

Moron: Chapter 1

1

On John Moron's nineteenth birthday, his mother dropped him off for his freshman year of college with all the emotion that would accompany giving someone a lift to work. No tears. No big goodbye.

"No big goodbye?"

"Oh, I'll see you in a month for Columbus Day. Then I'll see you the month after that for Thanksgiving, then...."

Moron supposed she had a point. They were only a two-hour drive apart. But still. He watched this woman cry at MasterCard commercials, listening to the *Beauty and the Beast* soundtrack, and once during an episode of *Smallville*. Now her only child, her baby-boy, was leaving the nest and she didn't seem bothered. Maybe she was just excited to not do his laundry for a few months. Maybe she was sick of eating Jr. Bacon Cheeseburgers from Wendy's for dinner. Maybe she had some old pervert coming over to have sexual intercourse with her. Whatever the reason, she was gone and Moron was left in an empty dorm room. Empty for only a moment though, only long enough for a deep breath.

Moron couldn't remember what answers he put on the roommate questionnaire, but they were clearly the wrong ones. Any algorithm that spit this guy out needed to be deleted. He met him for the first time at orientation and their original encounter left a lot of room for improvement. Will Cavendish was his name. He had a tumbleweed for hair and it moved whenever his eyebrows did and his eyebrows moved up and down every time he talked. Moron never once saw him without his hands on his hips, and so there he would stand in the middle of their room, the wiry bastard, throwing the whole vibe off, cooing like a pigeon. This was the first thing he ever said to Moron:

"So, did your grandfather fight in the war?"

It was like that all the time. All of his greetings were questions reserved for deep friendships or maybe never.

"Yeah actually he did. Did yours?"

"Yep! Got killed over there!"

At overnight orientation as they lay in their beds Moron heard Cavendish's whole backstory. The thing he was most proud of, the thing he never shut the fuck up about, was that he had been a ballboy for some basketball team in the Pacific Northwest. Moron couldn't remember which one. Moron hated basketball, but this didn't deter his cotenant any. Cavendish went on and on about all the players he met and the autographs he had in some diary at home, like the ones you keep when you meet Goofy at Disney World.

"Let's see... I've met 'Lemon Lime' Larry Collins, 'Señor Soap' Max Diaz, 'Ass Ninja' Barry Andrews..."

Okay, these weren't the real names of the players. But they might as well have been. Moron didn't know the difference.

When Cavendish entered the room for their official first day, before he even put his bags down, he asked Moron if he'd ever seen the movie *Disturbia*. *Disturbia* was a 2007 remake of Hitchcock's *Rear Window* aimed at teens and starring Shia LaBeouf. It was the only thing in the

world Will Cavendish liked outside of being a ballboy. Over that next week, he'd watch it in its entirety six times.

Moron fantasized about scratching the DVD so he couldn't play it any more. Or maybe he'd just jam Cavendish's head through the TV. What Moron couldn't have predicted was that he'd soon long for the only problem being an infinitely repeating LaBeouf. The second weekend they were there Cavendish was bobbing in the middle of the room like usual but couldn't seem to get his words out. Moron felt physically ill. If this lunatic was at a loss for words, something very bad was about to happen.

"Well, John, I've got a question to ask you. I happen to have a girl coming over this evening and I was wondering if you might mind stepping out for a few hours."

John told him he wouldn't. He was a bit jealous of his freak roommate for succeeding with the fairer sex, but mostly he was just dying to see what the girl looked like. Turns out it wasn't a girl at all. As Moron exited, he passed Cavendish and his date in the hall. The woman he was holding hands with was somewhere between fifty and eighty-four years old. Moron felt terrified at the thought of this woman stealing all of his belongings. True, there wasn't much to steal, it wasn't like he had expensive silverware in there, but..oh! What if she used his toothbrush? He'd have to kill himself.

Moron came back later that night and the woman was gone. He still couldn't sleep thinking about where she might have been in the room. Did she put her ass on his pillow? It was more than likely. Where the fuck did Cavendish even meet her? He'd have to find a way to confront him about his behavior, but what had he even done really? All he did was watch a shit movie and politely ask to have the room for a few hours. Moron tossed and turned, unaware that the Cavendish issue was about to resolve itself.

That Monday when Moron was walking back from one of his gen-ed courses (My Body, My Health- a course everyone took because they found it funny one of the homework assignments was to masturbate) he noticed a commotion outside of his dormitory. Campus police were escorting someone out, and even from a distance Moron could see the tuft of hair bobbing up and down.

When he saw Moron, Cavendish shouted "they got me, pal!"

