

Minor Mensch

Volume 11, Chapter 28

DINNER, LUNCH, BEDTIME

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Sunday, March 11, 2007 at 9:44 p.m.

I'm at the dinner table with Fred, Jacqui, and Zoë. And Jacqui. And Fred. And Zoë and Jacqui. (They all deserve multiple mentions.) And this is my favorite place in the world.

No one has ever experienced more happiness than I feel right now. Or even as much. Or *close* to this much. Relative to my happiness tonight, every other living thing is wallowing in agony. The second happiest person alive is paralyzed with depression, spiraling toward suicide, compared to how I feel. I have nothing but pity for all other life, knowing the joy it has been denied. But I also feel sorry for myself, as this is an experience I share with no one. It's a lonely peak up here. Anyway, moving on:

I brought a bottle of wine with me from Stockton (a 2005 Reuilly Les Pierres Plates). It was one of the bottles from my Kermit Lynch trip. And we just finished it. It tasted like a rotten grapefruit with dirt mashed into it. But in a good way. A delicious way.

Much *more* delicious was Fred's running monologue about the god of the English-speaking world.¹ These monologues (rarely about religion) are the whole reason the Frank Family dinner table is my favorite place to be. Nothing has changed my life more. Though we're currently in an intermission. As I'm writing this, Fred is peeing off the back porch. His last sentence before leaving the table:

"And it didn't come to pass that God learned modern vernacular."²

Then he went outside to pee.

¹ Any god that has been channeled in English post-KJV Bible (the god of the Mormons, etc.).

² That was the last sentence of a five-minute speech about how, if God knows everything, how come he doesn't know how to talk to anyone who was born after the 17th century?

And now he's done peeing, but he's opening up another bottle (we just finished mine). So while he's in the garage, riffling through his "wine cellar", I have another minute to finish this entry.

To new music apparently. The CD just changed.³ It's been on Philip Glass for a while, essentially playing the same measure over and over since we started the last bottle. Enjoyably though. I don't know what the new CD is yet. But Fred just got back.

And he responded to my Kermit bottle with a Kermit of his own: a 2004 André et Michel Quenard Vin de Savoie Chignin-Bergeron.

...

I just had one sip. I can barely tell that it's alcohol. It has sort of a peachy mead flavor that tastes like it was stirred with a branch from the lime tree in last year's backyard (the backyard of my house in Brookside; the Rockwood Circle one). But that was just a sip and a thought. I'm sure I'll change my mind later. And not document it. Because it's time to close my computer. Fred is starting up his monologue again. And it's too brilliant. And way too fast to type. So I'm just going to listen. We'll talk later, reader. I'm so sorry you can't be here.

Monday, March 12, at 6:27 p.m.

Jacqui and I went to Rice Time for lunch. I've said this before but I feel the repetition is due: there's no sushi in Stockton that can compete with Rice Time. Well, maybe some of it competes, but it loses. Badly.

When we got there, we parked next to a car with this license plate: "4EVRL8".

It seems the owner of this vehicle is forever late. Okay. I don't understand what you want me to do with this piece of information. (I hate people who have vanity plates.)

³ Fred has a Marantz-everything sound system. One that he tries to hide. Not because he's worried it might be stolen, but because he doesn't want to be accused of having more than a passing interest in electronics.

When we sat down to eat, the same waitress we always have approached the table. And when she got to us, she gasped. It was a very animated, deliberate gasp.

We both looked up at her and she began orbiting her hands around her waistline.

She had this giant smile on her face and she just kept circling her hands around her hips and stomach as if she were a mime groping a hula-hoop.

And the whole time she was doing it, she was staring unblinkingly at Jacqui's chest.

Jacqui and I must have both looked confused, and the waitress must have noticed that, because she then tried to explain what she was gesturing:

"Your big body! It much smaller!"

She shouted that at Jacqui. I think she was trying to compliment her on her recent weight loss. But "your big body" doesn't really send that message. It doesn't really communicate a lot of "compliment".

It's all part of the experience though. A part of the experience we've come to expect. So we ate a lot, Jacqui still left a big tip, and then we left.

And now I'm in bed. My old bed (i.e., Fred and Jacqui's old bed). In my old bedroom (i.e., the extension Fred and Jacqui built on their house).

And Phoebe's here too. She's sitting next to me. And we're having a conversation while I type. I will color-code that conversation so it's easier to follow.

The pink is Phoebe. The blue is me. And this is us:

"Courtney?"

"Yes?"

"Who do you love?"

"I love you, Phoebe."

"No, I mean what *adult* to you love?"

“Oh, I don’t know.”

“Well who are you going to marry?”

“Um... I don’t know, Phoebe. That’s a good question. Or at least it’s a hard one.”

“Are you going to marry Danielle?”

“Maybe.”

“Are you going to marry Stacey?”

“Who?”

“Stacey.”

“I *know* a Stacey. But I kind of doubt we’ll wind up married.”

“Why?”

“Well, lots of reasons I guess. It would just be a little unexpected.”

“I might not be very smart yet but I do know lots of things. I know that love is when you kiss. And sometimes your mouths are open. And I know that cupboards are made out of wood and paper is made out of wood. They microwave the wood to melt it down and make it into them. And sometimes people in love have both paper and cupboards.”

I didn’t respond. Partly because I’m typing as she’s talking (and she said a lot and I’m trying to keep up). And partly because what she just said was totally brilliant. And I have no idea how to respond.

She just interrupted my silence: “So who do you love?”

“Yeah, I really don’t know, Phoebe.”

“I meant Katie.”

