

## ***Minor Mensch***

Volume 14, Chapter 16

### **MY LAST RIDE**

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Friday, May 11, 2007 at 11:01 p.m.

I landed on my head. We were going pretty fast at the time.

With Cheryl, it was her face that hit first. No hands or knees or elbows. Just her face. Straight to the pavement.

Logan was there too. For a moment anyway. And then he wasn't anymore. He just disappeared. I was pretty sure it was the rapture that did it. It must have come and claimed him halfway through the crash. Pre-rapture, Logan was sitting in the front, passenger-side seat. After the crash, there was no Logan to be found. How else was I supposed to interpret that? Obviously God just snatched him from his terrestrial life. And Cheryl, Kate, and I were among the "left behind".

Kate (the only other person there) is Cheryl's roommate. She was the one driving when we crashed. And she was fine. Out of the four of us, Kate was the only one who was neither raptured nor injured.

Friday, May 11 at 11:17 p.m.

I'm lying on the rock wall crash pads with Cheryl, Logan, and Kate. I just got back from peeing. It felt pretty good. I didn't drink any of it. I couldn't be bothered. All I needed was to stand at the urinal for a minute and relax.

And during my minute of relax-peeing, I made some decisions. One of those decisions was that I should explain what just happened (what happened to Cheryl's face, where Logan went, why we're now lying on the crash pads, etc.). So here's what happened:

A couple hours ago, Cheryl and I were sitting in my Baun office. We weren't doing anything, so I looked at her and said, "let's go for a ride." And she responded with a sentence that could very easily be interpreted as consent.

I stood up, held out my hand, and she took it.

After I pulled her out of her chair, we walked up to the front desk to grab the three items that would be necessary for our ride:

- 1) A key for the gas-powered golf cart<sup>1</sup>
- 2) A paperclip
- 3) Another paperclip

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<sup>1</sup> This isn't really a *golf* cart. It's more of a *golf-cart-sized* dump truck. I remember describing it in an earlier entry, but it seems an appropriate time to repeat myself. The gas-powered cart is a two-seater (bench seat) with a flatbed in the back. That flatbed has low borders on the front and sides (sufficient to hold its cargo) but no border in the rear. Because that rear is meant to be dumped. The dashboard controls don't have features like turn signals, but there is a hydraulic tilt option. Hold it down and the base of the flatbed starts rising, angling the whole thing backward. This happens very slowly (and with a lot of mechanical noise), but it comes in handy when you're trying to unload cargo (e.g., if I'm hauling boxes of stationery from Central Receiving to Baun). When the dump feature comes in the *most* handy though is when I'm giving people rides around campus. A few evenings a week, I still go out on my little pleasure cruises. I'm usually by myself. And if I don't leave campus entirely (or at least do my cruising around the perimeter), I will definitely be solicited for rides. "Can we have a ride?!", an overconfident, foot-traveling undergrad will shout in my direction. And he will be representing a small group of fellow foot-traveling undergrads (maybe three or four in total). I'll let off the gas, coast through a U-turn, and pull up beside them. "Where are you guys headed?", I'll ask the one who did the shouting. This is always a well-dressed male who is several hours into some underage drinking. And his companions are always equally dressed up (and equally underage-drunken) sorority girls. I'll be told the name of some building where a party is being held. After releasing an audible sigh: "okay, but you'll all have to ride in the back." "What?" "It's a weight distribution thing. The cart won't drive if the load is too front-heavy." Somehow they believe me and start packing themselves onto the bed. If they don't all fit, I make a hollow promise: "wait here. I'll come back for you as soon as I drop off your friends." And then we drive away. During the first half of the trip, I find out where my passengers are from, what they study in school, etc. I ask every boring question I can think of. I would ask more interesting questions during the second half of the trip, but there is no second half. When we hit the halfway point, I lean forward and activate the dump feature. I don't slow down; I just start tilting their bed. Because it's so loud and gradual, they have plenty of time to panic. Eventually they can't hold on anymore and they all go tumbling out the back. I'm usually going about ten miles per hour when this happens, but I make sure I do it on a soft lawn, so it's safe. And a wet one so it's funny. After I've deposited my cargo, I don't stop or look over my shoulder; I just keep driving (while slowly returning the bed to its normal position). And then I finish my evening's cruise off campus to avoid any further solicitations. And I feel good about what I've done. Really good. Because these kids are now halfway to their destination and they have a story to tell when they arrive. That's so much better than getting all the way there and being the most boring people in attendance. You're welcome.

