

Moron: Chapter 5

1

Somehow or another, at the end of their sophomore year when they were trying to figure out housing for the fall, Cecilia convinced Moron and Hank to sign on to live with a pair of twins she met in her history pre-requisite. Without much consideration, Moron and Hank entered a realtor's office with two brothers they had never seen before. Their names were Frances and Stephen Wolf and their names were most of the reason they were all in this mess. Cecilia, whose attention was drawn to oddities of any kind, pestered them into becoming friends with her and once she found out their names she referred to them collectively as Frankandsteve Wolfman.

Frankandsteve were disturbingly tall and skinny and when they were standing next to each other they resembled the prongs of a tuning fork. They were both business majors and if you know nothing else about business majors, know this- they usually fall into one of two buckets. A. Shitbags or B. Eccentrics. Frankandsteve were firmly in the second bucket. Moron, easily threatened by all men, had no alarm bells when he saw them interact with Cecilia. They presented as completely asexual. Luckily for them, they were geniuses. One of the first times Moron ever heard of someone working on a "phone app" was when Frankandsteve said they had one in a beta phase. They were like the Winklevossi without the athletic ability or inheritance or good looks or social skills. Corrina and Cecilia's favorite joke was that Frankandsteve's app was a dating website for twins named "Twintimate.com". It would be years before they found out what the app was actually designed for.

As they sat in the realtor's office that day to sign the appropriate forms, Moron could feel Hank seething in anger next to him. When they moved in with the twins that autumn however, Hank changed his tune. Turns out he and the twins had a joint obsession with video games. It wasn't *Madden* or *Call of Duty*. The three of them loved out-of-print games for defunct systems, stuff that only absolute mutants liked, like *Shenmue* for the Sega Dreamcast. Frankandsteve welcomed him to video game heaven, surprised that someone with his body type knew so much about their world. It was their first exposure to the onion that is Hank Howard. Those autumn days spent in their new house were some of the best of their lives. Moron would sit there getting destroyed by the other three in video games and not mind. He was just happy everyone was happy. Plus, Moron was 21 now which meant he could go to bars or buy alcohol with his actual license.

Most college kids would probably watch football on the weekends in some dive, but despite Hank looking every inch a linebacker, none of them ever mentioned wanting to do that. As Moron considered just how big Hank was, he decided to Google "Hank Howard high school football" and was surprised to see a link for a website called 247sports.com. In 2006, they ranked Hank as one of the best prospects in the state. Another layer of the onion.

The twins ended up being great roommates. They cooked for themselves, cleaned up after each other, paid all bills on time (maybe it's easier when there's two of you) and would make sure you knew things about current events (like when the Chilean miners were rescued). Cecilia had created a nice little environment for all four men. The house itself was wanting, but that's par for the course for college beer dens. It was a yellow, single-story structure that was a five minute drive or a twenty minute walk from campus. The problems were mostly cosmetic

except the weird pink mold in the basement. Frankandsteve worried it could be asbestos. When they asked the realtor about it she said “don’t bother it and it won’t bother you.”

2

The Camelot days of their junior September and October unraveled in November. On the first of that month, Cecilia called and told Moron that her estranged grandma had just passed and, like the plot of some Charles Dickens novel, had left Cecilia a few thousand dollars in her last will and testament. Cecilia then asked Moron to come over to her house because there was something she needed to discuss with him. Moron’s stomach thrashed like a squirrel caught in a trap with a peanut butter cracker. John Moron wasn’t a spiritual man but he wasn’t a stranger to premonitions either. He’d see entire sequences before they happened and not just things like “eating sixteen mozzarella sticks will lead to diarrhea”. He was certain he knew his and Cecilia’s dialogue already. They were stage actors with their lines memorized. Crisp fall air spiraled into his lungs, falling leaves halted their descent and enveloped him instead, and when he opened his bloodshot eyes he was sitting next to Cecilia on her bed just as she had asked.

“I’m so sorry about your grandmother,” said Moron.

“She was a monster. Don’t worry about her. I’ve got something else I want to talk about,” said Cecilia.

“You’re going to use the money she’s giving you to pay for a study abroad trip to London next semester. You’ll get someone to sublet your room so there’ll be no issues,” said Moron.

“Wait. What? Yes, but how did you know?”

“Well, you said if you had the money you’d do it. And now you have the money,” said Moron.

“Okay, and how do you feel about it?”

“I don’t have the money to do it,” said Moron.

