

## ***Minor Mensch***

Volume 4, Chapter 3

### **Baun Fitness Center and Main Gym**

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Monday, November 6, 2006 at 12:48 p.m.

I've been back in Stockton for eleven weeks now and I feel as though I haven't properly described my little region of campus (which is mostly just Baun Fitness Center and Main Gym).

Maybe a little bit, but I certainly haven't given geography its due.

Every medieval-themed fantasy book ever published (about a flock of elves, a couple centaurs, and an ancient sorcerer) has an elaborate map of some invented land stretching across the first two pages.

I'm not going to do that here.

In fantasy lit, I understand the purpose. There's no better way to capture the distance from Rohan to The Shire (or whatever). But Pacific is a major university. You can find a campus map online.

Despite how easy that would be, however, no one will do it. No one will try to enhance his or her reading experience by Googling "University of the Pacific campus map."

And this is fine. Because I wouldn't either.

But I do worry that, if anyone is reading this journal (I'm not sure that anyone actually is), and that person is not a Pacific student, a portion of the narrative will be lost. Or at least less clear.

So for *that* reader (imaginary though he or she may be), here's a very general description of where my life takes place:

Baun Fitness Center is the student gym. And to those students, it's just "Baun." Nobody says "Baun Fitness Center." So if I'm talking about Baun, I mean the gym where everyone works out. Students and faculty both. And a few valued alumni (like William Cornman).

That is to say that Baun is a popular building. And it's shaped like a big donut. The loop of that donut contains all of the exercise equipment. The donut's hole has the front desk, both locker rooms, and two offices: mine and Ryan Fetzer's. Although Fetzer has a real staff position (and I'm just a lowly graduate assistant), I have the better office. His is small and office-like. Mine is huge and has a fifteen-foot mirrored window facing the free weights section.

Connected to the north end of the building is the Pacific Outdoor Connection. Nobody calls it "the Pacific Outdoor Connection" though. They say "the POC." (Not *pock*. They spell it out: P.O.C. They just don't put dots after the letters when writing it.)

Andy Fields (another non-student professional staff) runs the POC. Fields is an important guy. For a lot of reasons, but the reason that's most important to me is that he's the one who actually taught me how to do homelessness. Not how to *be* homeless, but how to really *do* it. How to be sneaky, when to be adventurous. It was Andy Fields who taught me that homelessness was a realistic option. These were last year's lessons. And because of those lessons (and for other equally venerable reasons), he'll probably be a recurring name throughout this journal. Probably.

His POC has a 36' rock wall and a giant garage where people can rent things like kayaks, belaying harnesses, surfboards, snowshoes, and tents.

To the north of Baun (to the north of the building itself, after maybe sixty feet of concrete and dirt) is the Calaveras River. This is a disgusting stream that flows through campus, collecting (to the point of hoarding) things like shopping carts. And probably a few human bodies. Maybe one a year.

On the other side of the river (across the "Wood Bridge", which is right next to Baun and is not made out of wood) is the north end of campus (obviously).

The north end of campus has some old, dilapidated buildings (the townhouses), some medium-aged buildings (e.g., the physical plant), and some newer buildings (mostly belonging to the physical therapy and pharmacy departments). And then there's a

Mormon church, which does own its own property, but that property is completely enclosed by campus (like the pus core of an abscess).

I rarely go across the river.

To the west of Baun is a bunch of pavement. It's just a big parking lot. If you go west far enough (across all of that pavement), you'll get to the abandoned football stadium. The field portion of this stadium has hip-high grass. At the moment, one could do crop circles in it. The Grounds Department only mows it for special events (a youth soccer tournament, a concert, etc.). There haven't been any special events in a while.

To the east of Baun is the giant field where the pow-wow was held. When there are no pow-wows (or other such events), and if it's sunny out, this is the favorite spot for boys to pretend that they know how to play guitar in public. They sit cross-legged on the lawn and make the kinds of noises that should only be used to oppress enemies. This lawn is also where scantily dressed girls lie face down on towels, looking at (but not reading) an open book. These girls are pretending to study while also pretending to tan, positioning themselves in such a way that the fake guitar players can conveniently stare at their already-tanned gluteal folds. This field probably leads to a lot of sex. A few abortions. Fewer full-term pregnancies.

To the south of Baun: more buildings.

The first building is Bannister hall. It looks like one of those standard two-by-eight Lego bricks. It's just a long, two-story rectangle. And it's where all the "Greek" student life offices are. If you have some sort of housing question, that's where you go. Being homeless, I have no business there. So I go through life pretending that building doesn't exist.