If you're going to drive the gas-powered cart, the paperclips are as important as the key.

The gas engine is a pretty good one (certainly better than the electric alternative), but it's totally ruined by the presence of a governor.

It accelerates nicely up until about twelve miles per hour (maybe fifteen tops) and then the gas pedal just stops working. It doesn't matter how hard you slam it into the floor, nothing will happen. You will be joyriding in a silently coasting dump cart.

After a few seconds of gentle deceleration, the governor will snap off and the cart will lurch back into acceleration. For about one second. And then it will die again. So you can never reach an especially thrilling speed. You're just yanked around at an average speed of about thirteen.

*However*, with two strategically placed paperclips, you can overthrow the automotive government (i.e., the governor loses all of its former authority). And the anarchist's engine has no interest in speed limits. So when you drop the pedal, that thirteen will roar past twenty in a hurry. And if the wind is right (or the straightaway long), you might be able to hit thirty.<sup>2</sup>

While Cheryl and I were behind the front desk, making a mess, looking for paperclips, Logan was finishing his shift (the gym was closing at the time).

"What are you looking for?", he asked me, very reasonably.

I didn't answer right away. Because I was still searching. And that search was way too frantic to be interrupted.

But then I found them. A brand new, unopened box of paperclips sitting behind all of the pointless stationery. I ripped it open, grabbed a pair, and held them up with a look of complete triumph. "These!", I shouted.

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<sup>2</sup> Andy Fields, the once-upon-a-king of the POC who introduced me to homelessness, also taught me the magic of paperclip utilization.<sup>2A</sup>

<sup>2A</sup> This is the only situation in which you'll catch me using the word "utilize". Bill Bryson explained it best in his *Dictionary of Troublesome Words*. Paraphrased, it goes like this: "utilize" is to be avoided in pretty much every context *except* when making use of something (i.e., a paperclip) for a not-originally-intended purpose. In the case of paperclips, elementary school teachers might use them; MacGyver utilizes them. And I utilized the shit out of those clips tonight.

The look Logan gave me in return carried much more curiosity than triumph. In the total silence of his squinting eyes and tilted head, he seemed to be asking me: “what small stack of papers could you possibly be this passionate about clipping together?”

I didn’t respond to the implication of his look. Instead: “when are you off work?”

“I’m off now. I just have to wait for everyone to leave. That guy who always showers a minute before we close is in the shower now.”

While Logan was explaining the shower situation to us, Kate (who I’m pretty sure is a freshman) walked in, looking for Cheryl (who was standing right beside me).

“Kate, this is Courtney”, Cheryl said immediately, revealing a set of very un-Stocktonian manners.

Kate extended her hand in my direction. She seemed to think I would be inclined to reach out and grip it. And then, before letting go, we would move our clasped hands around in the air.

I’ve always found handshaking to be a weird practice, so I didn’t take the bait.

Instead, I just looked at her (somewhat appraisingly), started in on a smile, looked back at Logan, finished that smile, and then asked the obvious question: “you guys wanna go for a ride?”

Neither of them said the word “yes”, but I interpreted their responses (like Cheryl’s) as consent of a kind.

“Okay, we’re gonna go get the cart”, I said, while putting my hand on Cheryl’s shoulder (a gesture that let everyone know she’d been promoted to full partner). “You guys wait here and we’ll come pick you up.”

Before Kate or Logan could offer any sort of response, Cheryl and I had already left.<sup>3</sup>

And five minutes later, we had returned with the cart (paperclips already in place, anarchic engine purring eagerly).

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<sup>3</sup> In the direction of Main Gym. There’s a fenced-in area in the back where the carts are stored.

Instead of collecting the rest of our crew like adults (parking in the POC driveway and then entering Baun to notify our party that their ride had arrived), Cheryl and I decided it would be classier to just spin some skid-less cart-cookies outside of the front doors. So we got started.

Kate and Logan didn't give us enough time to get dizzy. They came out immediately (apparently the shower guy had already wrapped up his afterhours hygiene business).

As they approached us, I could see a very clear expression that their faces were sharing. The curiosity that had been the primary facial tenants when Cheryl and I left to pick up the cart was now missing. Totally gone. What had replaced it was a look that likened them to sheep knowingly leaving the flock for slaughter.

