



**REVOLUTIONARY
BLUES**

CHAPTER 1



Spring 2012

A book reading at The Grove wasn't the worst thing in the world, Rohan mused. It wasn't a jazz solo at The Met, but it wasn't exactly doing the robot on the Santa Monica Promenade either. Austin, his literary agent, had told him this was a necessity, part of the whole 'being a writer' thing, but the reality of it was only now setting in. He thought for a moment about skipping out on the obligation, but knew he had no choice. The contract was exceedingly specific: if he didn't do the tour, his lucrative royalties would receive a significant buzz-cut.

This wasn't like him. Rohan was usually more grateful for his recurrent good fortune. He tried to lift his spirits as he walked from the Farmer's Market towards the bookstore, nostalgic of the many afternoons he had spent lounging on the upstairs balcony, reading and admiring the scenery. In an impatient motion, he stopped and glanced at his watch without actually reading the time. The gesture comforted him as he waited by the busy crosswalk where Austin had agreed to meet him.

A few minutes later, his friend and agent pulled up in a new luxury sedan and rolled down the window.

"Hey buddy, you lost?"

"You're late, we were supposed to be in there 10 minutes ago."

"Then why the fuck are you standin' out here? You need me to hold your hand for everything?"

Austin spoke with a Texan twang that had acquired a distinct patina from years of living by the beach. At his side, as usual, was a beautiful lady. It was easy to tell Austin didn't have much trouble with the fairer sex. Rohan ignored the comment and leaned over the open window of the automobile like a highway patrolman.

"Excuse me ma'am, I don't think we've met. I'm Rohan. You must be..."

"I'm Cynthia, it's a pleasure to meet you, Rohan. I loved your book. Austin gave me a pre-release copy last month. Finished it in two days."

"Guess it wasn't the most challenging read, huh?"

"No, no that's not what—"

"I'm just teasing Cynthia. It's very nice of you to say. In fact, I'd love to chat with you more about your literary interests. Why don't you have my agent get us in touch?"

Austin broke in, "Alright, alright, that's enough. Let me go park. We'll meet you inside."

Before he could finish the sentence, Rohan swung open the back door and hopped in, "Nice try, but I too want to relish the spoils of my labor."

He paused briefly to admire the interior, then said, "You do realize the bitter irony of earning a commission from a working class Indian man and using it to buy a British make, right?"

"No," Austin laughed, "but I knew you would."

Cynthia interjected, "Oh come on, Tata Motors owns Jaguar now. Everyone knows that. If anything, it's fitting."

Rohan, not expecting to be corrected by Cynthia, looked impishly at Austin, who simply gave him a shrug as he put the car into drive. Ten minutes later, the trio arrived at Barnes & Noble, where they were greeted by an overly-cheery bookstore manager. She led them towards a back room and as Rohan was walking past the DVD section, he caught a glance up at the second level where the reading was to be held. He was surprised by the turnout. Pausing for a moment to see if there were any pretty women in the audience, he felt a hard shove from behind.

“There’ll be plenty of time for that aft’ the reading, young stud.”

They quickly went over standard protocol and the store manager eventually escorted Rohan to his seat. He tried hard not to smile when she gave her flattering introduction. As she wrapped up, he pressed his palms together and prepared to perform for the crowd. In that brief meditative moment, the true nature of his recent anxiety was curiously revealed to him. Having gotten to this point, he felt suddenly trapped. For the first time in his life he lacked motivation, was absent the existential drive that served as constant assurance. Of course it was the height of folly to think he had experienced and learned all there was, that nothing novel remained, but he couldn’t escape the fact that since the memoir had been published, everything felt worn out. Like he had written the ending before the story was quite finished. He shook himself from his reverie to the expectant gaze of the audience. A smile overcame his practiced stoicism as he mused at the rebellious nature of his subconscious.

In the act of casting aside his anxiety, a teaching of Tsunetomo Yamamoto’s came to mind: “There is surely nothing other than the single purpose of the present moment.” As it so happened, he knew exactly the single purpose of the present moment, because his publisher had explained it to him in no uncertain terms.