The next building, which looks practically identical to Bannister Hall (another Lego brick; the two sitting parallel to each other), is Owen Hall. This is where the Dave Brubeck Institute is. Brubeck (class of '42) is Pacific's most famous musical alumnus. And one of my musical heroes. His eponymous quartet sits in Owen Hall playing live jazz practically 24 hours a day. I've never been inside of the building, but its windows are routinely open and nothing gladdens my day as much as my walks past it.

I've decided the sole purpose of the Dave Brubeck Quartet (or whoever it is that's playing in there) is to supply my walks with personal theme music. The kind of music that would announce my entrance into an auditorium and continue to play as I marched

down the aisle to a WrestleMania ring. Disgusting fans would be screaming and I'd be just about to do something spectacular.

But I'm never actually headed toward a ring. And I'm scarcely on the verge of a spectacle. I'm just walking to Main Gym.

Main Gym is the very next building. And, owing to the reasons I just described, I always arrive with a rush of adrenaline.

Upon entering the front door, you're facing the entrance to a giant basketball court. The court begins about twenty feet in front of you and it looks like it's straight out of Hoosiers. Every time I go into the building, I expect to be greeted by Gene Hackman. Or to at least see him in the distance with a gym whistle caught on his necktie. It hasn't happened yet. Instead, I'm greeted by a life size black and white photograph of an elderly Amos Alonzo Stagg wearing Hammer pants.

To the left of the court entrance is a weird bunker. For some reason its floor sits a couple feet lower than the floors in every other room in the building. It's like a sunken living room except that it has half a dozen first generation Sun Microsystems computers permanently running, keeping the temperature at around 100 degrees. Nobody ever goes in there. It's always locked. I've been in it once and I feel like that was the only time the door had been opened since installing the then-brand-new computers.

To the right of the court entrance is a staircase to the second level. That's where all of the offices are located for the professors in the Sport Sciences department. There's nothing else on that level; just half a dozen offices surrounding a reception area. And if you walk into that reception area, you'll hear a very hoarse "can I help you?" escape the cigarette-scented mouth of Deb Nolan, a really sweet older lady with a fried-frizzy afro version of Addie Horton hair. The bowl of candy on her desk typically sees as much action as her keyboard, but when her keyboard is being used it's being announced. Announced by the percussive bursts of long, thick fingernails striking depressible plastic. No skin on *those* keys.

On the perimeter of the lower level (south side of the basketball court) are all of the Sport Sciences classrooms, Van Ness's physiology lab, and the locker rooms. The entire building smells like dusty mildew and the locker rooms have gang showers.

The rest of campus has nothing to do with me. All of my classes are in Main Gym. And all of my work is in Baun. And while walking back and forth between buildings (which I

do several times a day), I'm always uplifted by my personal quartet's theme music. It almost makes me want to wear a wrestler's costume. I often close my eyes as I pass. And once in a while, I do imagine myself headed toward the ring. And I wonder: what kind of a wrestler would I be?

I imagine a little bit further and I decide.

I would go by the name of Samson. And everyone I wrestle would constantly try to cut my hair. And when my biggest rival finally succeeded, I'd grow so weak that I couldn't defend myself. And he'd proceed to beat me so badly that I'd be hospitalized. A week later, some behind-the-scenes footage would emerge of my lesser rivals showing up at the hospital, finding me in my hospital bed, and beating me even more (in the spirit of previously-impossible-but-now-effortless revenge). That's when I would announce my retirement, with every breakable bone in my body broken. Or shattered. Or whatever sounds even more dramatic than that. I'd quit wrestling, disappear for a long time, regrow my hair, and then make a comeback with serious Rapunzel locks. And the strength to match. And that's when I would unveil my new special move, which I perfected while in hiding. Every good wrestler has some sort of special move (like Razor Ramone with his Razor's Edge), but mine won't make any sense. It'll be called "The Hayride." And now every time I thwart an opponent's attempt to cut my hair, the audience will begin to chant "Do The Hayride! Do The Hayride!"

And I'll do just that. I'll grab...

Hold on. I'll be right back.

Monday, November 6 at 2:03 p.m.

As "Manager of Baun Fitness Center" (inflated title of my graduate assistantship), it is my duty to enforce breaches of the dress code. I shouldn't have to do this, as the rules of proper gym attire are actually posted all over the gym, but sometimes people can't read.

Apparently Dave Brubeck was unable to read music when he graduated. Who knows if that's actually true, but even if it is, I would argue that's different from being unable to read the very simple English sentences in a dress code.