And I doubt my first words helped ease any concerns: "go ahead and hop in the back. Just make sure you brace yourselves on the sides."

"What?"

"Sit sideways and press your feet against the edges so you don't fall out."

Neither Kate nor Logan seemed to be in too big of a hurry to climb in, so I produced my attempt at a soothing sentence: "I promise we won't dump you on the pow-wow lawn."

They got in.

I was behind the wheel at the time, but I decided to switch seats with Cheryl so she could be the first driver. And I'm glad I did because her driving was masterful.

She hugged every huggable corner (bear hugs wherever that amount of tightness was possible). She hopped all the right curbs. She found the skid-able patches of sprinkler-soaked lawn. It was a brilliant performance.

And judging by my glances back at Kate and Logan, they seemed to appreciate the performance as much as I did. Logan especially. It only took a couple corners before excitement began to replace whatever concern he had originally brought onto the cart with him.

But Cheryl pulled over pretty quickly. She wanted to give someone else a turn (well before the etiquette of golf-cart-turn-taking would have had her do any switching).

She and I climbed onto the flatbed and gave the bench to Kate and Logan.<sup>4</sup> And Logan let Kate take the first turn behind the wheel.

This was cute. Even ignoring the absence of bear-hugged corners, Kate was no Cheryl.<sup>5</sup> No one expected her to be; she was the youngest one on board. But it was still funny. She clearly didn't have a lot of experience behind any wheel. Just enough to acquire a driver's license; no more. Never a golf cart and certainly no gas-powered dump carts.

For the first five minutes, there was no reason to even have the paperclips hooked onto the engine. I doubt our speed reached double digits. We were cruising around campus at about six miles per hour. It felt like walking; I didn't even have any wind in my face.

But eventually she started to get comfortable, feeling in control with a bit more speed. No curbs, no slides, no hugs, but she started putting those paperclips to good use.

And so we started to replace our words of comfort ("no, no, it's okay; only do what you're comfortable doing") with words of cheer. Egging her on, trying to push her past those comforts.

After a couple more minutes of speed acclimation, I decided she needed to try a curb.

We were driving down the sidewalk between Grace Covell Hall and Morris Chapel (headed south; going from President's Drive toward Chapel Lane) when I made that decision.

As we were getting close to the end, Kate started to veer left. She was going to cut across the lawn a little bit, but only to take the edge out of the corner so she could stay on the sidewalk.

I was sitting right behind her, so I reached forward, grabbed the wheel, and aimed it straight at the curb. She tried to overpower me, but I'm twice her size. That wheel wouldn't be turning.

I'm not sure if this excited her or if she just panicked, but her foot never left the gas. We were speeding up.

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<sup>4</sup> I was sitting behind Kate with my feet pressed against the passenger side wall and Cheryl was sitting across from me (behind Logan with her feet pressed against my wall).

<sup>5</sup> The difference was biological. Cheryl had this vestibular acuity that allowed her to instinctively sense how far a corner could be pushed.

As soon as we were close enough that she couldn't pull out, I let go, got back into my position, and braced myself, pressing my feet against Cheryl's wall of the flatbed.

When the cart went off the curb, we must have been near full speed. And that's fine. Cheryl was doing curb drops at top speed too. But we went off this one at an angle. The right tire dropped first. So we started bouncing.

Had we just coasted it out or eased into the next corner, all of that bouncing wouldn't have been a problem. It would have just been bumpy. And then, as soon as it wasn't bumpy anymore, Kate would be ready for another curb.

But that's not quite what happened.

I don't know what our exact speed was, but we were definitely beyond the governor when she spun the wheel. The bounce had Kate's side of the cart lifting upward and Logan's side sinking toward the pavement. And that's when she made a hard left turn.

As the cart started to roll, Logan turned his head away from the rapidly approaching street. And I saw the expression of a face already mutated by panic. And one can be pretty sure I was mirroring that look.

That's when I let go of my braced-leg position and got ready for ejection, tucking myself into a cannonball. I have no idea what happened after that. I just know the first thing I felt was the back of my head hitting the pavement. But I didn't dare un-tuck. Not until I had finished rolling. I was confronting this crash like a threatened pill bug.

When I finally did open up (from my battered cannonball), I started scanning for bodies. First task: get a head count.

