When empty cupboards can no longer be endured, we venture to the grocery store around the corner. The setup of is similar to home: Florescent lighting, white tile that lacks luster due to the heavy foot traffic, and isles of shelved food. But the unfamiliar letters remind me that we are not in my home Safeway. We move timidly forward, starting in the first isle. A section of Coca-cola slightly lifts our spirits. You can figure it out, the red can cheers. Confidence creeps back into our stride as we easily identify cereal, bread and frozen vegetables. But shelves of milk tear down our illusions of easy shopping in Greece. There is no way to translate the symbols I’ve only seen in names of sororities and math problems. Only disorientation is understood through the letters. A small Greek grandmother totters to the section and grabs her dairy of choice without a problem. Her grandson, a young boy with a bowl cut and light up Velcro shoes, picks out his carton with ease. You don’t belong, the drawn cows taunt from their bottles. But, they are silenced as Allison reaches for one. Her eyes scan the health information to analyze the fat content. The corners of her little mouth perk up to celebrate her discovery. Skim milk presents a victory. At the check-out counter a woman with black curly hair that fills the space between her shoulders and ears and penciled eyebrows asks us a pointed question in Greek.

 The blank look on our faces reveals our true nature: foreign.

The Irish winds whisper all around the village of Spiddal. Suddenly, a yellow building comes into view. Its vibrant color stands in stark contrast to all of the structures around it. Perhaps this is a clue to the vitality waiting inside. The sign outside modestly proclaims “Hughes’ Pub.” Alongside the English text, there is a Gaelic inscription that hides its meaning from outsiders. As the rain commences, stepping down the staircase into the dark, crowded interior provides some refuge. Although expansive in size, Hughes’ prominently features low ceilings. On this evening, Irish customers cover every spare inch of the stone floor. This is enough to make any visitor feel reticent about entering such an intimate space. Every physical feature of the pub personifies a Gaelic culture that is rapidly disappearing. Black and white photographs litter the walls. Some of them feature Irish luminaries—Michael Collins and William Butler Yeats. Others display snapshots of a vanishing lifestyle—farmers herding sheep or fisherman arriving at the wharf with the morning’s catch. A stone fireplace rages in the corner of one room. It’s hardly necessary due to the excess heat generated by the packed pub. Behind the bar, there is an array of Irish spirits—Guinness, Jameson, and Bushmills. Despite the absence of lights, the bottles glimmer like pieces of treasure. They are the rewards for a hard day of managing cattle or catching fish. Suddenly, the accented chatter throughout the pub is replaced by the sounds of a fiddle. The local musicians have arrived; they begin with an Irish folk song. The entire pub immediately joins in. The precious floor space that is not already occupied is soon taken over by dancers; the old men dazzle with their unusual dexterity. It is obvious that the clientele of Hughes’ is unlike the youthful populations of any American bar. This pub is the domain of the world-weary who nevertheless retain a song in their hearts. It’s evident that the town of Spiddal no longer exists in the streets or even in the houses on this night. It exists in Hughes’. People have come here to celebrate their bonds with one another. The worries and drudgery of daily life are left outside to be washed away by the Irish rain. Only joy is allowed within. The lights flash, and the band plays one last song for the still-dancing patrons. The music remains in my soul long after Hughes’ has closed for the evening.

