

## ***Minor Mensch***

Volume 12, Chapter 24

### **FROM THE LEVEE WITH LOVE**

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I forgive everyone. I do. Or I think I do. I feel as though I probably do.

In observance of that relationship milestone (or perhaps in an effort to prove it to myself), I spent the day with Win. It wasn't just an exercise in forgiveness though. That might have been part of it, but the larger part was that no one else (no one but Win) would have known what to do with all of those tampons.

A company representative from Tampax came to Baun this morning and dropped off two cases of tampons. Not boxes, but cases of boxes. Cases of boxes of tampons. There were probably 2,000 of them in all.

I'm assuming the company rep wanted all of the girls at the gym to use Tampax brand products, succumb to brand loyalty, and then be lifetime (until menopause) customers.

Sorry Tampax, that kind of marketing doesn't work in Baun Fitness Center. Maybe it works in other gyms, but not one that has a Courtney Jensen in charge. Because the moment I saw the cases, I called Win.

"Hello?"

"Hey, are you on campus?"

"Yeah."

"Main Gym?"

"Yeah."

“Okay, can you come to Baun and help me carry these tampons back to Main Gym?”

“All right, be there in a sec.”

He didn’t respond with a question like “tampons?” or “what?” He just said he’d be over in a sec. And he was.

As soon as he walked in, I pointed at one of the cases. “Can you grab that one?”

“Yeah”, as he was bending over to pick it up. And then: “what are we doing with them? Are we decorating Mark’s office?”

“Yeah”, as I was bending over to pick up the other case. And then: “that’s what I was thinking we’d do. Unless you have a better idea?”

“No, that sounds good. I mean, what else could we do with this many tampons?”

The obvious answer was that we could distribute them to the girls at the gym. What I was actually supposed to be doing with them. But why would we do such a thing?

(The obvious answer is...)

Win and I hauled the cases of tampons to Van Ness’s office and began “decorating” it.

We had barely started when one of his undergraduate students showed up, hoping to meet with him.

“Is Dr. Van Ness here?”

“Dr. Van Ness?”

“Mr. Dr. Van Ness; I was hoping to go over some physiology questions.”

“Mr. Dr.?”

“Is he not in?”

“Yeah.”

“He is?”

“What?”

“He’s here?”

“No, you asked me if he was *not* in. And I said yes.”

“Oh. Can I schedule a time to see him?”

“Sure, I guess. Do you always call him that though?”

“Dr. Van Ness?”

“Yeah.”

“Is there something else I’m supposed to call him?”

“Not really, no. But all that doctor stuff probably annoys him.”

She gave me a look that communicated both curiosity and worry. I decided to address the curiosity part while ignoring the worry:

“It’s just a matter of syllabic efficiency. A couple unnecessary syllables of praise when all you need to do is ask a question. It’s a waste of everyone’s time. Those seconds add up over the course of an education. Or in Mark’s case, a career.”

She didn’t respond, so I continued:

“He has enough self-esteem to go by his Christian name. That’s all I’m saying. He’s the best professor in the continental U.S.; he doesn’t need to be inflated in that way. Only sad, bad professors need to be called doctor. So Mark probably thinks you’re accusing him of being a sad, bad professor when you call him that. Or mister doctor or whatever. Not only are you wasting his time, your attempt at praise is actually belittling him.”

“Oh. I’m sorry”, she said. The worry in her face was elevated to panic and the curiosity was replaced by a look of defeat. And then she continued: “do you all work together?”

She asked this question to me (age 26) and Win (age 23) while our hands were full of tampons.

“Yes. We do. This is Count Winthrop and I’m Baron von Jensen.”

Win then noticed she had a camera. “We should send a picture to Mark”, he told me. And then to the girl: “will you take our picture?”

She did.

We sat down with lapfuls of tampons and were throwing them in the air as she took it. She didn’t think it was weird that Mark’s professional colleagues would be behaving in this way. The Count and the Baron are just here for research; it’s a big collaboration with Mister Doctor and this is what professional collaborations look like at Pacific.

We didn’t send Van Ness the picture right away. We still haven’t. We want his office to be a surprise. And that would definitely spoil it. Once the surprise is over though, it’ll be in his inbox.

After the girl left, Win and I got back to work.

When we were done, the tampons covered every surface. Mark will need to excavate a layer of Tampax to reach his desk. And the layer on his shelves was even thicker. We packed his desk drawers so full they had to be closed with force. We took every picture off the wall, taped a dozen tampons to the back of each frame, and rehung them. There wasn’t a square inch of ceiling that didn’t have a tampon thumbtacked to it. We taped them to his window. No water bottle was left un-stuffed. We even lifted the ceiling panels and hid piles of tampons on top of them.

With no surface left to sully (and no tampons left to do any sullying), Win and I broke down the cases and boxes. “We’ll see you tomorrow, Deb”, as we left Main Gym, dumped the boxes in the recycle bins (outside) and left for Win’s house.