“No, I know that. But how do you feel about me going?”

“We both know there’s nothing I can do to stop you,” said Moron. He wanted to be supportive but couldn’t find the strength. There was a horrible image in his head of Joe Strummer and Cecilia having sex. Strummer died in 2001 but that was beside the point.

“I thought you’d be happy for me,” said Cecilia.

“You didn’t think that,” said Moron.

“No, I didn’t, but you’re being a real asshole!”

They got into a blow-out argument, reliving older spats and unleashing insults they’d been saving for a rainy day. Each felt worse afterwards and unearthed more resentment when they restarted an hour later. In the midst of this, Corrina had tried calling Moron five times. The only time Corrina ever contacted Moron directly was if she couldn’t reach Hank. Finally, Moron called her back and she explained she was with Hank, but that something was severely wrong.

3

Moron passed through the faux-quaint college town back to his house like he was on an automated walkway at an airport- the only thing moving were his legs and the ground beneath his feet. The twin circus attractions stood chopping up something smelly in the kitchen as Moron went by them breathlessly towards Hank’s room. Corrina waited outside it, shuffling her feet and chewing on the end of her phone thoughtlessly like a child. When Moron spoke she jumped and

then gathered herself. She explained that something was wrong with Hank but she couldn't make out what. He had punched a hole in one wall and threw a chair at another. His yells were incoherent and Corrina genuinely didn't know what had set him off.

"I've never seen him like that," said Moron.

"Will you try speaking with him? I don't know what else to do," said Corrina.

"Yeah. Do you want to go wait in the living room?"

"What and play *Ms. Pac-Man*? I'll hang on the front steps. Text me if you manage to get in," said Corrina.

Corrina went outside and Moron spent a few minutes trying to get Hank to open-up to no avail and no response. Finally, he asked Hank if he wanted to play chess. The door unlocked and cracked open. Moron texted Corrina that she could head home for a while if she wanted to. She chose to continue waiting. Once Moron was in the room, Hank silently set up the board, took out Moron's King in five minutes, and then started setting up the board for another game.

"Can I ask you something? About chess. Not about the other stuff," said Moron.

"About chess, yeah," said Hank.

"Well, when we first started playing, you beat me the first two games. The first one took a little while, my guess was because you were double checking that I wasn't secretly a grand master, but in the second game you beat me pretty easily. I won the third game and even though I didn't say anything at the time, I knew you let me win," said Moron.

"I didn't..." said Hank.

"Hold on, let me finish," continued Moron. "Overtime as we kept playing, the games started becoming more competitive. I would win one-out-of-four, let's say. So, I start thinking I'm getting really good at chess. I'm, like, proud of myself. Then you know what I realized?"

"What?" said Hank, starting to shake a little.

"I realized I wasn't getting better at chess, you were just getting better at letting me win," said Moron. "How many games did I actually beat you?"

Hank's eyes were closed and he had his hand covering his mouth. Eventually he managed to say "zero" before bursting out into uncontrollable laughter. Tears of frustration and hilarity joined each other in streams down his vermilion cheeks. Hank's laughter started to peter off after a few minutes and then Moron continued.

"You're such a good guy that you got better at faking it just to boost my confidence. Whatever it is that made you angry, just know that you're great, and whoever did that isn't worth it. Plus, you've got a girlfriend that really cares about you," said Moron, praying it wasn't Corrina that Hank was mad at.

"I should actually probably call her. You wouldn't mind would you?"

"Jesus Christ, no Hank. She's actually still outside. I'll go get her and see what the two uncoiled paper clips made for food. Whatever it was, it absolutely stunk," said Moron.

Hank laughed again as Moron left his room. For the moment, the beast had been pacified but it would be another year before Moron learned what made him flip his lid in the first place.

suggested they make the most of their autumn semester and then make a clean break at the end of it. That made it impossible to live in the moment, his heart was already in a lonesome January, and the body that appeared in November and December was merely a ghost with a smooth-surface cavity in its chest. Relief and heartbreak see-sawed as he hovered over his future, for he understood his life would be healthier without her and yet he didn't want it to be.

Soon, it was time to say goodbye and indignation prevented him from saying anything meaningful.

Moron: Chapter 6

1

Melanie Yearwood's room was bitterly cold due to a broken window latch that the facilities team had yet to fix. Moron tried to remember why they hadn't gone to his house instead of her dorm but couldn't. Well, alcohol was the answer, but he meant more specifically. Maybe hers was closer? Where did they even end up late at night? A pizza place potentially. He recalled her buying a pack of cigarettes but could that have been at a pizza place? Marb Reds and anchovy please. None of it mattered.