My body checklist had a Cheryl, a Logan, a Kate, and a me on it.

Finding me was easy. Half a second of navel-gazing and it was time to move on.

The next person I saw was Kate, who appeared to be totally fine.

"Are you okay?", I asked anyway.

"Yeah, I landed on my feet. I sort of just hit the ground running."

She wasn't making a bad joke on purpose. Apparently she literally (not figuratively) did hit the ground running. She landed on her feet in a full sprint. Then, after a few sprinty steps, she decelerated, turned around, and ran back to the wreckage.

Kate's name could be checked off the roll call. Two bodies were now accounted for.

Next on the list: Cheryl. My sweet little Baun mate / master golf cartist.

There she was, ten feet from the cart, lying in the fetal position, bleeding to death. Mostly bleeding out of her face. And most of that blood was being soaked into the collar of her shirt. Which was actually my shirt. Which was actually Eric Sheets' shirt.

There was no way Logan's injuries could be worse than this, but I felt like I should at least check before figuring out what to do with Cheryl.

So I looked up. No Logan. I looked all around me. No Logan. Behind me, over me, under me. No Logan. He had totally vanished.

"Where the fuck is Logan?", I asked no one in particular pretty loudly.

When that turned out to be an unproductive way of locating him, I decided to charge someone specific with the task. And I wasn't going to direct that charge toward Cheryl because she was fucked up. So I asked Kate: "Kate, where's Logan?"

She didn't answer me, so I repeated myself: "Kate. I need to know where Logan is."

Again, she didn't answer me. She just stood there, staring at Cheryl. So I decided to start yelling, angling my voice in different directions:

"Logan!"

"Logan!!"

"Logan!!!"

Notice how the exclamation points are increasing in number. So was the volume of my voice. But to no effect. Logan was just gone.

I looked back at Kate and gave her a three-exclamation-point shout: "find him!!!"



Kate took off running in what appeared to be a randomly chosen direction.

Now Cheryl and I were alone.

My head hurt, but nothing seemed to be broken or bleeding, so I wasn't all that worried about me. With Cheryl though, there was a legitimate reason to worry: she looked like Two-Face from Batman. Except she wasn't a man in a suit. And also her face was much worse than his.

But she wasn't unconscious or in shock or anything. Maybe a little bit concerned about the volume of blood being sponged into her collar (one only has so many liters), but composed in spite of that.

And I was composed too until I saw the full spread of Cheryl's face.

The first time she actually looked at me was when Kate ran off in search of the rapture. And my reaction took control of my expression, betraying any effort to keep her calm.

"How bad is it?", she asked me while wiping some gravel (and probably tooth chips) from her mouth.

I tried to comfort her with some unconvincing lies: "oh, you'll be fine. Honestly, it's not that bad. How's everything other than your face? Can you move everything okay?"

As Cheryl was testing her various bits ("I can move this, I can move that"), I looked up and saw what appeared to be Logan hobbling toward us.

I say "appeared to be" because he was at least a football stadium away from us (not the length of the field, but the length of the actual stadium, nosebleeds to nosebleeds), so I couldn't be sure who it was. I thought it was probably him though. And Logan-probably had his arm wrapped around Kate-probably.

Cheryl and I kept evaluating her injuries until the hobbler and his assistant were close enough for me to squint out some identities. And I could tell that Logan-definitely was being assisted by Kate-definitely. And he was seriously hobbling. Putting no pressure on his legs at all. He was sort of hover-dragging his feet back and forth over the ground. And Kate was struggling to marionette him toward us.

“Hold on, I’ll be right back”, I told Cheryl as I got up and ran over to assist Logan’s puppeteering.

While I was jogging over to meet them, I began to wonder something: how could Logan have possibly wound up this far away? He clearly lacks the ability to walk. And I doubt his body was hurled this far in the accident. We weren’t going *that* fast.

Maybe he did get zapped up in some kind of rapture; the eschatological equivalent of being picked by the team captain at recess. But only for a minute. And then that captain decided to unpick him, casting him back into the lineup of unchosen chumps (and didn’t bother to replace him exactly where he snatched him).

That’s the best explanation I could come up with while jogging pretty far to meet a kid who had no use of his legs.

As soon as I got there, I slid my shoulder under his armpit (the one that wasn’t being occupied by Kate), and asked the obvious question. Not if he was okay, but “how the fuck did you wind up all the way over here?”

