

ASCENSION IN DECLINE

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[Assignment: Write a paper in which you explain to an audience of your choosing how to do something of significance. How you characterize your audience should make a difference in your presentation. Don't forget that no one will read with interest unless you have created in the introductory paragraph a need or desire to know your process.]

(1) Don't be fazed when you first see their quarter bag. Admit your surprise, but don't give undue importance to the bag or your surprise. Treat the bag's presence as a minor inconvenience, as though you wedged a splinter into your finger, or snapped your shoelace in the midst of tying a knot. Shrugging off the impulse to indulge is much easier when you give little import to the creased, wrinkled ziploc bag of shredded weed.

(2) Walk with them in the night. Notice that their nonchalant walk and confident air is betrayed easily by their nervous laughs and glances. Slink along with them into the shadows, into the desolation. Secretly smile when they grow sheep-eyed at the abrupt clamoring of the church bells. When one of them overcomes his politeness and displays irritation by asking what you are doing here, truthfully answer, "Watching the stars." Once they gather in a circle and pull out the baggie and pipes, sit a comfortable distance away from them. Sprawl out on the grass. Feel the long green stalks roughly tickle your ear; smell the rich, thick, and somehow familiar dampness of the ground. When you see the flames from the lighters lick at the pipe bowls and hear the vacuous laughter, resist the ever-present temptation to partake. Resist the temptation.

(3) Nestle your hands beneath your head and clear your mind like an eraser sweeping across a slate. Look at the stars, all of them, so numerous they look like spilled salt on black velvet. Look at the stars and wonder what she is doing beneath the stars. What is she doing now? What is she doing right now? Remember her: how she laughed, how you could see the smile in her eyes even before you could see it on her lips, how her dark eyes, lit solely by candlelight, looked like chasms so deep you could fall in. Know that you have fallen in. Remember her and wonder why they feel the need to smoke dope.

(4) Once they get up unsteadily, staggering a little as they leave, join them and walk steadily as you normally would. They will be too concerned with trying to walk straight to bother to harass you. On arrival at the keg party, follow them; make use of their uncanny ability to sniff out the source of flowing beer even while stoned. When they offer you a foaming plastic cup of lager with absent-minded smiles etched across their

faces, quietly decline. You would not want to ruin the evening with hypocrisy. Instead, enjoy yourself. Enjoy your complete, free, undiluted self. Revel in your sobriety. Now, no longer try to search them out; they are either running the tap dry, smoking more dope in a dark, isolated corner, urinating on a tree out back, or passed out on some uncomfortable bench in an uncomfortable position.

(5) Take the time to sit alone on the front porch. Prop up your legs on the rotted wood railing, and watch the stars slip away, blanketed by the dark, rolling clouds. Hear the leaves angrily stirring in the trees, and smell the incoming rain shower. Watch the drops fall, cooling the night, bathing everything. Get up and lean over the railing, feeling the rain wet your head, and run down your face in little rivulets. Feel cleansed by the rain; feel cleansed by the night.