That’s where I am now. I’m writing this entry from Win’s sofa.

The moment we got here, we opened up a bottle of wine (2005 Henri Perrusset Macon-Farges Selection Vieilles Vignes), set the chessboard, and played two games. I won both. (I’m still deeply wounded from my loss on February 24<sup>th</sup>, so I now play every game as though lives are at stake. Lives I don’t like. And my win will exterminate them.)

After the second game, we went for a walk.

Aside from the time it took to get to the levee, we spent our whole walk on top of it. While we were up there, we noticed something about our position: we were essentially upstairs in everyone's houses (the houses that line the base of the levee). From where we stood, we could see the beds in everyone's master bedrooms.

"Do you have a video camera?", I asked Win.

"Yeah."

"You know what we should do?", I began. Win already knew but I finished my thought anyway: "we should make voyeur films of these people having sex and then go door-to-door selling them their own videos. It would be like when someone goes on a helicopter ride and takes aerial photographs of people's homes and then finds those homes and tries to sell prints to the owners. Only this version would be pornographic. But other than that, it's pretty much the exact same thing. We could call the videos *From the Levee with Love*."

Win agreed. And we decided to pencil it into the "Chapter Missions" list that's hung up in my Baun office.

Last semester, I hung up several sheets of computer paper. At the top of the first one, I wrote a title: "Chapter Missions". Beneath that title was a list of things I wanted to do. It was just a list of activities. And if I did them, I would have something to write about. Something to base a journal chapter on. Examples:

1. Cry a lot in public.
2. "Accidentally" write pornographic emails to the wrong person.
3. Beg in front of an alley with wet boxes in it.
4. Go to a speech or seminar and initiate a power clap after every trivial point.
5. Stay the night at a coworker's house. Don't leave in the morning. Continue to stay, day after day, until the police arrive. When questioned, explain to them that I'm just conducting research for my latest book, *How to Overstay a Welcome*.

6. Spend a month eating nothing but restaurant food. Get all of my meals for free by convincing the managers that “I’m a writer” (or journalist or whatever) “who’s doing a column on your restaurant.” Come up with different fake credentials every time.<sup>1</sup>

7. (Credit to Adam Frank for coming up with this one; all I did was translate it to more specific and graphic terms): become a criminal prosecutor. The kind of prosecutor who only goes after big time criminals (e.g., crime bosses). Arraign them on charges of public nudity. It doesn’t have to be real; just Photoshop evidence, pay “witnesses”, etc.

“On July 17<sup>th</sup>, Al Capone was discovered naked, masturbating in a Denny’s bathroom.” The sentence wouldn’t be as severe, but the punishment would be worse.<sup>2</sup>

The “Chapter Missions” list goes on – it has about twenty entries on it – but I’m not going to recreate the whole thing here. Instead, I’m going to describe the three *new* entries Win and I came up with while on our walk.

The first of those three being the levee voyeur film business (*From the Levee with Love*). The other two are (at least peripherally) related to personal sex tapes (a phenomenon that’s become oddly popular and will no doubt lead to a lot more “celebrity scandals”).

2. Make a porn. A professional one though. Not some voyeur from the levee that gives people the creeps. Pay for a lighting guy, hire someone to hold a boom, maybe have a key grip, etc. Serious, high-budget porn. And make it extremely erotic, but every thirty seconds, cut to a five-second shot of an eight-year-old boy polishing a volleyball trophy.

3. Become a male figure-drawing model (i.e., pose nude for art classes).

Before arriving, don’t pee for several hours, take tons of Viagra, and consume an enormous amount of pop, baked beans, Metamucil, and milk of magnesia.

Apologize as I enter the room:

“Hey guys, before we get started, I just want you to know that I’ve had some really bad diarrhea these past few days. And I hope it won’t be a problem, but in case it is, I’d rather you knew now... so you can be prepared.”

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<sup>1</sup> Fred did this with plane tickets. Before the days of the Internet (and thus evidence), he flew all over the world. All over. Compared to Fred, Lord Jim’s expeditions were like that of an elementary schooler on a classroom fieldtrip. So it shouldn’t be too hard for me to get a few comp’d meals at a restaurant.

<sup>2</sup> The kingpins of the world would probably have a harder time coping with humiliation than incarceration.

When the Viagra kicks in, giving me a giant, veiny, throbbing erection, apologize again:

“I’m *really* sorry. How about we try to incorporate this into the artwork? Like we can try to turn this into something artsy?”

Squirt out a little bit of pee. “Oh god. Oh god, I’m sorry. I’m just *so* nervous.”

Begin to poop. Make sure it’s pure diarrhea.

“Whoops. Oh no, whoops. That’s what I warned you about. Let’s just keep going. Just keep drawing, guys!”