“Once I dislodged my leg, I had to run on it to make sure it was still attached.”

Those were his exact words.

If he was wondering whether his legs were attached, I bet he could have just looked. Maybe poked at them a bit, taken a step or two. But no. Instead, he ran far, far away. It’s as if he were a dying cat, trying to do it in hiding because dying is *so* embarrassing.

And he didn’t stop talking after the bit about leg attachments. Other sentences were spoken, but each made less sense than the one that preceded it. And I became more and more convinced that he was in shock. Maybe he hit his head harder than Cheryl or I did.

It would have been hard to tell in the dark though, so I decided we should get everyone back to Baun to clean up and take stock of our injuries.

But I didn’t want to assist Logan all the way there on foot. We were moving at about a thirtieth of a mile per hour. At that speed, it would have taken all night. So I called for Cheryl (who was already up on her feet).

“Hey Cheryl? Can you take over for me?!”

She came running over.

And when she got there, we Ark-swapped our positions.<sup>6</sup> I got out from underneath Logan’s arm and Cheryl slid in (probably bloodying up his pit).

I jogged back to the cart (which was still on its side) and tipped it onto its wheels.

“I’m not going anywhere! I’m just going to test the cart!”, I shouted at the hobbling trio. And then I sat down behind the wheel and pressed down on the gas.

It was still drivable.

This was a serious relief because I wouldn’t have known how to explain “I did it again” to my coworkers.

That’s not to say the cart was in good condition. If I were to list it on eBay, I would not describe it as “like new mint condition!” It would be more of an “as is” sale. I’m sure it had broken shit all over it. Pieces missing, at least half of the paint scratched off, etc. But the essentials (gas, brakes, and steering) were there. Those parts were functional. As soon as I was sure of that much, I circled around and pulled up beside Logan and his support staff.

Kate and Cheryl hoisted him onto the flatbed (he couldn’t bend his leg enough to ride in the front seat). Then Kate joined Logan in the back and Cheryl joined me in the front.

And then I drove us all back to Baun. Extremely slowly. I was being ridiculously careful to avoid anything that might potentially result in the ride being the tiniest bit bumpy (occasionally letting off the gas altogether, looking over my shoulder and asking “how you guys doin’ back there?”).

After about a minute, we pulled up to Baun’s front doors. This is where, less than an hour before, Cheryl and I had been spinning our skid-less cart-cookies. This time, we had no interest in any such stunts. Instead, we were driving as gingerly as we could. And after (very gingerly) coasting to a halt, we all got out.

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<sup>6</sup> In *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when Indiana Jones swaps the golden idol for a bag of sand, that’s what Cheryl and I did (which would make her the bag of sand).

We were standing in the light for the first time since crashing. So, while Kate was helping Logan to his feet, I inspected Cheryl's face more closely.

I knew it was bad; that much could be seen in the dark. But it was hard to tell *exactly* how bad it was until I held her up to the light. Then we'd know for sure.

So we walked up to the front doors and stood under the entry lights.

It was awful. Her face was in terrible shape. But I didn't say that. I didn't say anything. I just stared at her silently. And I kept staring until she put an end to that silence:

"You've been staring at my face for a really long time and you haven't looked into my eyes once. I don't like the way you're doing that."

She said this with as much humor as fear. And both were adorable. So I leaned forward and kissed her forehead.<sup>7</sup>

And then I continued to lie: "your face is a bit scratched up but it's all surface. Trust me, it looks worse than it is. You'll be fine." And then we went inside.

Logan broke away from Kate and hobbled straight to the rock wall crash pads. After collapsing sort of indelicately on them, he started heaving. Some dry, some wet.<sup>8</sup>

I gave Kate my keys. "Go find him a garbage pail or a mop bucket or something."

"Where do I look?"

I pointed at the nearest closet and mumbled a set of really lazy, hurried instructions. The purpose was not to help her, but to let her know that she did not need my help.

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<sup>7</sup> This seemed like an appropriate place to kiss her. If I kissed her on the mouth, I probably would have ingested a fair amount of blood and possibly a tooth.