The two had met at a party February 11th and consummated their relationship that night. He asked her to meet up for food that Monday, not realizing it was Valentine's Day. There were worse ways to spend the holiday, but he just hoped she wasn't getting the wrong impression. It wasn't that he wasn't attracted to her- the physical end of things was too intense if anything- it's just that he didn't know if he liked her. Not liked-her-liked-her. Just liked her even in a general sense. Melanie was a uniquely bad listener. She would hear what you said but misinterpret it every time. If she said she "I love crepes" and you said "oh, I think there's a crepe place in the town center" she'd take it as "the best crepe place in the world is in the town center." When she would go and inevitably be disappointed, she'd angrily say something like "I can't believe you recommended that crepe place." And at that point Moron wouldn't have the energy to argue. He'd rather be known for giving bad recommendations than to debate the linguistics of crepe conversations.

"Didn't you say this was your favorite band?"

"Who? Modest Mouse? No, last time the song was on you asked who it was and I told you," said Moron.

"No, you definitely said this was your favorite band," said Melanie. And it went on like that until she had constructed a whole new opinion base for Moron that he silently accepted. He was willing to let people think XXX: *State of the Union* was his favorite movie if it meant that she kept giving him handjobs in the slop closet at the dining hall.

One night when Moron was drooling and snoring and farting in bed, Melanie woke him, not to scold him for his hog sounds, but to ask him a question.

"Don't you think we should be girlfriend and boyfriend?"

"What time is it?"

"Answer the question," said Melanie. She lacked passion and conviction. She didn't mean what she said even 15%. It was like someone ordering clam chowder at a restaurant

when they knew they didn't like clam chowder.

"I don't know if that's a good idea. You haven't even said you have feelings for me," said Moron.

A bad courtroom drama preceded his statement, he the prosecution, and her the outraged defendant clearly exposed of their lie. Why did she ask him that he wondered? It could have been boredom or a bizarre sense of civic responsibility or maybe she just saw her other friends with boyfriends and decided she wanted one. They argued until Melanie's roommate, a nice girl who didn't deserve to be subjected to the moans of sex or of agitation, finally asked them to stop. Moron was happy for the excuse to leave.

Over the next few days Melanie reached out to him a few times and she seemed to genuinely miss him now that he was gone. He didn't miss her at all, but felt tremendous guilt because of that, and it left him wondering which end of things was worse- his or hers?

How can you tell someone that your time with them had nothing to do with them? What cruel bastards we all are.

2

Cecilia Skyped Moron from London exactly twice. The first time was the first night she landed and the second was drunkenly at 8PM her time which was 3PM Moron time. The first talk was dry, how was your flight, how's your accommodation, kind of talk. The second was incoherent babbling, Moron, Moron, Moron, just her repeating his name over and over, kind of talk.

Some days he missed her terribly. Some days, like the entire week after the drunken Skype, he didn't miss her at all.

3

One night when Moron and Hank were pre-gaming and playing drinking games at Corrina's house with her roommates, Hank got a call and was ecstatic for a reason to get out of Never-Have-I-Ever (a game you'd sooner get Jason Bourne to participate in). Hank left the room then rushed back in a minute later and screamed to Moron that they needed to go. Moron and Corrina chased Hank to the door as he blurted something out about Steve (of Frankandsteve) getting punched in the face. Frank had called him in a panic to say that they were at a party and someone hit Steve for no reason.

Hank was much faster than Corrina and Moron so they were grateful that he was wearing a plain white t-shirt, their north star dashing through drunken streets. The house they caught up to him at, the house that would cause a lot of pain for a lot of people, was three stories high but when the twins told them the party was on the top floor, it might as well have been a skyscraper. Moron could hear the music and see the lights, but from their vantage point he couldn't make out much else. Despite Corrina's protests, once Hank got a description of Steve's assailant from Frank he started stomping up the relentless stairs. Moron trekked behind him through a disgusting black slime formed on the wooden steps by snowy boots and a lack of initiative.

The party was crowded and most of the kids in there looked the same. Moron's second biggest fear (his first being getting stomped into the black mush) was that Hank would find the wrong guy. He didn't. Like a Greek champion entering a battlefield, it seemed the group had a good idea why this scarlet hulk was standing there.

“Did you just punch my friend in the face?” said Hank pointing at some scumbag leaning against the refrigerator.