That was the last time Moron would ever see him. The police confronted Moron when he tried to get back in his room. They asked if he had anything to do with it and he could honestly tell them he didn't even know what "it" was. Cavendish had started to sell weed out of his closet and got caught the first day he did it. The campus cops informed Moron that if he was in the room when it happened, he would have been expelled too. When they told him this they waited for a reaction that would never come. What would Moron care if they kicked him out? The place was a nightmare. They'd be doing him a kindness. The cops became enraged, like they had been turned down by a woman at a bar. Red-faced and blue-balled, they stormed out and left Moron to his room, now empty once again.

Cavendish would slip further and further from Moron's memory until late next summer. Moron felt that a nutcase like Will Cavendish could only end up one of two ways: Either dead in a shootout with police or the future president of the United States. An hour after he had this thought, he walked in while his mother was watching the news. There was a story about a kid who didn't buckle his seat belt correctly on a rollercoaster, Chief Thunder's Red Hawk Drop, a 400 foot mega coaster. The ride flung the teen onto the adjacent interstate, killing him instantly.

Will Cavendish: dead at the age of nineteen.

2

Back during that freshman September, it only took two days for the university to fill the bed. They brought in a guy who had missed out on the original round of housing and had been staying in an open event space they forced beds into. There amongst twelve other young men, they slept and snored without privacy, refugees at school.

Hank Howard, relieved to now have only one other roommate, was everything Will Cavendish hadn't been. Big, quiet, tidy. If one thing had gone right, Hank could have been the All-American boy. But everything had gone wrong. He had the size and look of what Moron called birthday-card cowboys. The hunks that you find on the cover of gag birthday cards, the premise being that the man on the front has something for you, presumably that he wants to fuck you, but then when you open it up you find some insult about how old you are. It doesn't have to be a cowboy. It could be a dentist. "He's got a message for you." Then on the inside it says "it's time for new dentures!" Anyway, if Hank Howard was ever strapped for cash he had that to lean back on. Hank, a robot with all of his wiring removed, was more than happy to follow Moron's lead. Whatever Moron wanted to watch was fine with him, when Moron wanted to drink they drank, and whenever Moron went out, Hank followed. Moron didn't know how to feel about being a leader, but he liked Hank, and Hank drew the attention of women.

It seemed that their roles had been written for each other before they met. Hank would draw the girls in and it was Moron's job to keep them around. The flaw in their shared destiny was that Moron didn't know how to speak to women and Hank avoided words altogether. So, there they'd stand at parties, Moron asking girls what movies they'd seen recently and Hank, an action-figure equipped with beer-drinking action, only able to move when he was taking a sip of Keystone Light. In the embarrassment and despair, Moron felt a strong affection growing for Hank though he was afraid to admit it. He didn't think he could handle it if Hank ended their blossoming friendship.

If Hank was a friend, then Moron had reached the first level of university social life, but he needed to take it to the next level: romantic partners. There were girls, sure. But Moron would always fuck it up somehow.

One day when he was silently sitting with Hank at the dining hall, he noticed a spotlight that no one else could see. It was following a girl as she walked past the tables and chairs and the raised screens playing Sports Center with a solitary slice of pizza on her plate. She sat alone, a deity, her hair like uncooked ramen noodles, her face blank and bloodless like someone in an airport lounge waiting for the stewardess to tell them to board the plane. Moron's high school English teacher had taught them about Dante's *Inferno* and how Dante had written the whole thing based on his love for a muse that he may have never spoken to in real life. Moron thought Dante was a creep loser at the time, but now he understood. He would die for this stranger and, by some miracle, he found himself in bed with her that weekend. They just held each other, staring into each other's eyes until she drifted off to sleep. Without warning, Moron felt a rocket-ship of a cough shoot through his throat and the force of it went right into her eyeball. She quietly removed herself from the bed and left his room. She must have withdrawn from the university the next day, because like Cavendish before her, she was gone from Moron's life forever. Maybe it was time for her to board her plane.

Hank had less trouble. Once the first girl accepted his silence like a blanket and spent the night with him, the rest of the freshmen class lined up.. Hank, a mechanical bull at the state-fair, was never with the same girl more than once or twice. It was hard even for the most sensitive of them to hold it against him because he hadn't broken promises or told them lies. He hadn't said anything. Moron knew it would break some unspoken agreement if he ever mentioned the silly amount of sex Hank was having, so he never mentioned it.

3

Moron went home for Columbus Day and drank in the woods with his childhood friends and the next generation of neighborhood kids. He didn't recognize their baby faces, little rascals, running around with an eye-patched dog. The police came to chase them out of the woods and Moron felt tired and old as he scraped his face against the branches. This part of his life was over and he felt foolish for trying to re-enter a memory. He went home and ate leftovers from his mother's fridge and drunkenly cried over a plate of microwaved lasagna.

4

When Moron got back to school he decided to sit down and check how he was doing in all of his classes. It was a mixed bag. Some- like the jerking off class- were going great. But then there was a class called Wildlife Conservation which he had never been to. He made it a point to go to the next session, but when he showed up the building was closed due to a burst pipe. It was like God was telling him it didn't matter. He figured he could pass the final exam anyway. Putting poison in water=bad. Feeding otters=good. Here's your A+. In reality, he'd end up getting a generous D. He was much more focused on trying to get laid than his grades. It was cliché, but it was all he could think about especially when Hank the fuck machine was pounding away.