<sup>8</sup> I don't think his nausea was because of a bunch of brain hemorrhaging. The only part of his face or head that seems to have taken any abuse was his chin. And it didn't look that bad. So I chalked his vomiting up to a combination of pain and panic; an adrenal response shunting blood around in nauseating directions. Or maybe it was the result of all that sprinting he did; he built up a big pool of acid through exertion and needed to get rid of it somehow. Pump it out of the muscle, into the blood, and then what? May as well empty the stomach so you have another open reservoir for disposal. I could come up with a dozen more explanations that have nothing to do with head trauma. And if it turns out to be head trauma, my bad.

Then Cheryl and I went into the women's locker room together to start cleaning out her wounds. And she was such a great sport. It must have stung an awful lot when I rammed soaped up paper towels into her face and scraped around with all my might.

After a minute of me digging at Cheryl's face, and Cheryl maintaining a poker master's countenance, she took over. And I just sat and watched. And while watching, I began to wonder if maybe Cheryl is who I should have been spending all of my time with from the beginning.

That thought only lasted a couple minutes though. And then she was all done cleaning. And her face was seriously raw. She gave it one last rinse before looking up at me with an expression that seemed to ask "what now?"

I returned her look with a smile that communicated a lot but none of that lot answered her question. So I just said my answer out loud: "I guess it's time to bandage you up."

And then we got to work, doing so with no strategy or skill whatsoever.

Step one: connect a bunch of old gauze to her face with old Band-Aids. Step two: cover that gauzy mess with an outer shell of athletic tape.

When Cheryl started to resemble a fifth grader's five-minute attempt at a homemade Halloween costume<sup>9</sup>, we decided to call it quits.

We left the locker room and joined Kate and Logan on the crash pads. And that's where we all are right now, lying here in silence.

Cheryl and Logan are in recovery (having been discharged from Baun's ICU). Kate isn't recovering; she's just present. We'll call it visiting hours. And I'm writing. I'm writing this entry. I'm on this sentence right now.<sup>10</sup>

The silence we're all sharing isn't because I'm establishing an antisocial environment by writing journal entries. We're just resting. And none of us (excepting Kate) is eager for that rest to graduate to sleep (in case any concussions were had).

I think we'll all be okay though.

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<sup>9</sup> "I'm a mummy!", the chronic underachiever announces to a horrified mother.

<sup>10</sup> I'm writing it longhand; it'll obviously be typed by the time you read it.

And by tomorrow, I think this experience will have been worth it. Not just for me, but for everyone.

Kate's totally fine. If she was a little bit emotionally scarred, that's a good thing. One needs stories to tell in life. And now she has one.

With Logan, I don't know the extent of his injuries (he still can't bend his leg), but he didn't die and he's no longer throwing up. Plus, all of his sentences make sense again.<sup>11</sup> Health wise, I'm sure he'll pull through. And when he does, he'll definitely be the first draft any time a team captain starts picking a recess squad. Give him a milliliter of epi and the kid can outrun a goddamn rapture.<sup>12</sup> There are very few people as bright as Logan who, with nothing but a pair of sneakers, can beat almighty gods. And there's a confidence that comes with this. And that confidence matters. Logan will go far in life.

As for Cheryl, my sweet little Baun mate / master golf cartist, faces heal much better than bodies. She won't be Two-Face forever. But while she is, she gets to immortalize the moment in a set of family photos. Her brother's graduation pictures are tomorrow. And I bet her parents are going to be fucking pissed.

I hope she shows up with her face all pussing and denies there's a problem.

"What happened to your face?!", they'll shriek in horror.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what happened to your face!? It looks like you were beat to death with sandpaper!"

"Oh... I hadn't noticed."

"How could you not notice?!"

Then Cheryl explains to them that it's just an optical illusion. The way the light is striking her perfect complexion; it makes it look like she's bleeding from her freckles. That's all.

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<sup>11</sup> This is especially good news because he's a really smart guy; it would be hugely unfortunate if he lost that in a dump cart accident.

<sup>12</sup> Maybe there should be some athletic scholarships at play here. I think he still has a couple years left in his undergrad.

Then maybe someone else will notice her.

“Oh my god, Cheryl! My god! What the fuck happened to your face!?”

And maybe this time Cheryl will make up an excuse: “I tripped and ran into a door jam.”

“All over your face?”

“All over. I did it like ten times. On accident, of course.”

These conversations could go on all day. And I’m sure they will.

Out of the four of us, I think Cheryl has the best story to tell. She’s smart, she’s funny, and she knows how to land the punch lines. She’ll get more mileage out of the photos than she got out of the cart (and she drove that cart like a champ).