“No,” said the scumbag.

“Yes, he did!” screamed a girl to Moron’s right. That was all it took. Hank only had to hit him once. The force of the punch drove the kid’s head back into the refrigerator, broke a Coors Light magnet, and dented the door. The body slid to the ground like a rubber snake. No one else moved and Hank grabbed Moron by the arm and started walking back down the stairs.

Moron felt every muscle, every bead of sweat, every sticky board underneath his sneakers, not able to do anything but hold his breath and count the steps as he descended. Just when he thought they might be in the clear, a stampede started sounding behind them. The two of them managed to get out of the door on the bottom floor and off of the porch. Or so Moron thought. Hank had stopped to block the door. The first three stooges out of the gate ran right into his fists and dropped like pigshit. Eventually though, too many got through. Moron started to make his way back onto the porch but the mob had other plans. Hank’s body started coming over the railing and Moron screamed “I got it! I got it!”, subconscious programming from his days in little league. He got it alright but Hank Howard weighed so fucking much. The two of them were sprawled across the lawn when a strange thing happened. Hank started laughing. Moron couldn’t join in just yet. The pack of the wolves on the porch were licking their lips.

Corrina, Frank, and a one-eye-open Steve joined Hank and Moron. Frank, shaken up by the shame and hurt of being unable to protect his brother, was in worse shape than Steve.

“Corrina, take the twins and get out of here,” said Hank.

“Let’s just leave, Hank. This is so stupid,” said Corrina.

“Let them come,” said Hank.

Just as the horde was about to close in, three unknown guys walking down the street, bad samaritans if you will, joined in next to Hank.

“Looks like you guys are a little outnumbered. Do you need some help?”

“Hell yes,” said Hank. And like that, they had a little back up.

Moron still didn’t want to see any of it happen. He stood out in the middle of each group with his hands in the air.

“This is stupid,” said Moron. “We’ll just leave and it doesn’t have to go any further than this.” He thought they’d at least take a moment to consider his proposal but someone on the opposite team grabbed him by his shirt collar and flung him off the street. Gravel cut sorely through the palms of his hands. When he lifted his head, he saw the guy that tossed him now on his hands and knees himself, likely from a Hank Howard fist. A pleasing and carnal release broke through Moron’s body. The schadenfreude was only temporary of course, ruined by one of the bad samaritans running over and booting the boy across the jaw. Moron’s attacker fell completely limp and unconscious on the ground, perhaps no longer in the land of the living. Finally, Moron got to his feet and tried again, futilely, to stop mankind’s oldest and most brutal past-time.

Eventually, only two combatants remained. Hank and their biggest guy. Hank had a one-inch gash on his left eyebrow, making it hard for him to see properly. Their guy bore a shredded shirt and a visibly broken nose. The two brutes stood smiling sickly at each other. Just as it looked as their showdown would begin, police sirens rang and everyone dispersed. Moron, Corrina, and the twins hid in some bushes down the road. The three of them had avoided injury

(or further injury in poor Steve's case), and considering what Moron bore witness to, he considered himself relatively unscathed as well.

Hank and the other monster ran down the same side street and towards two overeager cops who greeted them with mace. Handcuffed in the back of the cruiser, Hank offered the clean part of his shirt to his opponent, his opponent returned the favor, and each helped to wipe the spray out of each other's eyes. Enemies only a moment before, now friends with a common goal- make sure they didn't permanently lose their eyeballs. The officers, afraid that Hank and his new tag-team partner might press charges against them and not the other way around, let them go a few streets over and told them to go straight home and stay out of trouble.

Moron often considered what it was that the savages were sharing in that moment when they locked eyes before their would-be fight to the death. Sometimes he would admit he knew and at other points he'd plead ignorance, but he felt it when he watched that boy, prone on his hands and knees, about to have his mandible shattered. It was humanity's entombed blood lust and he wished to never drink it in again.

4

On the night of May 2nd, SEAL Team Six compromised Osama bin Laden to a permanent end. A party broke out at the dormitories, all of the students flooding outside to celebrate. Hank called Corrina to see if she wanted to join him and Moron in walking down to the party, but she declined. She said that the murder of a man, even a horrible man, was a strange thing to dance over. Hank and Moron continued to the revelry anyway.

Moron used the international news as an excuse to Skype Cecilia when he got back to his house. It was likely she'd be getting up for her classes pretty soon anyway.

A man answered the call and then closed her laptop.