“Go out and earn that paycheck,” he’d said.

With that in mind, Rohan began to read.

“The weather and the women, they struck me before I ever set foot on campus...”

From the moment I picked up the
book until the moment I laid it down,
I was convulsed with laughter. Some day,
I even intend to read it.

Groucho Marx

When you're almost done with this book,
you'll realize there aren't enough pages left
for all the things that need to happen.

Jeff Wyseski

A heartbreaking work of staggering genius.

Dave Eggers

Rogue Library Press
Cover design by Pinna & Bazz

SOTTO VOCE

Selected Excerpts From
SOTTO VOCE



Rohan Kapoor

Fall 2001

The weather and the women, they struck me before I ever set foot on campus. The flight from Baltimore landed at LAX around noon, on a typical southern California day. There was a dreadful delay on the tarmac, but when I walked off the jet bridge a deep feeling of relief washed over me. I had been gripped with trepidation the whole flight, even though I knew it was too late to change my mind about going to college 3,000 miles away from home. Maybe it was the beautiful sunlight that dramatically illuminated what I could only imagine were models scampering across the dated linoleum. Or maybe it was the bright cloudless sky and the palm trees that convinced me I had made the right decision. Whatever it was, the apprehension was replaced by excitement as I left for baggage claim, cheerfully humming the theme song from *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*.

After an hour spent on the parking lots known as freeways in LA, I arrived at my dorm to the familiar image of proud parents hugging their impudent child. I walked around the awkward three-way hug to throw my bags on the unoccupied bed and waited for the moment to come to its natural end before sticking my hand out to my new roommate's parents. I entertained their small talk for longer than usual, noting their matching diamond-bezeled Rolex Daytonas. Having been abruptly transplanted into a private high school, I learned quickly that wealthy connections came in handy. I would later find out that theirs was an inherited wealth: Mrs. Richardson's oil tycoon father had left her a small fortune and a substantial drinking habit, both of which allowed Mr. Richardson to play 36 holes of golf a day. He had been on the PGA tour in the '80s, but lingering injuries and the fallback of a wealthy wife ended his career after only two seasons. They were charming enough and after a few minutes of small talk, they left us to meet some relatives for a late lunch.

Austin and I spent the first week of college solidifying our social circles, contemplating what clubs to join and fraternities to rush. The excitement of the times was a natural bonding agent and we became good friends quickly. Austin naturally received a bid from one of the premier fraternities (I decided instead to walk-on to the Rowing team) and in our second week on campus he invited me to my first frat party. It was an incredible affair. There were open bars in three or four different rooms and dancing in the main hall downstairs. Hundreds of guests with red cups looked like they were having the time of their lives out front. I took a moment to enjoy the spectacle from street level, before rushing in.

It was in the backyard that I first laid eyes on Monica. She stood out from the blondes that dominated the party, off in her own corner smoking a cigarette. I think it was her casual confidence, the kind often possessed by girls who are pretty at a young age, which caught my attention. Looking past the pledges I was hanging out with, I tried to make eye contact.

Two dreadfully long minutes later, she reciprocated. I quickly finished my beer and mustered up the courage to walk over to her.

When I approached, all I could get out was, "Hey, I'm Rohan."

"Hi Rohan, I'm Monica," she responded, putting out her cigarette and reaching out for a handshake.

The gesture was reassuring.

"This is some party huh?"

“Nothing compared to my 16th birthday,” she said, in what I would learn was her signature deadpan.

We chatted for a bit, got another drink and continued the conversation until we ended up on the dance floor. She happened to live in the same dorm as me and at the time I thought it was an improbable stroke of luck. I wouldn’t learn to abide by the valuable axiom, *don’t shit where you eat*, until some time later.

