

Latin Salutatory: English Translation

The Four-Year All-Nighter

By Fanaye Solomon Yirga '13

President Faust, esteemed Deans, sage Professors, honored guests, loving families, and dearest fellow students—greetings to all!

It is my honor and pleasure to be addressing you on this fine morning, you, filled with hope, overflowing with joy, and, I hope, having enjoyed much well-deserved rest. The topic of my speech, however, is not rest, but the lack of rest: that student's ritual of the all-nighter, carried out either never or only once by the most disciplined of us, but by others much more often.

It seems almost as if it were yesterday, perhaps a bit too late yesterday, that we first sat down at this celebrated institution, pens, course materials, computer, and necessary beverages at the ready, all of us prepared for a great undertaking. Fueled by eagerness and the rapidly advancing night, we proceeded to outline the rest of our lives. Some of us had a detailed plan from the beginning, some of us scrawled a few vague notes, but we all blithely looked forward!

We looked forward! Not down at our notes, but idly at a wall, or pointedly at a noisy library patron, or unblinking at the latest cute animal video. How often did we put off the task while the midnight hours drew nigh, how often did we cry with Ovid, “Run slowly, horses of the night!” Soon, having duly arrived at our second year, we cast off the lanyards of innocence and settled into our Houses, the most blessed of us in magnificent Cabot House. The hopeful spark in our wide eyes began to glaze over as we immersed ourselves in our busy lives, or possibly, in our wildest fantasies, a pool of sweet, sweet coffee.

And yet we wrote, as one word followed another, serenaded by vindictive crickets and unwanted Tygas. Some of it was not unsound, and some of it was utter nonsense, but we went on writing, through fierce blizzards, savage hurricanes, unexpected blackouts, controversial occupations, cruel hangovers, countless defeats of our friends in New Haven, and that single glorious defeat of those in New Mexico. We made countless revisions and additions, our plans and goals sometimes completely deviating from the first outline.

Finally, after this frenzied night, dawn has approached, heralded by chirping birds, and, as in the past on certain Saturdays, by my most beloved Harvard University Band. Today we exit this great institution, delirious and elated: some confidently striding, others on tiptoes, and still others of us stumbling incoherently, correcting neglected typos. But we have all completed the journey! We have arrived! Let our tired pupils adjust to the sudden burst of sunlight as we squint towards a most beautiful new day. My dearest classmates, sleep well and farewell!