Five minutes ago, while writing my last journal entry (just before typing “I’ll be right back”), I looked out of my office window and saw a student – a male student with an awful lot of breast tissue – breaching that code.

He wasn’t all *that* fat; he just stored his fat so poorly. And so grossly, as revealed by his exposed breasts.

Remember Mike, the guy who interrupted my journal entry about the Engines (Panama Joe and company) in order to tell me he wanted to video tape himself rafting all semester (or whatever it was)?

Him.

That’s who I just saw prancing around the weight room, tits flapping unabashedly.

I issued one of those “do I really have to do this?” sighs, typed my “I’ll be right back” sentence, and then left the comfort of my unlit office/voyeur palace.

“Excuse me”, I said to Mike’s bare back.

No response.

My second call was much louder, though still at his back: “Hey, Mike without a shirt!”

He spun around to face me, jiggled some, and then made eye contact.

I found myself engaging a set of very startled eyes. He was apparently surprised that I knew his name. And he didn’t recognize me from our previous encounter at the POC.

This is when I noticed that the only thing he was wearing above his waist was a crucifix. I found this funny, though I didn’t know why. I must have thought about it for ten seconds before realizing I had been making eye contact with him the whole time. Silently. And I was still making eye contact. As soon as I realized this, the situation grew uncomfortable. So I interrupted our mutual silence: “You need a shirt.”

“What?”

“Yeah, you need to wear a shirt while you’re here.”

“That’s bullshit!”

“Okay, well you still need to put your shirt on.”

Before I’d finished saying that sentence, I’d already started to turn my back on him. I wanted him to know that I was unwilling to participate in a conversation with a floppy-breasted man indoors. If this were the beach, and I was asking him for money, or hoping someone might put sunscreen on my back, maybe. But we’re in Baun. And I wanted to sit in my office and relax. And I couldn’t do that as long as his tits were out.

Monday, November 6 at 8:16 p.m. I still haven’t figured out what I found so weird about Mike’s bare-torso’d crucifix. I wonder if he thinks he’s made in the image of God. And his god’s nipples point straight at the ground too.

It doesn’t matter. What matters is that Win came by this afternoon. Late afternoon. I was sitting in my office, wondering (to no illumination) about Mike when my door opened.

That’s how I knew it was Win. Or at least how I would have known if I hadn’t been looking. He’s the only one who doesn’t knock. He and I have never discussed this, but it bothers me when people actually *do* knock. Because then I have to shout “come in!” Or, worse, I have to go open the door myself, which means either sliding my chair ten feet or getting out of it. I only have to do that for the extremely timid though. Like a freshman who is applying for a job. For the hired-already class, the most annoying thing they do is, after I shout “come in!”, they announce who it is. “It’s Megan” or whatever.

There are only a few people who do this. And only one is *really* annoying. What makes her more annoying than the others is the way she announces her name. Her voice is always muffled, sounding as though her lips were pressed against the door when she said it.

What she’s actually doing is no better. She cups her tiny Hawaiian hands into a tiny Hawaiian megaphone, presses it against the door, and speaks through the hole, trying to communicate her name to me quietly enough that the exercisers around her won’t hear it.

“It’s Christy”, she whisper-shouts.

“I know. I can see you. I said come in. What the fuck?”

People seem to forget that, from inside looking out, that huge mirror is a window. And while that window only really faces the free weights, the walls of that section are covered in regular mirrors. And this means that, from my desk, I can practically see the entire donut of Baun. So I can definitely see who it is that’s standing outside of my unlocked office door, negotiating an entrance through cupped hands.

All of that aside, if I didn’t want people to come in, I would lock the door. So I wish people would take a lesson from Win and just open it whenever they’re ready to enter. You’re not going to catch me off guard. I spend the majority of my office hours staring out the window, studying the people in my company.

The remaining hours are spent in activities like the one Win and I did this afternoon (after he showed up and walked into my office without knocking).

Before I explain what we did, I want you to go to YouTube (or whatever the future site is that people use to watch music videos for free... if music videos still exist). Bring up the Stellar Kart song “Life is Good.” And then watch the official music video.

Actually do this. Don’t read any more until you’ve watched it. Start to finish. I’ll wait.

...

Okay, now that you’re done watching it, you must agree with me that our species has never created anything sadder or more embarrassing. Or even comparably sad and embarrassing.

“Life is good, *ETERNAL LIFE IS BETTER!* Life is good, *ETERNAL LIFE IS BETTER!*”

When I hear this song (and see the video that’s marketing it), I feel nothing but vicarious humiliation.