Cheryl will definitely come out ahead. But I think I got the most out of the experience. Likely more than Cheryl, definitely more than Kate and Logan.

Part of it is this journal entry. While I don’t have any photographers coming to capture the story, I get to record it in my own way; I get to write it. And to me, the narrative has always paid a kind of dividend that makes the initial investment (any painful experience) completely worth it. The moment I put it to paper, all the pain dissolves. All that’s left is the profit. And that never seems to leave my circulation.

Before I started writing this entry (while I was standing at the urinal, relax-peeing), these were the thoughts I was turning over in my head. When it came time to flush, those thoughts had matured into a decision. I decided that this was a story I needed to put into circulation right away. Not because the pain was so severe that it had to be dissolved immediately, but because I was worried.

What worried me was how hard my head hit the pavement. Maybe it was so hard that my ability to write would be affected. Until I knew for sure (or at least had a hunch), I wasn’t going to be able to empty my thoughts and relax among the post-crash party (no matter how empty and relaxed my bladder became). So, on my way back to the rock wall, where I would be joining Cheryl, Logan, and Kate, I stopped by my office and grabbed a pad of paper and a pen. And I’ve been writing ever since (partly as a test).

When I'm done with this entry (which I imagine will be soon; my hand started cramping an hour ago), I'll put it aside. I'll let it sit in a drawer in my Baun office for a couple days. And then I'll come back to it, giving the longhand its keystrokes. If it still makes sense at that point, my recipe for happiness will remain intact. But if it's just a bunch of mindless dribble, like Logan's initial sentences about leg attachments, I'll consider my attempt at "being a writer" complete.

This seems an unlikely outcome. Cramps aside, I'm happy with the entry so far. And I doubt my standards have just been lowered by brain damage. But even if that were the case – if this turns out to be the worst shit I've ever written – the crash would still have been totally worth it.

Normally, as we go through life, we're completely unaware that any moment may be our last. Not that we're always on the brink of death; that's far too boring to discuss. And scarcely is it even true. What I mean is that any experience we have may be the last time we ever have it.

The last time you perform some stupid trick off a diving board. The last time you play catch with your dad. The last time you sleep with someone for the first time. The last time you see a person whom you once knew as a best friend. Not because that friend died, but because people drift apart. At some point, every experience stops repeating. There's a last time for everything. And it's almost always a mystery as it's happening.

There is very little in life that's more tragic than that. Because we have no idea we should be making the most of these moments until years later when they're already lost. And we're looking over our shoulders, remembering them in sadness. There's never any fanfare. Those experiences are just gone. And you keep aging and aging while everything is slowly and quietly taken away from you.

I don't have a lot of time until I leave Stockton. Three days and a few hours. I know I'll be collecting a lot of lasts during this time. There are people I'll never see again. There are experiences I'll never have again. And I'm pretty sure this was one of them.

I bet I've taken the golf carts out more than a hundred times since I first got to campus. It feels like such a small thing, but these little pleasure cruises have been a huge part of my life here. And it seems reasonable to assume I'll never do it again.

I can't say I knew that going in. When Cheryl and I were at the front desk searching for paperclips, I hadn't considered that this might be the last time I'd ever "utilize" them.



Not until I was tucking myself into a pill bug cannonball did it seem like a real finale. And now that it's over, I do feel like I made the most of it.

If I were allowed to choose, I'd rather my golf cart phase didn't have to end. But it did. So the best I could ask for is a good ending. Spectacular enough to be remembered and memorable enough to deserve its place. And I feel like I got that. So when I'm older, I know it won't be sadness that's looking over my shoulder. And that by itself is worth the headache and the back pain and skinned knees. Or, in Cheryl's case, skinned face.

Okay, now it's time to put my journal down. I only have a few days left. I don't want to spend that time scribbling on notepads. Plus, everyone is dozing off. I should try to keep them up. For their sakes as well as mine; it's going to start feeling pretty lonely in here if I'm sharing the crash pads with a bunch of corpses. Well, two corpses and a sleeping freshman (there's no way Kate has a concussion). But Cheryl is the only one I really want to wake up. All bandaged and bleeding and pussing, she looks wonderful. And the fanfare of any final memory is hardly complete without a little dancing on the roof. So I'm off to take this battered mummy up the hatch.