end up on the beach at the end of the night. If it wasn't for your weight, I think my head would've floated up into the black to be lost among the stars. If I had company, we would walk and talk or dance our way down the post-curfew shore. If I was by myself, I wasn't alone. I had you and a can halfway buried in the sand. We would stare out at the world around us. I remember trying to find where the sea and the sky met; where the black of one giant met the goliath of another. The foam disappeared on the beach's lips like clockwork. I wasn't drinking alone those nights.

I wasn't the only one who benefited from your warmth and companionship. Girls dwarfed in your size wore you as nightgowns on crisp fall afternoons. The fire in the trees had burned out, leaving ash piles of leaves in clumps underneath the branches. Pinned hair and mascara, shorts and flip-flops, you kept them warm while I kept them in conversation. In winter, you were a hit at bonfires. All the girls wanted you. Glowing in orange, they'd laugh as they blew out flaming marshmallows and stuck them between pieces of graham crackers. You got quite a bit of melted chocolate on you and even more crumbs, but you were a trooper. A quick spin in the washing machine and dryer, and you were ready for the next night.

Now that I am in college, you're hanging in my closet at home, adding to the preservation of the high school "me" in my room. I'll probably bring you back with me when I visit for Thanksgiving. It'll be cold enough to wear you then. Until then, I'll look through pictures, catching glimpses of you every now and then. I'll remember the good times we've had together. I'll remember the falls, winters, and the springs. As nice as the memories may be, I know nothing will feel as good as putting you on, grabbing a thermos of hot chocolate, and heading out into a cold winter evening to embrace the fickle infinity that is our world.