It’s not just that the video is a dreadful string of clichés (the “musicians” are always strutting through a gate or carrying skateboards around or jumping in place with a fashionable forearm band or leaning in to share a mic or bending toward the camera to sing a lyric with eyes open way too wide, etc.). That’s not the worst part. All of that is very bad and humiliating, but the worst part happens ten seconds into the song. And then again at forty seconds, 1:24, and finally at 2:21. Those are the scenes in which the



band members are driving an SUV. And wearing their seatbelts. If eternal life is so goddamn good, why are you buckled up? Shouldn't your hankering to arrive have you engaging in riskier behaviors?

There's just so much sadness and insecurity here. "If I say it over and over and over, if I chant it and I shout it and I sing it, maybe I'll start to believe it myself: life is good, *eternal life is better*, life is good, *eternal life is better!*" The sadness is difficult to bear.

But this story does have a happy ending (you'll be happy to know).

My job title ("gym manager") comes with a variety of perks and permissions. These were granted to me under the assumption that I wouldn't abuse them.

Obviously I can't be trusted in that way.

And if I focus my abuses just right, I've realized that I can play the role of an emotional alchemist.

With a little bit of creativity, I can take the entirety of Stellar Kart's sadness – the whole, hulking lot of it – and transmute it into a very uplifting experience.

And that's just what I did (with Win; we did it as a team).

Here's how:

The speakers throughout the entire gym are controlled by a receiver that sits on a cabinet right behind me... in an office nobody can see into.

Because today is a Monday (the busiest day of the week), 5:30 p.m. brought about seventy (maybe eighty) students into the gym. And a few professors. And one William Cornman.

Win and I were sitting in my office at the time.

We locked the door.

And then we hooked my computer up to the receiver, stringing the wires a few feet across the office, from the desk to the cabinet.

We turned the volume dial on the receiver up to about twice its usual level.

We loaded the Stellar Kart video.

And we hit play.

Every person in the weight room – William, the faculty, and the undergrads – was demonstrably annoyed. And so were the employees of the gym. The people I “manage.” They were annoyed too, but what were they supposed to do about it? They were aware that control over the music happens in my office. And they’ve grown to, maybe not tolerate, but at least expect my behavior.

As soon as the song ended, Win and I wiped away our tears, turned the volume up even louder, and hit play again.

At this point, the annoyed people became angry.

None so angry that they complained though. They just pointed at the ceiling (as if toward the speakers, which aren’t actually in the ceiling) and mouthed sentences like “what is this fucking shit?”

I’m sure they weren’t actually *mouth*ing those words as much as they were *yell*ing them. But there’s no way anyone could hear their yelling over the volume of Stellar Kart.

Still, the fact that nobody was complaining meant Win and I hadn’t pushed it far enough. Not yet.

So, once the song had finished its second time through, we turned the volume up even louder (as loud as it would go) and just played the first fourteen seconds of the song (“life is good, eternal life is better, life is good, eternal life is better, life is good, eternal life is better, life is good, eternal life is better”). Over and over.

As soon as it reached second fifteen, we’d drag the progress bar back to the beginning and start it over. Sometimes all the way to zero. Sometimes just halfway. We wanted to loop it in the choppiest, most abrasive way possible. Not only were we playing the worst part of the song, and repeating it over and over, but we made it sound as though it were some sort of glitch – an electronic malfunction – that had it skipping in that way.

Within a minute, people were complaining at the front desk. Mostly students, a couple faculty.

But people weren't complaining adamantly enough (Win and I decided), and we couldn't make it play any louder; the dial didn't turn any farther. Nor could we make the skipping any choppier. We were already doing our damndest to make the experience for the exercisers as unpleasant as possible.

The only thing that we thought might worsen it was to fast-forward to one of the choruses in which the lyrics were not being spoken, but yelled (neither, I would argue, are sung).

So we started clicking around at the end of the song until we found the point at which the final chorus begins (1:59). "Eternal life is better!" was now being shouted at the exercisers. Unlike the opening chorus, the speakers couldn't handle it. They were distorting with the volume. And just like the opening chorus, Win and I were clicking all over the place, looping it as indelicately as we could.

Almost immediately, a line had formed at the front desk.

I have a hunch these people were not waiting to check out racquetball equipment. It seems a more reasonable assumption that every one of them was waiting his or her turn to issue the same complaint as everyone else.

I have no idea what they were being told – how their complaints were being received – but after what must have been thirty more seconds, William had grown sick of it. And he decided to take matters into his own, meaty hands.