The London Underground is the heartbeat of the city. It is the life force that moves everything, grounding people as they are rocketed from one end of the city to the other. Everyone is the same down there. You are no different than the businessman heading to the financial district or the group of tourists slapping people with their clumsy maps. The Underground is ritualistic and temperamental. You better know what you are doing. Have your Oyster Card ready to place next to the sensor. Wait until it makes that high pitch beep or else the doors wont release. Don’t stop once you are allowed passage into the station. Keep moving. Pretend like you know where you are going even if you don’t. Follow the sea of people spilling onto the escalators. Stay to the right to allow that late person scream pass you as they pound their way down the moving stairs. Once the escalator ends, make your way through the white tiled tunnels. Look to the walls that have the different stops painted on them. North or South Bound? Decide quickly because people behind you know which direction they are headed. Once you find your platform, be aggressive; don’t be afraid to shove a little bit. Move as close to the edge as you possibly can. Make your toes kiss the yellow line you have been repeatedly warned to stand behind and never cross. You’ll hear a harsh rattling and feel the ground shake. No its not an earthquake, a train is approaching. Relish in that artificial breeze created by the force of the train, it will be the last time you feel cool until you emerge and experience the fresh city air. Soon you will see the nose of the train come raging through that narrow tube. If you were to stick your hand out you could touch it, but wait until it comes to a stop to touch and enter the car. Wait for the last person to exit before climbing onto the train. Move quickly because there are about 100 people behind you expecting to get into that same car. Find the person that seems the most normal because you will be close, practically embracing for the duration of your ride. Move toward your new friend and grab hold of the nearest pole above you. You will feel the two of you getting closer as more people squeeze their way into your car. As you breathe down each other’s necks, try to think of anything but the fact you are pressed up against a total stranger and it is so hot in there that you are beginning to sweat. The ride will end as quickly as it begun. You will emerge from the depths and move onto your destination. Be content with the chaos of it all, you now feel like a Londoner.

The words of Yeats echoed in our ears as we took the first steps into the vast Irish wilderness: “Come away, O human child! / To the waters and the wild / With a faery, hand in hand, / For the world’s more full of weeping than you can understand.” Coole Park was one of Yeats’ muses—a reservoir of infinite poetic inspiration. As we walked into the forest, the canopies of the ancient trees hid the bright sky. Nevertheless, sunlight trickled through to give each tree a particular sheen. We passed the “Autograph Tree”—a living record of all who found solace in Coole Park. Carved onto this tree are the initials of Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Sean O’Casey, and Lady Gregory. As we delved further into the woods, the vibrant greens became scarcer. The bare trees retained a beauty in their obscure shapes and auburn bark. Finally, we reached a clearing. In front of us was a broad expanse of water—we were told that it’s a transient lake. Swans glided over the shimmering surface while cattle and sheep roamed on lush green pastures across from us. Nature kept its hold on me for that brief moment as I absorbed the magnificence around me.

I returned to Coole Park two months later; this time I was alone. The lush greenery no longer remained, and the sky was now a dull gray. I traversed along the same path in order to reach the lake once more. When I came to the shore, I found that the water had vanished. All that remained was an open field with dead grass. Although disappointed, I looked upon my first trip to Coole Park with an extra fondness now. I remembered the blue water and the white swans and the peace that day had given me.

Falling. I am falling through time. Overlooking the Mediterranean Sea from a dusty red cliff, I could be Aegeus, the king of Athens, waiting for my son, Thesus to return from killing the Minotaur. As I turn to behold the marble temple, I could be a wife of a sailor praying to Poseidon to keep my husband safe. Instead I am a student standing in a place that exemplifies history. The temple to Poseidon at Cape Sounion in Greece reminds me that I am a mere pinprick on the timeline.

 My day spent playing on the beach is not even a blink for the temple. Marco Polo in the salt water. Reading *The Iliad* on a towel in the land of Agamemnon. Grilled octopus. Though these moments linger like garlic on my breath from dinner, they are no longer present. What was a reality only a few hours ago has become a memory. It becomes even more important to take a mental Polaroid. Below me the teal sea lulls over the jutting earth. In the glow of the falling sun the water moves like a stop-motion film. I take in the pieced together columns of the temple. The aged marble threatens to make me fall through history again. But my I feel the warmth of my skin, remember my own history and stay grounded.

It’s uninteresting and bland. Similarly textured, salty and mind numbingly consistent. British food, the awkward uncle of the culinary world. It tries so hard to fit in with actual cuisine you cant help but pity it and sample some of its shining stars. The bangers and mash, a heap of pale potatoes provides a lumpy bed for a plump link of sausage. The entire cannon of British cuisine revolves around meat and potatoes. Take the traditional Sunday Roast for example; a slab of roast beef is the main attraction, accompanied by its trusty sidekick the mashed potato and Yorkshire pudding, a ball of deep friend dough. The stew is the personification of all things that the British value in their food, Meat, potatoes and root vegetables. They don’t mess around. British food is not pretentious; it doesn’t have to taste good it just has to fill you up. There is something about the food you can’t help but appreciate. The warm, soft, salty, and chewy combine together to form a symphony of mediocrity that brings you back to the days when food was meant to comfort rather than impress.

