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Hello there! I'm Matt Mehfoud, a third year at the University of Virginia, majoring in Computer Science. I grew up just twenty miles south of Richmond in Colonial Heights, Virginia. I have a deep dedication to UVA basketball and can often be found cheering for the Hoos at every home game. Otherwise, you can find me in the Language Commons, where I work for the University, or sitting in a New Cabell Hall window sill writing code in a highly caffeinated state. Many of my interests extend far beyond any typical STEM requirements, including global sustainability, creative writing, and project management.

Where do I see myself in five, ten, twenty years? Well, at this moment, my future is very much undecided, but I see myself still going on mother-son bike rides. I see myself arguing with my brothers over who will be hosting that year's Christmas. I see myself writing interactive data science articles and exploring my passions unapologetically, travelling and experiencing different cultures. I may or may not have stood at the altar. I may or may not have children. Only time can tell, but whatever the future holds, I can only hope to face it head on, confidently.

## Worldly Contrasts

The kayak rocks back and forth with the gentle push of the sound's weak tide. The wake is nonexistent, yet my arms still burn from paddling around the protuberant barrier islands. My senses are overloaded, like reading a passage of a book but not actually absorbing any of the words printed on the page. Colors, sounds, lights, and ripples saturate my brain to a point of near incomprehension. The sun is seemingly as small as a golf ball, only a raging red in color. It shines through clouds that mimic white and gray paintbrush strokes, inextricably overlaying the blues and yellows and oranges of the sky. An expanse of ocean lays to my left and an L-shaped island to my right, its shrubs and thicket alive with clicking and chirping. From every angle comes the windblown whisper of swishing waves, breaking willfully against the island's sandy edge, and the piercing cries of gulls as they soar overhead. Mother Nature is never reticent, as she is resplendent in a way that is intimate to all people. Scrupulously, each individual piece of this moment falls precisely into place.

My senses were overloaded, like the circuits of a computer receiving too many binary strings to process. My obsession was overwhelmingly constant. I poured years' worth of time and energy into curating my accomplishments to impress others: I was captain of that team, I won that award, I got into my dream school. I existed solely for praise from others. I always ensured that not a single hair fell out of place. It truly was picture perfect. And yet there I stood, at the top of the monstrous mountain I'd been climbing my entire life, but all I could think was, "Oh, God. This is it. This is really all you wanted." In a single second, all of the glory slipped away from my fingertips, like trying to grasp onto wind or water—nothing in all my power could

bring genuine joy. I'd never been more alone than when I was on the edge of that precipice, and with no one to call, I dropped my chin and took myself home.

Removing my phone from its waterproof pouch, I try to capture the vibrant image—after all, it is picture perfect. The Earth, however, is spinning with intention, as the sun recedes faster and faster. Once I realize my efforts are in vain, I lay my paddle down the length of my kayak and settle into the plush seat. The sea breeze blows my hair from my face and fills my ears with white noise. I take a deep breath of the salty air while I slowly drift further into the Nags Head Sound. I know the soreness in my arms will betray me during my return, and yet I can't bring myself to put the paddle back into the water. I sit and witness the arrival of night. Not even an hour later, darkness has crept into the sides of the horizon, a sliver of the sun long hidden behind distant trees and clouds. Red, orange, yellow, and blue are layered on top of one another leading upward, a stark juxtaposition to the gradual presence of night. I want to remember every aspect, every detail, but the sights slip away from me. Moments like these are meant to be spontaneous and inspired, not stolen and repeated.

Reinventing myself to break down every misgiving I'd previously conditioned myself to believe was arduous, but it was time to find my own bravado. And even though I was utterly alone in that kayak, I'd never felt more precisely pieced together. It was entirely different than basking in the façade of glory on the mountain top. Bottling perfection was an impossibility. My unhealthy obsession was all in vain, as life had a means of delivering me to the finish line in its own time...Even if it took a little bit of rowing on my part. It was time to settle in, paddle hard, and take pleasure in both the wonderous scenery and the slow burn in my own arms.