The joke is that, if the volume wasn't deafening, speakers distorting as we looped the worst clips of the song, I bet William would have loved it. I know no soul more evangelical. But his meaty fist came knocking.

I moved for the door while Win draped a shirt over the computer, his hand still on the mouse pad (beneath the shirt), making some attempt to hide what it was we were doing.

As soon as I turned the handle, William finished opening the door for me, pushing his way into my office while shouting "what is going on out there?!"

“Pardon?” I ask William as Win positions his body in front of the wires, trying to block William’s view (not realizing he was going to actually enter the office).

“Do you *hear* this?” William asks, sounding pissed.

“Is it the music?”

“Yes, it’s the music. It’s skipping all around and it’s been on the same song for fifteen minutes!”

“Really?”

“It’s *awful*. Come out and listen to it!”

“Yeah, I mean I can hear it. I see what you’re saying.”

“No, get out here and listen; both of you.”

The problem is, if Win and I went out to listen to it, the song would immediately stop “skipping all around” and, shortly after, it would go completely silent. Because it’s a YouTube video. And that’s what happens when YouTube videos end. And this one is only two and a half minutes long. And at that time, we were repeating the final chorus.

I looked at Win, unsure of what to say.

Win was much more sure of himself: “Yeah, it’s coming out of Fetzer’s office. The same thing happened last week. He bumped some wires or something. He probably did it again.”

I gave Win a look, with half a smile, that was meant to communicate “oh my god that was brilliant. Terrible, sure. Blame it on the quadriplegic assistant director around the corner. The hardest working, most honest person we know. Terrible. But redirecting blame to a guy who isn’t even in the building at the moment? Good thinking.” That’s what my look was supposed to communicate. Win understood it word for word (or so I understood his reciprocal look to mean).

I looked back at William. “I’ll head over there and get it fixed” I told him.

I paused for a moment, and then continued: "I mean, I'm sure it was an accident. He's probably in there right now trying to figure out what he did wrong."

Win continued to click on the progress bar, blindly, maintaining the skipping under the cover of the shirt.

As I left the office, William followed me. A few feet into the weight room, he pointed at the ceiling and shouted in my ear: "Do you hear this?!"

Shouting into my ear was the only way I could have heard him, so I took it as a rhetorical question. I smiled and rolled my eyes. But then I remembered who it was that was asking me the question. A man to whom (and from whom) no question is rhetorical. He was waiting for an answer.

I mouthed the word "outrageous" at him. And then I started walking toward Fetzer's office.

William began to follow me, giving the impression that he'd like to have a word with Fetzer as well.

I held my hand out and mouthed "I got it."

If William had followed me all the way, he would have realized I was going to be entering an empty office and doing literally nothing in it. Nothing at all just long enough to seem like a reasonable time to fix an electronic malfunction in some stereo equipment. At which point Win would stop clicking around on the Stellar Kart video and reconnected the radio.

William smiled, shook his head, and sliced a scolding finger through the air several times (like a little sword). Not at me; just at the situation.

I took it to mean "we had better get this fixed." And I took him to be serious.

He then turned and walked back to his personal training client (a man with a violent dog who refuses to put it down even though it routinely bites him hard; one time in the throat, which nearly killed him).

I walked over to Fetzer's office, went in, and closed the door behind me. Win waited about a minute... and then reconnected the radio.

I left Fetzer's office.

And on the walk back to mine, I realized I had just discovered my new favorite activity. My new favorite way to spend my middle-evenings.

Wednesday, November 8 at 2:33am. I just finished using the treadmill in Van Ness's physiology lab. I used it for half an hour. Maybe forty minutes.

It's not a normal treadmill; it looks homemade. It has carpet all over it and it's surrounded by metal beams that look like they were bought at Lowe's. Van Ness probably built it himself. But it's sturdy. And it's huge. It must be five feet across and ten feet long, with the belt taking up most of that (the rest of it being what's carpeted).

Plus, the whole thing stands about two and a half feet off the ground, so if you slip and fall (and go crashing off the back like Charlie did a month and a half ago in Baun), you really hit the linoleum hard. And you can hit it fast because the belt can spin at nearly twenty miles per hour.

But I wasn't going that fast. I was just walking. Walking while reading bad novels, trying to make myself tired. And the reason I'm trying to walk myself to sleep in Main Gym (as opposed to Baun, where I usually do that) is because I got a new "office" today.

Van Ness gave me a key to the little sunken living room. The hundred degree Sun Microsystem bunker. He did this purely in support of my homelessness. He told me that as he was putting the key in my hand.

