

## ***Minor Mensch***

Volume 13, Chapter 1

### **FIRST DIARY ENTRY**

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Monday, April 9, 2007 at 7:50 p.m.

I've stopped putting my journal entries online. Maybe someday I'll post them again, but not right now. Right now it just creates too many problems. Even passworded, it's way too much trouble. So this is my first entry to no audience. And that's okay. I feel complimented that a single person ever cared enough to read it. I mean really, it's just a journal. It's a thousand bipolar pages that say nothing of value while toggling back and forth between boundless self-importance and bottomless self-pity. I can't help but feel flattered to have had an audience here. But I'm unmoved by flattery. At least relative to how portable I am when faced with the kinetic power of "drama".<sup>1</sup>

When my life is complicated by people's reactions to my journal, it's time to stop letting people read my journal. Seems rational enough. So I took the rest of the entries offline and I'm not posting this one. Starting today, this project will be a super-secret diary. The kind of diary that twelve-year-old girls keep hidden in their bedrooms, filled with humiliating notes about boy-crushes.<sup>2</sup>

The *content* of mine won't be aimed in that direction, just my interest in concealment. Regarding the content, I've decided that my first super-private diary entry should be a response to the one question every former reader asked me. The most frequent Q in the FAQ.<sup>3</sup> This: "Courtney, I've read your journal entries and you never seem to work. How do you still have a job?"

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<sup>1</sup> I've always hated that coinage.

<sup>2</sup> You know the diary I'm talking about; it's always covered in wispy flamingo hair, glitter, and sequins. Open that hairy, sparkling cover and you'll find a repository of emotional hysteria a pre-adolescent girl hasn't yet learned how to control. Or properly express. So it seeps onto the pages in run-on scrawls of passive aggression and active devotion. Hatred toward Cynthia, future wifery with Chad or Tristan, etc.

<sup>3</sup> I don't have a "FAQ", but if I did, this would be its only Q.

Sometimes the reader is a bit more specific, but it still ends with the same question: “Courtney, I read your entry about how you pretend to work by displaying meaningless spreadsheets on your computer monitor at all times. How do you still have a job?”

That’s a good question, reader.<sup>4</sup> And it has a two-part answer.

**Part one:** I do work. It just appears as though I don’t because I never write about it. And why would I? It’s not an interesting subject. “I worked today” is not a story that anyone would want to read. So it’s not one that I often tell. But off the record, I do work. In an effort to prove it, let me break down my daily routine:

I spend a few hours every day writing these journal entries (I’m sure you’ve noticed). And a few more doing the activities I’m writing about (which raises our total to six). Add another three for school-related tasks (class or writing or reading or whatever). And another three for non-school-related reading (usually done while out on walks). Maybe two hours to prepare my meals, eat them, and explain to people what they are. Another hour of peeing and/or showering and/or masturbating. One more for exercise. And one final hour for basic chores (e.g., stealing food, buying wine, doing laundry, etc.). That puts the daily tally at seventeen hours. I probably sleep about three hours a night, but let’s round up to four.

If those estimates are close to my real averages, I’m left with twenty-one hours a week to do my job. Do I do my job for a full twenty-one hours a week? No. Not even close. I work for about ten hours tops. I spend the other eleven doing nothing. But even at ten hours a week, that’s still only half of my contracted amount. So how do I get away with fulfilling half of my contract? See part two.

**Part two:** I’m really fucking good at my job. That’s how. In all due modesty (in all due honesty, there’s no modesty due), I run the gym like a champ. When I organize campus events, people participate. When I do personal training, people sign up. When I teach a group exercise class, people attend.

Before I came, there were six group exercise classes a week. Six. Now there are sixteen. Plus four taught by me. And in each of those four, the per-class attendance exceeds the total *weekly* attendance of all group exercise classes *combined* in the pre-me days.

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<sup>4</sup> Sort of. It’s sort of a good question.

I've expanded the personal training program even more than that (we'll call it a twenty billion percent growth rate, give or take). And the greatest improvement was in special event programming. I don't think its growth rate can even be expressed in longhand. The number is too large to have been given a name (unless you're spelling out some likeness of its scientific notation: "there's a one and then octillions of zeroes").<sup>5</sup>

I would be happy to keep congratulating myself (because I like the way it feels), but you get the idea. I put in my twenty hours *worth* of work; I just do it in ten. And I'm not the type to dedicate a workweek to a project that can be banged out in an afternoon. And I'm hugely grateful to have an employer who doesn't demand that of me.