The next morning, I woke up in unfamiliar surroundings and groggily looked around the room. Monica lay next to me comfortably asleep. I noticed there wasn’t another twin bed in the dorm, which was strange. I guessed that must have been part of the reason for coming here. It took a minute for it to hit me that Monica was a Resident Advisor and an upperclassman. She was still asleep when I got out of bed and in the cold sobriety of that Sunday morning I happily noted that she was indeed quite pretty. She had a delicate look with her fine features and high cheekbones, her messy brown hair cropped shoulder length. I congratulated myself on the job well done, thinking: not bad for less than ten days into the school year. She woke up just as I was about to walk out the door, forcing us to trade banal morning-after pleasantries. I promised her I would call and just like that I was off to gloat in victory.

“You’re never going to guess what happened,” I told Austin as I walked into the dorm.

He was sitting on our communal beanbag in his boxers playing Grand Theft Auto III, drinking a light beer.

“I know exactly what happened,” he said. “The whole frat knows. You wouldn’t stop talkin’ about it all night ya silly drunk bastard.”

I tried to play off my embarrassment, “Well anyway, what’re you up to today?”

“Just cruisin’ over to the quad. Y’all?” He asked as if we were already a couple.

I told him to fuck off and got into bed for a few hours. Two weeks into college, things were going swimmingly.

Then on Tuesday some assholes decided to fly two planes into the World Trade Center. By the time I rolled out of bed, the twin towers had already collapsed, something had blown up the side of the Pentagon and there was much ado about smoke and debris in a field in Pennsylvania.

Monica had come over the night before, causing me to miss practice and my 8am class, so I finally got ready to go to my second lecture of the day around noon. I could sense a commotion in the dormitory but it was only as I waited outside the lecture hall that a classmate told me what had happened that morning. In those days, not all of us brought laptops to class, so I had to wait two whole hours to get the scoop. How could it have happened? We had futuristic radar technology and fighter jets. Weren’t billions of taxpayer dollars going towards preventing just this sort of thing?

That initial incredulity was quickly swept aside by the confident narrative provided on the news. Explanations were rapidly rolled out for any incongruity that came to light and an investigative committee was formed to explain away inconvenient facts like the towers collapsing in free fall, the lack of visible airplane wreckage at the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania, even the eyewitness accounts of

explosions coming from the World Trade Center basement. Blame was quickly assigned to a former CIA asset and his ragtag troupe of cave-dwelling jihadists. The rest, as they say, is history.

Luckily, the remainder of the semester carried a semblance of normalcy as I devoted myself to rowing, lectures, studying, and partying at Austin's frat. There was little time to spare, even for Monica. She put up with it for the most part but began to act distant in the last month of fall semester. I knew I had been neglecting her so I bought tickets to see some local band at The Wiltern. Having only seen her off and on for the past couple months, she was understandably cold when I invited her, but agreed anyway.

While at Will Call she finally asked the dreaded question, "So what's going to happen with us over break?"

I stammered, "What do you mean?"

"You know exactly what I mean."

"Mon, I just have so much on my plate with class and all... I don't know if I can go down that path right now."

"And what path is that?" she replied.

"You know what I'm talking about, the path to boyfriend-girlfriend. I'd like us to just stay friends. Can we do that?"

"Sure."

Trying to salvage the situation I continued, "I'm just trying to look out for you, Monica. I think you deserve someone who can devote a lot more attention to you. You're beautiful, smart and you roll the best joints of any girl I know."

"Yeah, I get it," she replied with a quickness indicating the conversation was over.

We barely talked to each other for the entire show. It's true, I should have known better than to get with the RA and let it end on a sour note. In the remaining three weeks of the semester we were sanctioned for noise and alcohol twice; three times and we would have been kicked out of the dorm, but luckily Monica wasn't heartless. Austin gave me shit about it for days, though I knew he didn't really care. He enjoyed posting the silly anti-alcohol posters we were forced to make, telling everyone within earshot we were in trouble because I stopped hooking up with the RA. The experience taught me a lot more about power politics than the International Relations courses I was taking, that's for sure.