The first thing I did was unplug the computers. Then, while the room was cooling, I moved in a couch and a fridge (both of which came from Van Ness as well... also in support of my homelessness).

This is a serious life enhancer. Baun was getting hard to sleep in. And sleeping in was impossible in Baun. Here, I actually have my own private bedroom. Real luxury among the homeless class.

Wednesday, November 8 at 5:49 a.m.

I don't have my own private bedroom.

At least not in the way I thought I did a couple hours ago. A couple minutes ago, I was awakened by the janitor of Main Gym. Yenko. He's from Chile.

And apparently, as part of his Main Gym custodial duties, he cleans this room. I don't know why; it hasn't been used in years. But maybe that's the point. If he spends ten seconds in here, he can claim his custodian'd domain to contain this square footage too.

Whatever the case, Yenko uses the words "my friend" where everyone else would use a name.

"Hello, my friend!"

"I'm sorry, my friend."

"Goodbye, my friend."

"Etc., my friend."

The first three are exact quotations from our conversation this morning. The one that just happened. At a quarter to six. The rest of the conversation was mostly in Spanish. I think. I don't think that because I recognized the vocabulary, but because he told me he was from Chile and I know the Spanish conquest of Chile is something that happened.

But the little bits of English he worked in gave me the impression that he understands why I'm sleeping here. Or he thinks he does. "Life is challenge" he said to me. And I liked it. I liked hearing those words from him. It's as though he cares about me when I know there's no way he could. Or at least there's no way I could in his position. But when Yenko addresses me with a "my friend", I nearly believe him.

His whole head tilts forward and lowers about an inch before the words come. And when they arrive, they're always coupled with eye contact and a companionable tone. The whole package is very persuasive.

As soon as I heard his key scraping its way into the door, I leapt up in a panic. I had no idea who it could possibly be, which meant that I was certain I had just been caught by someone who matters.

I couldn't put my shirt on in time, but I threw off the blanket, flipped up my laptop screen, and started pretending to work.

Yenko opened the door, turned the light on, and made eye contact with me. And he immediately knew that I was faking it. Because he's not an idiot.

My computer was in the process of turning on when he saw me, shirtless in the dark, with a blanket around my ankles, typing to a black screen.

After a very brief and uncomfortable staring contest, "hello, my friend!"

"Good morning, I'm just... um..." At this point, that signature noise Windows makes when it boots up happens. And it seems unnecessarily loud. I finished my sentence anyway: "I'm just trying to get a little work done. Getting started early, you know?"

He pretended to believe me. In Spanish. But he sprinkled in a few English sentences (e.g., "I'm sorry, my friend").

After another minute (the minute during which I found out he was from Chile), he said "goodbye, my friend" and closed the door behind him.

He's out in the lobby right now, vacuuming. And I'm imagining all of the thoughts he must be thinking. Among them, "boy do I feel sorry for that guy. No shirt, breathing heavily, a blanket at his feet, typing into a blank computer."

Something like that. Except that he's thinking that thought in Spanish. And while doing so, he accepts me for who I am (the creepy, homeless guy who is sleeping in his building). And that part feels nice. That's the part I'll take with me today (once the sun comes up).

At that point, I'll decide that I'm happy to have a Yenko in my life. I just wish I had him in my life in a different way. Or at another hour.



Wednesday, November 8 at 12:10 p.m.

The morning crowd in Baun is very different from the afternoon and evening crowds. It's mostly staff and faculty. Fewer students. So at about 9 a.m., I hooked my computer up to the receiver and put *Do You Know the Muffin Man* on repeat for ten minutes.

I had it playing at a normal volume. Maybe a little louder than normal, but not much. Just a quarter turn or so on the dial.

But I still got complaints. Several of them. And one compliment.

It seems the morning crowd is a much more vocal group compared to those who do their exercising in the evenings.

The complaints were all delivered to the desk staff, who took notes. And then they gave those notes to me.

I couldn't be bothered to read them. The carbon-duplicated office memo pad paragraphs about "prefers different music" have already arrived in the recycle bin.

The compliment was delivered straight to me though. And I listened.

It came from Fred Muskal, a professor in the School of Education who loves to tinker with electronics. If he could be paid to play with things like circuits, that's what he would have done as a career (instead of teaching courses with self-reflective titles like Foundations for Teaching).

He was one of my personal training clients last year. He must be somewhere in his sixties, has skin that appears as though it came from Saudi Arabia, but hasn't seen much sun lately, and he's as sweet as he is rotund (a lot of both).