Employers who do impose those demands ("I need you to submit weekly time logs so I can be sure we're getting the full twenty hours out of you") are criminals. What they're doing is far worse than what my fellow Stocktonians are doing (stealing cars or swinging meat cleavers at people in Sherwood mall or whatever).<sup>6</sup>

If we're lucky, we get one shot at life.<sup>7</sup> One. But the moment we're born, the shot clock starts ticking. And the universe doesn't care who inbounds the ball; it won't stop time for anyone<sup>8</sup> for any reason.<sup>9</sup> So if you want to run it down, just dribbling at half court, be my guest. But don't expect me to join you. Because I know how lucky I am to have been given the ball. And I know the mechanics of the clock. I'm not going to piss away those hours watching *Friends* reruns or putting in the extra "face time" at work.

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<sup>5</sup> I'm taking a lot of credit here, but a portion of that success can be explained away with the story of my predecessor. The girl who had my job before me (a girl whose name I don't remember) did nothing. Apparently she went through a terrible breakup during her first year at Baun and spent her second year moping worklessly. So, by doing anything more than nothing, one could reasonably expect *some* growth.

<sup>6</sup> That class of criminal isn't stealing irreplaceable hours from anyone. Maybe a few (however long it takes to deal with insurance), but they're giving you something in return: a story to tell. And the story is usually worth the price. You just don't think it is because you're forced to buy it. And that can feel a bit violating. It's like taxes. You don't sign up to pay for the highways, so maybe it doesn't seem like a bargain, but you end up getting a lot of mileage out of those roads.

<sup>7</sup> Nobody has ever captured this better than Richard Dawkins. Opening lines of *Unweaving the Rainbow*: "We are going to die, and that makes us the lucky ones. Most people are never going to die because they are never going to be born. The potential people who could have been here in my place but who will in fact never see the light of day outnumber the sand grains of Arabia. Certainly those unborn ghosts include greater poets than Keats, scientists greater than Newton. We know this because the set of possible people allowed by our DNA so massively exceeds the set of actual people. In the teeth of these stupefying odds it is you and I, in our ordinariness, that are here."

<sup>8</sup> Not even Joshua.

<sup>9</sup> Not even to kill Amorites.

I realize this journal (hereafter my super-secret diary) contains mountains of self-pity. I complain constantly and my life is largely miserable. I haven't forgotten where the manic swings of these bipolar entries have taken me in the previous thousand pages. Having written them, I know the author of those thoughts intimately. And that author hasn't changed his mind. But I'm pretty sure I will look back on these years (someday) and they'll have been everything I ever wanted in life. Because I didn't waste a moment of them watching the last season of *Friends* for the ninth time (people actually do this). Or catering to the demands of a life-sucking employer.

As miserable as it is, life is good to me. Maybe I'm not dribbling the ball according to the official NBA rules. And so no one will be collecting Courtney Jensen sports cards. But I'm making the most out of my shot clock. And it would be an impoverished life if I gave into the whistles.<sup>10</sup>

This is beginning to sound like a puffed-up criticism of disciplined people. It's not that at all. God bless those who have to work twenty hours to achieve twenty hours worth of work. I just don't have to. Because I'm a Courtney. And as a Courtney, everything comes easy to me.<sup>11</sup>

Let me rephrase that. It was pithy, but not quite accurate. Much more accurate would be: everything comes easy to me but Katie.

Oh, and analgesia. That's pretty hard for me to get too. I'm in an awful lot of awful pain all of the time.<sup>12</sup>

But other than Katie and analgesia, life doesn't ask that much of me.

Actually, that's not true either. There's nothing even almost true about that. Life asks a lot of everybody. And probably more than the mean from me. I do have a few skills, but only because I have a history of working on them way harder than I pretend to.

That's how everyone is good at anything. If someone tells you differently (e.g., "I was born this way!"), that person is a liar.

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<sup>10</sup> "Traveling!", the ref screams at me as I roll another golf cart... but just keep dribbling the only way I know how.

<sup>11</sup> The ego balloon absorbs another breath; its latex skin is now stretching toward a burst.

<sup>12</sup> It's awful.

Mozart was not a natural. Tiger Woods was not a natural. Even the Kurt Cobains of the world paid their dues in work ethic. They just did it in private. And then pretended like they didn't.

So when it comes to my job (as silly as it is), I actually worked hard to become good at it. I did my drills, I ran my laps, and now I can show up on race day and just jog. I can log a decent time without really having to apply myself. No need to carb up, no vomiting at the finish line, and I'm happy with my rank. I'm not getting any PRs, but I don't care to. Because I don't really care for the sport anymore.