What began with the intentions of an innocent shopping day took a sudden turn with the sound of the first explosion. We saw the crowd of Italian students milling in the piazza, but their relaxed music and postures seemed to signal an end to their predicted activity instead of the beginning. We were wrong. Crowds of yelling people, most of whom were our age, began marching past us. We stop on a street corner with a few other spectators as a group of people in black hats and ski-masks move past. All this is visible are their eyes. Their angry eyes. They are modern bandits, some equipped with makeshift weapons of sticks and rocks. A street sign is torn down and smashed. A store window becomes victim of one man’s rage. Elderly Italians bustle quickly away, their faces becoming more worried as the group in black tramples past. The store owners are closing up shop and bringing down their wrought iron gates. There is nowhere to escape this dark parade. Our only known escape walk towards the black, billowing smoke. The camouflage of our age gives us a feeling of comfort as we walk in the direction of the protestors. But the comfort is unsettled when we see dozens of riot police suiting up to herd the protestors. We must walk through the valley of the shadow of death in order to reach a safe pasture. Behind us there are regular sounds of explosions and in front of us there is a line of three cars in flames. Finally we cross the bridge of students with banners and megaphones and find a spot to watch. After an hour of conversation, observation and photographs, major movement happens. The riot police begin threatening the people and throwing objects in their direction. Protestors run past us with tears streaming from their eyes. Then the burning hits our throats. The distance has provided a safe guard for our eyes, but the stinging in our throats is enough to cause our eyes to water all the same. We have, in essence, been teargased. Check that off the bucket list.

Thanksgiving is not usually celebrated in Ireland. It was one of the traditions we had to leave behind us as we arrived at our new home at Galway Bay. The thirty of us had experienced nearly three months together in this foreign land, and the allure of home was starting to grow stronger. We all grew a bit nostalgic for faraway faces and customs as Thanksgiving Day dawned. However, awaiting us that evening was a dinner prepared by the staff of the Park Lodge Hotel—our place of residence for the semester. We all dressed in our finest attire and headed for the hotel ballroom as the sun set over the bay. The plain ballroom had been decorated with strands of red and green garland and lights. A fire raged in the fireplace behind all of the food set out for us. What a feast it was: a turkey that could feed a famished platoon, endless portions of carrots and potatoes, and plenty of wine to keep our conversations lively. The hotel staff continually asked us if we needed more food. My friends and I exchanged glances every so often, our eyes and full stomachs saying it all. The warm Irish hospitality and the harmony of our group exemplified the spirit of Thanksgiving. Even if this didn’t replace my home back in America, I realized I had established a new home right here in Ireland, surrounded by all these people I had grown to love.

The streets of London are welcoming. They have an ancient charm that tempt you to walk along and discover its secrets. I had a thirst to know every inch of the city. I would leave my flat without a plan or destination, take the tube to a stop I had yet to visit, and begin weaving my way through the streets. London is varying and unpredictable. At one moment I would be standing amidst the open chaos of Piccadilly Circus, with double Decker buses screaming past my nose, and the next I would find myself squeezing down a narrow lane, the sound of my wet footsteps reverberating off the cold brick like a heartbeat. I invited the idea of getting lost. I would meander through the impossible web of streets that somehow connected and made sense. The neighborhoods of Kensington and Chelsea slanted and curved around themselves, intertwining like a knot, housing the wealthy people who could afford to live in central London. I would walk these labyrinth streets, my eyes dancing along the intricate stone carvings of the burnt red facades to the white columns swallowing stoops leading to heavy wooden doors. The buildings are timeless and real. They tell stories and have a soul. Walking in London, feeling the beat of the living city helped me to understand the place. I know how it moves and acts. I feel a connection to it much deeper than if I were to have spent my time staring at Big Ben, relishing in the iconic rather than the real.