Years ago, he was in a car while it was crashing. As a result of that, his body is now filled with metal plates and shafts. Most of them are in his feet and shins. The higher up you go, the lower the concentration of intra-body alloys.

He waddles around the weight room in such a jovial mood that it makes me think he's a couple glasses into a good time.

It was earlier this morning, as I was leaving my office to go pee, when he waddled up to me to say that he found the humor in the music. (He apparently remembered that I'm the one who controls it.) And then he went on to tell me "that's precisely what this gym needs: character."

I assured him that character is precisely (and the extent of) what I was giving it.

"For that reason alone", he said, "you're earning your salary."

He must know my salary is only \$8,000 a year. But even at that rate, it seems a generous compensation for "character." Still, I took the compliment, immediately feeling better about myself as a person.

Like Yenko, Fred Muskal is someone I'm now glad to have in my life.

Wednesday, November 8 at 6:40 p.m.

There was a rock wall event about a week ago. I didn't write about it at the time because I didn't find it to be worth writing about (at the time).

Now I do.

It was the annual Halloween-themed night climb. They do the same thing every year. Andy Fields doesn't. He doesn't set this up, doesn't care about it, doesn't even go. His staff puts it together. They spend all day decorating the POC (mostly the rock wall portion of it) to be "spooky" (as accomplished by store-bought "spookiness").<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> By "store-bought spookiness", I mean paper cutouts of black cats and jack-o'-lanterns. And sheets of really thin plastic with "creepy" artwork on them: bats, ghosts, tombstones, skulls, etc. Sometimes a witch silhouetted in front of a full moon. Hunks of white cotton are stretched all over the room as an attempt at some likeness of spider webs. In December that same cotton is used as snow. Fruit punch can be ladled into your black or orange plastic cup (which matches the really cheap breath-filled black and orange balloons) out of a one-foot-tall plastic cauldron. And an old, scratched up CD of "eerie Halloween noises" is playing in the background. This means, when the CD isn't skipping, you can hear the creaking of doors opening and closing, the creaking of footsteps on a hardwood floor, the sound of an industrially-thick hoist chain being dragged across that same floor, and a middle-aged man periodically fake-laughing.

And then, once all of the decorating is done, and they've decided the mood is right, they shut the lights off and open the wall for some late-night climbing.

To some people, this sounds exciting. But I just find events like this so sad and stupid. And, like Fields, I wouldn't even go... but for the fact that it was happening in what is basically my house. What else was I going to do?

Win, who thought of it as stupid too, came with me.

When we got there, we realized ours was a minority opinion (as evidenced by how popular the event was). The moment we saw how many people were in attendance (an awful lot... a god awful lot), we got to work at driving them away. And within an hour, we had managed to drive every single one of them away (except for the staff members) with things like unconventional cheering, inappropriate spotting techniques, etc.

The only non-staff member who didn't leave the building feeling irritated (or somehow violated) was Taylor (staff, sure, but not POC staff).

Taylor stayed the entire time, purely for the comedy. She was just there for the show. And she spent every moment of that show weeping in laughter. By the end of the hour, her face looked like it had been for a swim. And right it should; Win and I were being hysterical. The type of hysteria that should have dislodged her uterus clean out. She should have left the event that night with a prolapsed hunk of meat dangling from her vagina.

While I'm more than flattered at how riveted she was by our jokes, something happened this afternoon that makes me wonder about Taylor (and her prolapsed meat).

She told on me.

She told Dan Shipp (i.e., the assistant vice president) this: "Courtney drove everyone out of the rock wall event with his pranks."

Those were her exact words, spoken to Dan, right in front of me.

There were half a dozen people (Dan, Taylor, Bryan, Fetz, Beej, and me) sitting in a meeting, four of them waiting patiently as Dan and I went back and forth on budget logistics, and then Taylor interrupted that conversation with this exact quotation:

“Dan, I gotta be honest, there was a Halloween night climb a little while ago, and it was great, everyone had a great time, but...”

Dan interrupts her: “Does this have to do with the budget?”

“No, but Courtney drove everyone out of the rock wall event with his pranks.”

Dan gives his head a good cocking, likening his cranial posture to that of a puppy who has just detected a high pitched noise.

He angles that cocked head first at me and then back at Taylor.

While I’m feeling caught extremely far off guard, Taylor interprets Dan’s gesture as an invitation to explain one of those pranks in detail:

“He rolls up his shorts so that his shirt covers them and it looks like he isn’t wearing any pants. And then he goes up to the students and asks them if they have any paper towels.”