Spring 2004

The spring of Junior year I studied abroad in Medellín at The University of Antioquia, or UdeA as it's known locally. After a hectic couple years, it was a much needed break. I wanted to work on my Spanish and I had heard the women of Colombia were to die for. I was sold. Classes turned out to be a joke but it was a great way to work on my language skills anyway, since I spent many nights out at the Parque Lleras bars chasing locals.

I was leaving history class one day, when this girl named Isabella came up to me, curious to find out what an American was doing in 'Social Class in Post-Columbian South America.' I wove some story about being interested in freedom movements under colonial powers, being Indian myself, and we hit it off instantly.

At the time, she was dating a hang-gliding instructor and working part-time as his assistant. One lucky day, she offered to take me up with her for free. Being on a tight budget, I greedily took her up on the offer. The beauty of the landscape quickly suppressed any pangs of doubt. I was awed by the expansive development, 16 comunas and 271 barrios worth. From that vantage point I could truly appreciate the bustle of commerce, the cooperative organization of millions. It seemed to be a choreographed dance. As I floated, I felt like I'd escaped from the depravity of everyday life. That hurried feeling, the anxiety and stress of innocuous deadlines and moronic obligations, completely faded away.

Back on land, I ecstatically tried to explain the feelings that overcame me in the air, flailing for words in Spanish. Isabella just laughed and asked why I thought she would deal with the hour and a half bus ride everyday if it weren't the greatest feeling in the world. It was a fair point.

As our bilingual communication improved, we delved into trickier subjects. Eventually, she revealed to me her sympathies for FARC, the notorious Colombian militia, one of many in the world with the adopted moniker of The People's Army. This came as a shock to me because I'd heard many students openly denounce the group. Especially in light of a massacre recently perpetrated by the revolutionaries, when an improvised bomb went off near a church in a jungle village called Bojaya, killing 79 people. Isabella was quick to point out that she didn't approve of violent direct action, but also that innocent casualties occurred on both sides and were a sad but perpetual aspect of war.

"It's easy to use a single incident to make a whole movement look bad," she said in her sultry voice, slowing down and simplifying the choice of words for my benefit.

"Like a strawman argument," I replied in English.

"What?"

"Never mind, it's a phrase we have in English, to describe what you're saying."

"Oh," she went on, "well the FARC are fighting injustices that have happened in Colombia since a long time back, even before Gaitan was killed. It's not so simple as good versus bad."

Having done a bit of my own research upon the mention of his name in class, I knew Jorge Gaitan was an immensely popular Colombian politician, the kind that people actually believed might fight for them.

And like most such politicians, his life was cut short under mysterious circumstances. The man that supposedly killed Gaitan was dragged naked by a vicious crowd through Bogotá, and his dead body was left in front of the Presidential palace. Without any testimony from the assassin, the motive has remained a mystery but many Colombians retain a healthy suspicion that the CIA was somehow involved. It's clear that the United States benefitted most from the event, as Communists were quickly blamed and the Pan-American Conference of South American countries shifted back towards an anti-communist stance. There's no hard evidence, but given the CIA's history in Latin America, it's not exactly far-fetched.

"That was over 50 years ago Isabella. Things have changed."

"Have they?"

"Of course, all around the world progress is being made, poverty is being reduced. FARC is only slowing things down."

Isabella looked intently as she parsed the meaning of my words. My classical, Friedman-inspired understanding of globalization as a universal good amused her. She was so elegant and proud as she described to me the history of her homeland. She explained how FARC got its start when a Canadian-born, London School of Economics and Harvard-educated economist-turned-rancher proposed a plan called "Accelerated Economic Development," many years ago in her country. (It reminded me of "No Child Left Behind" and the "Patriot Act." How could anyone argue with those names?) Soon after he proposed the plan, the Colombian government began forcing peasants that served local markets off their land to make room for large-scale industrial agriculture geared towards export markets instead. In her eyes, FARC was simply an expression of rebellion against unjust policy, one that had continued to this day. It impressed me that her understanding was far more nuanced than I was accustomed to hearing from other passionate individuals. She didn't display animosity towards either party, and spoke as if everything was in its natural order. Force matched with counter-force. It brought to mind a quote from Thomas Jefferson I had read in high school: *"I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical."*

Summer 2004

By 2004, the bursting of the dotcom bubble was a distant memory. Back in 2001, over \$5 trillion in hypothetical market value had been destroyed, and yet, sentiments seemed to already be fully recovered from that devastation. The underlying problems with the economy were never identified and the mantra remained—“In Alan Greenspan we trust.” He responded to the audience like a good performer and proceeded to talk down interest rates by almost a quarter over the course of a year. It successfully sent stocks on a tear from their October 2002 lows.

