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How to Wake Up

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HOW TO WAKE UP

Liz Larabee

First, cope with the realization that you will never be integrated into the medical community. Nurses in sea foam scrubs will not speak warmly of you in acceptance speeches of Good Conduct Awards. Cope with not living in a thatched hut in Uganda, baiting the lions of injustice with a worn Bible and a pack of highly fortified vitamins for the bald, naked children huddling over their rice bowls. Cope with the lack of a deep, aching love for a daughter whose hair you'd have combed into braids while she told, liltily, about the air blowing into her eyes on the rope swing. Once you have dealt with the guilt of choosing not to change the world, breathe deeply and head to Jos. A. Banks to invest in a sleekly sleek briefcase.

Attend a university that gives you a generous scholarship. Join the appropriate clubs and counsel your roommates and the problems they will have with their boyfriends. The likeability factor is key. But consistency is a weakness. Be sure to have a modestly strained relationship with your father, and when he calls you on Tuesday evenings, talk very often about financial aid and how the Eagles are doing this year. Never explain the way John Harbor makes you laugh from the inside out over simple, unfunny things. Never tell him that you remember him singing Edelweiss after bath night when your hair was steaming wet down your back and he was pulling it into braids.

Get an internship at an organization with an acronymic name. Make friends with everyone, even the people you know were never popular and who bring chicken salad in from home instead of heading to El Pedro with the others. Diplomacy is key. Make fun of the never-popular people with your coworkers at El Pedro, but offer to FedEx their never-popular packages for them when you pass them in the hallway. Tell them it's part of your internship, so that they don't feel like charity. Perfect your handshake. Draw your hand deeply into the groove of the recipient's and grasp firmly and directly: a quick thrust down and release. It's important that you not misjudge your own strength. If the handshake is in danger of harming the recipient—crushing their skeleton like a fine cheese or drawing their attention to your jawbone grip—subtlety is lost. However, it is undoubtedly even more disastrous to offer a hand like cod. Be John Travolta. Be the Fonz. Be funny. Get out of the habit of saying, "hi-how-are-you-I'm-well-have-a-nice-day" as you sweep past the general public. Stop and chat, but never remain in a conversation long enough to allow for awkward silence. End your stories robustly and begin walking away immediately, with your audience still chuckling into their mugs or pointed paper water cups. Never, ever repeat a story in front of someone who has already heard it. Practice in the mirror: tell your story with gusto, but never laugh. Deadpan is key.

Eliminate the concept of silence from your life. Lose sleep. Get a cell phone and find a ring tone that exhibits your sense of humor and appreciation for early nineties radio rock. Get an iPod and be selective about which bands you include. Get online. Get a Xanga. Write regularly and cleverly. Never write about academia or God. Get iTunes. Display your good, recognizable bands. Get Gmail. Write to presidents of different organizations often, and tell them the thoughts you've been having on "the interface you find possible and probable if your collaborative resources were combined." Fill your day planner with notes scribbled into corners and lunch dates and leadership meetings. A blank day is a lost day. Meet for lunch with professors and leaders of on-campus committees and organizations. Order a wrap and braided pretzels so as not to appear gluttonous. Be witty, but listen attentively to what they have to tell you. Don't dominate the conversation, but do talk about how you've been thinking a lot lately about humility and how it's missing from America. Talk about the need you think all humans have for silence and how it's missing from America. Talk about the need for community service and how it's missing from America. Fail at all of these, but don't let the professor know that.

Graduate.

Get a job with the company with which you had an internship. Hang up Calvin and Hobbes comics around your cubicle. Dig through your drawers till you find a picture of your father holding you in his arms when you were young and braid-headed. Put it in a black-rimmed frame next to your laptop. Get a funny mug. Lose more sleep. Take pills. Drink heavily. Quit drinking. Crave pretzels. Buy pretzels. Crave silence and humility and service. Buy more pretzels. Continue this until fully awake.