While she didn’t really explain it very well<sup>2</sup>, Dan was caught about as far off guard as I was. He and I appeared to be comparably stunned.

Luckily, Dan likes me. Or at least he *did*, but still likes me more than he likes Taylor (his loathing for Taylor is probably 30% sexism, 70% Taylor-specific). So all he said was “all right”, and then we got back to our discussion about the budget.

That was at 1:00 p.m. The meeting was over at 2:00. It hasn’t come up since. From Dan. It has come up from me though. At Taylor.

The conversation began with something like “what the fuck, Taylor?!”

“What?”

“Are you serious? You fucking told on me! You weren’t even prompted. It came out of nowhere.”

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<sup>2</sup> The comedy is not in the question itself (“do you have any paper towels?”), but in the panic of its delivery, as though something tragic has just happened to a twenty-six year old’s unclothed private parts.

“Oh come on, Dan loves you.”

“Not anymore. Christ! Why would you do that?”

“Courtney, I could tell on you for something every day and it wouldn’t matter.”

“Please tell me that’s not something you’re going to start doing.”

“Well you do.”

“What?”

“You’re the one who did it.”

“Taylor, these are really hard to understand sentences. Are you talking about the rock wall stuff? I’m the one who did *that*?”

“Yes.”

“So now it’s your job to make sure Dan knows about it?”

“I was just telling the truth.”

“But nobody asked you for the truth. That’s the thing. You interrupted a conversation about budgets to bring it up.”

The argument went on for several more minutes, Taylor defending herself, believing what she did was right.

Maybe it was. But if she was worried about the integrity of holiday-specific event programming at the POC, she should have said something at the event itself. “Hey Courtney, go easy on those freshmen; they look scared of you” (or some such).

Giggling yourself wet, shoving your uterus back into your insides, and then tattling is not a way to enhance my affection for you.

That said, I can’t think of anything that would make me stop liking Taylor altogether. She’s a total sweetheart and I adore her. But this definitely tested those bonds.

To get over how annoyed I was, I decided to have another go at my new favorite middle-evening activity.

I tried to find the CD of “eerie Halloween noises”, but it apparently left the building when the decorations were torn down. So instead, I improvised.

I connected my computer to the gym’s receiver, loaded an audio file of a meowing cat, and played it several times in a row. Then I clicked back to the radio.

I waited a minute, then bats: weeweeweeweewee! (That’s the sound of bats, but with flapping noises too). Then back to the radio.

I knew of no other Halloween animals, so I just moved on (zoos, jungles, whatever).

Seagulls, a couple rounds of monkeys, a rooster, a dying jackrabbit (which is apparently what hunters use to attract other animals), etc.

Everyone in the weight room appeared to be confused by this, but not confused enough. “Maybe”, they seemed to think, “this classic rock station is playing animal noises in the middle of every song to promote some sort of animal awareness week.”

I was starting to feel cheered up, but to reach full cheer I needed the students to be totally aware that what was happening was not normal. So I gave up on the animal noises and played the alphabet song.

*A-B-C-D-E-F-G... H-I-J-K-LMNOP... Q-R-S... T-U-V... W-X... Y and Z... Now I know my ABCs, next time won't you sing with me?*

At *LMNOP*, my door swung open.

It was Taylor. She, like Win, didn’t knock.

While this would have ordinarily pleased me, she barged in so clumsily that she tripped over the wires connecting my computer to the receiver. And broke one of the jacks.

Did she say something like “oh my god, I’m so sorry!” after breaking it?

No. Because, again, she thinks she’s in the right.

“That should be a sign that you shouldn’t be playing the ABCs in the weight room” she told me.

She broke it though. It’s broken.

In a completely guiltless tone, she then asked me if I knew where Fetzer was.

“No.”

“He isn’t here?”

“What do you mean?”

“Fetzer. He isn’t here?”

“Are you asking if I’m hiding him in my cabinets? Like he’s Anne Frank?”

“Fine” she said, sounding pissed.

And she left.

I shut the door behind her and sat down. And stared at my ruined electronics while reflecting on my day.

Maybe I should see if Fred Muskal can fix this. Given his affection for both electronics and high-spirited character, I’m sure he’d be happy to lend himself to such a cause.

In the meantime, I guess I’ll just go back to Main Gym where I can be with Yenke. Someone else who “gets me.”

Though I do wish Yenke would knock. Because that office has no windows. If I want to look out, I have to peer through the crack beneath the door. And the smell of dust and mildew gets pretty fierce down there.