Just because I have some passable skill at something (e.g., work) doesn't mean I have to enjoy doing it. I bet I could be even better at gay sex than I am at running a gym. I have all the biological tools to be a champ. But I'm not entirely eager to apply myself in that direction (I'm certainly not ready to invest myself in the training program).

There's nothing wrong with people who pursue stardom in that realm; it's just not one that interests *me*. And to me, all work is gay sex (unless one *is* gay; then the analogy would be "all work is straight sex").

I don't care what the job is; if I'm being paid to do it (if someone is expecting a product from me), I *will* lose interest. It could be the greatest job in the world. I will still reach a stage in which it's painful for me to clock in.<sup>13</sup>

How this affects my Baun life: I'm going to do the minimal amount of work required to appear as though I'm doing more than the minimal amount of work required.

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<sup>13</sup> If my job were to be a rock star, I would grow to hate it. Or even better: if I had a twenty-figure salary as the Olympic Bull of Sweden, I would regularly complain about my life. And probably call in sick as often as I could. I guess I should explain what I mean by "Olympic Bull of Sweden" (being as it's an expression that I'm coining right now). When a woman becomes pregnant, she'll experience a bunch of hormonal changes. Depending on the sport, these changes could potentially be advantageous to her performance. I'm not talking third trimester stuff. Female athletes could just take advantage of the bodily responses to the newly conceived. If you compete at the Olympic level, and you want a medal, you really, really need advantages. Anything that might give you the slightest edge. And a new uterine tenant might be that edge. But conception isn't going to happen magically. Little baby Jesus isn't going to hear a coach's prayers and reward his would-be star with the miracle of parthenogenesis. Pregnancy has to come from science. And one such mode of science is the hiring of a stud. And I could be that stud. I could be the Olympic Bull. "Courtney, as the Olympic Bull of Sweden, it is your job to make sure every Swedish woman who will be competing in the games this year is impregnated at the appropriate time." Even that job would become a painful bore to me. One I would ultimately try to avoid.

My list of Baun tasks is always full. There's always some amount of work to be done. That work just takes a limo-distant backseat to my journal. My journal comes first. Writing is the only pursuit in which I still apply myself. Every day. I still run my drills. I still practice my scales. In writing, I still work harder than I pretend to.

But right now, I'm at work. In my Baun office. And there's work to be done. And I plan on starting it soon. I would have started it already but there's a taekwondo clinic that's happening in one of the multi-purpose rooms.<sup>14</sup> And for that reason, I'm distracted. That distraction was actually the whole point of writing this entry. I sat down to write about taekwondo. But I got distracted from that too.<sup>15</sup>

Anyway, now that I've remembered why I started writing this, I'm going to get back on topic. With this:

Taekwondo (like most martial arts) is much less martial than it is art. I would put it in the same class of activities that I put hacky sack and hula-hooping (performance art). It's all about the display. All of that energy-wasting showmanship. The cool-looking Van Damme spin kicks aren't going to win any fights.<sup>16</sup>

Taekwondo is a healthy way for confused adolescents to manage their identity crises. It's definitely graceful, but it's not graceful enough to be pleasing per se (like ballet is). And it's combative, but it's not combative enough to be of any use in a fight.

If I'm confronted by a taekwondo sensei with a dozen degrees of blackness around his waist, I'm pretty sure I could win. As soon as he agrees to fight me, I'll just poke him in the eye really hard with my finger.

"Ow fuck! FUCK! Ahhhh!", he'll scream while rubbing his eye. And then he'll continue: "you poked me in the EYE! That is *not* taekwondo!"

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<sup>14</sup> In the "rubber room" (as opposed to the "wood room"; both are named after their floors).

<sup>15</sup> Now that I'm no longer posting these entries online, I think I can get away with the ADD, which is good because it seems to be getting worse. My writing used to be sort of a focused shotgun spread. A little bit of scatter, but at least you could tell where I was *trying* to aim it. Now it's just a bunch of shrapnel flying everywhere. I don't appear to have a target at all.

<sup>16</sup> As evidenced by Eric Campbell winning the elementary school fight against Troy Haver in my front yard (see volume one, chapter six) with nothing but slaps. It's hard to identify the artistic quality of slapping someone until that person can take no more slaps. Troy had karate trophies taller than he was, and he was roundhousing like the dickens, but he lost a unanimous decision by one move: slapping. Score one for E. Honda's martial technique.