If I’m allowed to continue posing, start releasing more and more poop and then say:

“Oh god, did anything come out on that one? I’ve been really gassy all morning.”

Then look around the room and pick a girl who appears to be trying really hard to make the most of the situation. Look directly into her eyes and ask “will you look and see if anything came out?”

Before she tells me she’s a little uncomfortable with the request, turn my buttock to her, spread my cheeks apart, and allow some more diarrhea to seep out.

At this point, I would obviously be kicked out, so there’s no reason to plan further.

And that was the last thing Win and I came up with. I’ll add it to my “Chapter Missions” list tomorrow morning.

And maybe when my list is long enough, I’ll turn it into a book. That would probably be a lot more marketable than volumes and chapters of journal entries written by someone no one has ever heard of.<sup>3</sup>

Anyway, on the walk back to Win’s house, we saw someone graffiting a car (there must be a better verb for this). And two houses down, we saw a twenty-something-year-old Mexican man singing Bon Jovi karaoke all by himself in his garage.

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<sup>3</sup> At some point in life, I’m going to have to figure out a way to earn a living. Being a passionate journal keeper is fine, but that’s not going to cover a mortgage. You can’t feed the kids with passion.

It was after the Bon Jovi karaoke that I came to a decision. I decided that if I made a questionnaire (with checkable boxes) that says this:

- Completed graduate school
- Attended graduate school
- Completed a bachelor's degree
- Attended a state college for a while
- Graduated community college
- Did a couple quarters at the local community college
- Graduated high school
- Dropped out of high school
- Dropped out of a Stocktonian high school
- Dropped out of middle school
- Dropped out of a Stocktonian middle school

And then I gave that questionnaire to someone on the street (selected at random), and while that person was checking the appropriate box, I was filling out the same questionnaire *about* that person, I bet we would almost always get the same answer.

Did that make sense? I could have explained it more clearly but I don't feel like rewriting it. Nor do I feel like following through with the experiment. I'd rather be a model for figure drawing. Or a criminal prosecutor. Or produce levee films.

We eventually got back to Win's house.

The moment we did, my cellphone rang.

It was Van Ness calling.

I was sure he was calling about the tampons.

He wasn't.

He hadn't been back to his office yet. He had been out hunting. He just got back from his trip. And he had a story and a favor to tell and ask.

The story was about his hunting trip. And the favor was because of that trip.

The story:

POW! That was the sound of Van Ness's rifle releasing a bullet into a wild boar. Or what, from a distance, appeared to be a wild boar.

The crash of Van Ness's rifle was followed by a piercing squeal that came from a whole flock of piglets.

(I don't know what the collective noun is – a herd, a drove, etc. – for half a dozen nursing baby piglets fleeing from the lactating nipples of their freshly killed mother.)

“Oh shit!”, Van Ness probably shouted (or at least shouted something similar to that) upon realizing he had just blasted a nursing mother sow in the back of the head. And then watched the herd of babies scrambling away from its dead nipples, squealing.

Post-realization, Van Ness did what any of us would do: he ran up to the dead mom, hid behind its back and started making mother pig noises (little grunts and oinks).

Despite what Orwell would have you believe (with Old Major and Napoleon and company), pigs aren't that smart. The little babies came right back to the nipples.

Mark leapt over the mamma pig and nabbed one. It squealed all the way home. And now it's his pet. His daughter named it Spork.

The favor:

Spork has genitals. And Van Ness wants to castrate him.<sup>4</sup> But apparently it's hard to castrate a pig all by yourself.<sup>5</sup> So tomorrow, I agreed to go out to his house and do just that. I will help him castrate a baby pig named Spork.

For tonight though, I'm headed back to campus. I want to be in Main Gym tomorrow morning when Mark gets in.

I'm definitely eager to get started on my newest “chapter missions”, but I'm actually a lot more eager to see Mark's reaction to the redecorating of his office.

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<sup>4</sup> So it doesn't impregnate... what exactly? His dog? His niece?

<sup>5</sup> Harder than doing hysterectomies on housecats, which Mark did to all of his and his neighbor's.

I have a hunch he'll approve. He'll see himself as the beneficiary (and not the victim) of the punch line. And that's part of the reason Van Ness is the best professor in the continental U.S.<sup>6</sup> How many academic advisors would approve of students like Win and me? How many are capable of appreciating our company?<sup>7</sup>

If it weren't for Mark, there would be no way I could get through grad school. So while I'm here, if I can castrate a few animals as a way of saying thank you, I'm happy to do it.

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<sup>6</sup> The larger part being that he's staggeringly brilliant. He definitely deserves the title Count Mister Doctor Baron Van Ness. He just chooses not to take it.

<sup>7</sup> I can tell you the answer is very few. A tiny handful. Like a Django Reinhardt hand, where it's melted into such bad paralysis that it can hardly hold anything. In this case, anything = Mark and Jules. (Jules being the one who got me into grad school.)