“I’m sorry?”

“I didn’t mean Stacey. I meant Katie.”

“Oh. Okay.”

“Are you going to marry Katie?”

“Um... Probably not.”

“Do you love them?”

“Do I love Katie and Stacey?”

“No, Danielle and Katie.”

“Oh, do I love both Danielle *and* Katie?”

“Yes.”

“These are kind of difficult questions, Phoebe.”

“Did you know that ghosts are air?”

“What?”

“Ghosts are the air.”

“Okay.”

“So if Danielle was a ghost you’d be breathing her.”

“I like that, Phoebe. It makes me want to breathe more.”

“Okay.”

“Okay, Phoebe, give me a kiss and then let’s go to bed.”

Phoebe gave me a kiss, sort of. A better description of what she did: she touched her lips to my face while saying this: “Okay let’s make a story about robbers.”

I could feel her lips saying that.

“Okay, let’s. Who will our robbers be?”

“Wait, what does this say?” She held up an instruction manual that was sitting on the nightstand.

“It says Canon EOS 30D.”

“Okay. That’s what I thought. Do you want a cookie?”

“That cookie you’ve been holding in your hand for fifteen minutes?”

She didn’t say anything. She just held it out, half-enclosed in a little Phoebe-fist.

“Oh that’s okay, Phoebe. Thank you though. You go ahead. It’s all yours.”

“I’m going to sleep with you tonight, okay?”

“It would break my heart if you didn’t.”

“Okay, good. You’ll sleep right here.” She points at the bed next to where I’m sitting.

“And I’ll sleep...” She gets out of bed, walks to the other side of it, points at an open patch of mattress, and then finishes her sentence: “...right here.”

“Okay.”

“Do you like the *Three Little Pigs*?”

“A little bit.”

She’s now eating the cookie she offered me. But she’s not chewing it. It’s just in her mouth. And she’s trying to sing me a song through it. I don’t recognize the notes and the words are too muffled for me to understand them.

She swallowed her cookie. Now she can speak regular sentences again, evidenced by this one: “what if I jumped on you? Would that hurt?”

“Probably not very much. But don’t feel you have to test it.”

“Do you ever wear no shirt?”

“I’m sorry?”

“Just your normal boobs?”

“Um...”

“This story is called *Leave Me Alone.*”

“Is this the story you were going to make up about burglars?”

“Robbers.”

“Right. Robbers. Is this that story?”

“No. This one is called *Leave Me Alone.* One day, in the pond, there was a roof and a wolf and a sign that everybody knew that said *leave me alone...* Hold on.”

She left the room for a moment and returned with a coat hanger.

“One summer morning... this is a summer story. One summer morning, in a stream forest, Mrs. Markers came. And then she looked at the sign, but she didn’t read it. She just said ‘oh that is so nice it sounds like tyliphia syndrome.’ And then she said, ‘this is such a wonderful day.’ Tyliphia pushed her and said ‘get out and go away’ so she went away crying. She came back at night. Ms. Little Penny was there. She was wondering if she liked the world... what’s this?”

“What?”

“What’s this?”, Phoebe asks while pointing at the inside of my wallet.

“That’s my wallet.”

“No, *this.*” She corrects me, pointing more obviously at my student ID card.

“Oh, *that.* That’s my school ID card.”

“Does Katie have a card?”

“Yup.”

“What does hers look like?”

“Like mine but the picture is of her.”

“The picture of you has no hair.”

“Yeah, I know. I had just shaved my head before the picture was taken.”

“Oh. I don’t like it. What does *this* say?” She points at some writing on the card.

“It says staff.”

“What does Katie’s say?”

“It says student.”

“What does *this* say?” She points at some other writing.

“It says Pacific.”

“What does *this* say?” She points at the only other word on the card.

“It says my name.”

“Does Katie’s say *her* name?”

“Yes.”

She grabbed my wallet again. “Can I play with two of your cards?”

“Sure.”

“Can I play with *four* of your cards?”

“Okay.”

“I want to play with four because that’s how old I am.”

“Okay.”

“Your wallet smells like your school.”

“Huh. I hadn’t thought of that.”

“Next time I come, can you and Katie help me rock climb?”

“Of course, Phoebe. I think Katie and I would both love that.”

“Let’s pretend this one” (she holds up my driver’s license) “and this one” (she holds up my school ID) “are friends.”

“Okay, let’s.”

“Does Katie shave her head?”

“No. Not yet anyway. Maybe someday.”

“Courtney, can I use your wallet as my little girl’s bedroom?”

“I don’t know what that means, but I think that’s probably fine.”

“Actually I don’t want it to be.”

“Okay.”

“What do you think is going to happen?”

“To what?”

“To Ms. Little Penny. She’s going to be attacked by the wolf I bet.”

“The girl from your story?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Yeah, I don’t know. Was she with Mrs. Markers?”

“Phoebe Isabelle Frank. Jacqui Frank. Fred Frank. Zoë Frank. Adam Frank. Timmy Frank. Grandma Bea and Grandpa Lloyd Frank. Grandpa Colin Frank. Grandma Heather Frank.”

“Okay. Are those... um... are those the characters in your story?”

Phoebe didn't answer. She's too distracted now, playing with things in my wallet.

And while she's doing that, I'm thinking this: I want to take Katie, Danielle, or Phoebe to the Salem Public Library with me. And run laps around the building. Mostly down the stairs where all the hanging bats are.

I haven't decided who I want to take.

Probably Phoebe.

Or maybe I could just breathe Danielle's ghost into my body and that would be enough.