I win.

And that's all I really wanted to say in this entry.

Monday, April 9 at 11:55 p.m.

I've decided that I'm UOP's campus cluricaun. Except that I'm an outlier in height. But I do get my daily chores done (work, which I talked about in the previous entry), and I go through life in the appropriate doses of solitude and drunkenness (although maybe I'm not *always* achieving my drunkenness in "gentlemen's cellars").

Tonight's solitude was spent in my Baun office (again, actually working; if I ever post this entry, please take note of that, reader). And tonight's drunkenness has come to me from a somewhat-gentlemanly bottle: Domaine Bernard Baudry, Chinon 2005.

It smelled like feet. Feet that had spent the previous eight hours in wool socks (but had been clean until then). It tasted like that, only good.

Tuesday, April 10 at 2:41 a.m.

I'm still in my Baun office. I'm listening to Rachmaninoff's mammoth hands work over a piano and trying to finish last week's work (as well as this week's and next week's). But I'm not making as much progress as I had hoped I would.

I'm in one of those phases in which every hour spent is an hour accomplished, owing mostly to drunkenness (which has continued through the night). The only difference between this moment's drunkenness and the BAC of the early-evening-me is that it's now being held in place by really cheap rum (I finished my wine hours ago).

Right before I started writing this entry (while sitting in my office, attempting to work), a blond-haired undergraduate kid saw the lights on in Baun and decided it was a good idea to knock on the window.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The window facing outside (facing the north wall of Bannister Hall), which my office window faces.

Note that this happened at 2:36 a.m. It was dark outside. Much darker than it is inside. And because the window is tinted (not just the window in my office, but the one facing outside as well), I couldn't really see. And because it's soundproofed (sort of), I couldn't really hear either.

All I heard was the rumbling of the boy's knock and some muffled, incomprehensible yelling. After looking up and seeing the outline of a yelling person, I looked back down at my desk, obviously.

When the boy noticed that I didn't get out of my chair, leave my office, and approach the window, he knocked again. And again and again.

After at least a full minute of really irritating knocking, I paused the Rachmaninoff and walked over to the window.

I didn't say anything. I just rotated my left palm to face the ceiling and raised my eyebrows in a gesture of "what the hell do you want?!"

When I got close enough to the glass, I could see who it was. I could see the boy clearly enough to know that I had no idea who he was (some blond-haired undergrad).

"Courtney!" (He shouted my name loudly enough to overpower the soundproofing.)

"Yeah?" (My response was so quiet it would have been impossible for him to hear it.)

"It's Jake!" (Or Pete or something; I already forgot what his name was.)

"Okay?" (I'm still speaking quietly enough to be totally inaudible.)

"I'm in your Kinesiology class!" (Jake-Pete yelled this with a Cheerleader's tone.)

I finally decided to match his volume: "do you want into the building or something?!"

"No!"

I was confused by his answer. So I didn't say anything. I just did the hand-and-brow move again. I couldn't figure out why he was knocking. Did he want to strike up a dialogue at 2:38 a.m. (based on my estimate of how long I'd been standing at the glass at that point)?



I must have held that posture for about eight seconds, waiting for some explanation of why he so desperately wanted to speak to me through tinted glass at that hour.

At the end of those eight silent seconds, he shouted this: “okay, bye!”

And then he walked off. And I walked back to my office and unpaused my CD.

I had every intention of returning to work, but I started writing this instead. And I’m still wondering: why knock? Why knock on the window at all? What did he think would happen? Was he hoping I would be happy to see him?

“Jake-Pete! Oh my god, it’s you! I’m so glad that you knocked! I’ve wanted to yell things at you through tinted glass for so long! I’ve just never had the opportunity! This really is a dream come true! I write about you every day in a hairy, pink diary! I’m finally ready to read all of my secrets to you! Are you ready to listen?!”

Is that what he thought would happen?

Whatever. I’m done for the night. I’m going to go lie down. I’m too drunk and tired to make any progress on anything. I guess I haven’t yet mastered the cluricaun life. Probably because I haven’t yet worked at it (definitely less than I pretend to and I’m not pretending very hard). So maybe it’s time to apply myself in that direction; start doing my laps in the gentleman’s cellars. At least until I have enough skill to convince people that I’m a “natural”. Although at that point, any further effort would probably feel like I was just dribbling down the shot clock. So it’d be time for me to move onto something else (Olympic Bull?).

Okay, I guess that’s enough for the first of my diary entries. My first journal chapter written to no one.

Goodnight, imaginary readers.