Then one night it happened. She had an anachronistic first name like Josephine or Agnus or something similar. Her last name a mystery, she kept it as hers, something he couldn't know, but she grabbed him by the hand and gave him something else. They had sex in the woods behind a party house, naked in the dirt, romanceless, animalistic, unlocking something ancient in their DNA. It wasn't love making. Through the tinnitus birthed by his boozy blood and the vibration of their warring bodies he could hear something howling to him from above. Above the trees. Above the clouds. Something called to him and threatened to scoop him up in its talons. It would take him away from there, plant him on a rock, and it would end. It ended. Moron lost his shirt-literally- and had to call Hank afterwards to try and find him something to wear. Hank gave him his top and walked home in his wife-beater undershirt.

The next morning Moron woke up in his bed like a child in the backseat of a car that's been circling around the block. He lay numb and indifferent trying to consider the events of the night before. His confusion morphed into deep depression when three spots soon appeared on the tip of his penis. This was it. He was sure he was going to die.

On Tuesday, November 4th 2008, Barack Obama was elected the 44th president of the United States but Moron didn't find out until Hank put on *South Park* the next night. His mother had been trying to text and call him about the election but he was ignoring everything and everyone. He had lied and told her he would send in a mail-in ballot. Once she found out that he hadn't, she stopped talking to him for a week. Didn't she know whoever was in the White House was inconsequential to whatever venereal disease was creeping through his body? But she

couldn't know that because he wouldn't tell her.

Eventually Moron worked up enough courage to go to the campus clinic.

"I'm here to get tested for AIDS," he said to the girl working the visitor's desk.

She looked up from her English homework and tried not to laugh. "I'm just the sign in person. Wait to tell that stuff to the doctor."

The doctor looked like a bartender and had a similar amount of patience.

"Listen, you don't have AIDS," he said. The sides of the doctor's graying hair kept popping over his ears like a cover of a bent paperback book that couldn't close properly anymore.

"How do you know that?"

"Do you do intravenous drugs or have unprotected anal sex?"

"No."

"Then you don't have aids. I'd say it's HPV. We've got a pamphlet somewhere around here about it. Almost everyone at this university has it. It just means you're having sex."

"Are you supposed to be saying things like this?"

"I mean, probably not. But if you tell anyone I'll just say you're lying," he said, letting out a laugh he didn't expect. "Which one of us was having drunk, unprotected sex in the woods?"

"How'd you know it was the woods?"

"No shit? Really? I was just fucking around. Listen, read the pamphlet. Wear a condom. Relax a little bit." He smoothed his hair and left the room.

Human papillomavirus? That didn't sound like anything to take lightly. It was certainly better than AIDS but, despite what the doctor said, Moron couldn't help feeling like he was cursed. A modern Cain, marked, forced into a nomadic lifestyle, scorned by the masses. His only recourse was to lay under the covers and watch the first two seasons of NBC's *Heroes* on his laptop. He watched the first 34 episodes in three days and the term "binging" hadn't even been invented yet. Or maybe it had, but he hadn't heard it. Moron watched so much so soon that his brain altered the show's catchphrase and then fed it back to him over and over again.

"Save my cock, save the world."

"Save my cock, save the world."

"Save my cock, save the world."

5

When Moron went home for Thanksgiving, a tiny affair of just he and his mother, they ate their meal in almost complete silence then drank too much watching *The Godfather* marathon on AMC.

"I have HPV," he blurted out as Michael was standing outside of the hospital protecting his father.

"I'm dating a podiatrist," she said.

They would never mention the HPV again, but Moron would soon meet the podiatrist, a nerd pervert of a man. Well, the good news was he was a doctor and he seemed to be genuinely interested in her. Moron might have even found their relationship cute if it wasn't for the man's profession. He couldn't stop picturing the guy with his nose in the arch of a patient's foot, sniffing away like there was no tomorrow.

6

Moron returned to his university with a feeling that this would be the last time he ever made the trip. College wasn't for him. The decision might not even be his to make. It was hard to tell just how bad his grades were because he was afraid to check. The next few weeks went by like a forgotten cigarette crumbling into an ashtray.

There was only one thing left to do.

Moron had been trying to build the strength to tell Hank he wouldn't be coming back after Christmas break. They sat watching TV in uncomfortable chairs and just as he was about to speak something astonishing happened.

"I just wanted to say something, if that's okay," said Hank.

"Sure, Hank. Go ahead."

"I really hope you'll come back next semester."

"Okay, Hank. I will."

And like that, Hank decided for him. It was out of Moron's hands. He'd come back the next semester.