The academics did a bang up job of explaining the turnaround. They claimed lower interest rates allowed more people to borrow money to buy things, which would lead to companies making more things and then in turn hiring more people to make those things. The increased hiring would boost wages and allow those consumers to pay off the debts they incurred by doing their economic duty. Thus, the virtuous cycle of consumer spending was supposed to bring the economy back to the nebulous, “potential” level of GDP growth. Though it was not immediately obvious how the real economy could be “fixed” through what basically amounted to interest rate manipulation, the Dow Jones seemed to confirm the academics’ theories. I was more than happy to leave what was good for the economy to the experts in their ivory towers. When you’re busy reaping the coincident rewards of having significant savings to invest for the first time, in the middle of a secular bull market, it’s not hard to look the other way.

I had accrued those savings by completing an internship at a Big 4 Consulting firm during the summer. The company had recently separated from the audit side of the business due to Sarbanes-Oxley and rebranded after the Enron scandal (the one where the auditing team helped the energy giant conceal unprofitable operations and evidence of financial fraud in order to secure lucrative contracts for the consulting arm of the firm). I took the offer because I dreamt of a jet-setting lifestyle and meetings with Fortune 500 executives, but instead I met the reality of expense report Tuesdays, obsessive airline mile accounting and goal-seeking project deliverables. In case you haven’t heard of the term before, goal-seeking is the practice of accepting a certain conclusion and massaging the data to fit it. Consulting was my first exposure to a phenomenon that now seems universal in a world obsessed with precisely measuring the immeasurable. Things like the size of the economy, the number of unemployed, and the amount of price inflation, measured from millions of data points, down to the decimal point. Think about it, when you measure a number in the trillions and say that it increased by two percent, you’re within the statistical margin of error. You might as well have said nothing at all. But that’s neither here nor there.

The mandate of the project to which I was assigned, was to determine whether the Chicago-based insurer that hired us needed to purchase new software to manage their policies. We already knew, of course, that the answer was a resounding yes. Managers at the insurance company needed evidence to present to the board which supported their desire for a shiny new toy. Plus, the recently hired CIO wanted to leave his mark and it was the only software he had implemented before, so the recommendation was a no-brainer. The underlying politics became apparent within a few weeks, so I asked my Senior Manager:

“Rob, what’s the point of all this? They’ve already gone through the whole proof of concept for this software and invested millions in preparing their infrastructure for it. Why do they need us when they’ve already decided what to do?”

Rob was an affable fellow, and I realized very early on from my fellow interns' stories how fortunate I was to have him as my project lead. He was round, balding and wore only Brooks Brothers iron-free shirts, like many consultants who had adapted to life on the road. He looked 50 even though he wasn't a day over 35. Rob seemed to sincerely enjoy my naïve questions, and felt his humorous honesty would endear me to the career path he had chosen for himself.

"Son, this is a service industry. The service we provide is the absolution of responsibility, kind of like the insurance company itself. When a management team wants to be one or two degrees separated from the consequences of their decisions, they bring us in. That way if the project fails, the blame goes to the consultants, not the decision makers."

Content with the answer, I let the issue go. We made some final revisions to our nifty graphics and wrapped up the day to grab a taxi to Gibsons on Rush Street. Rob walked down the bar and ordered us a couple bourbons. I was eager to please so I pretended to enjoy the whiskey without any ice or chaser.

"If only the shareholders knew they were funding our extravagant lifestyle just so a bunch of pussy executives could have job security."

Rob took a long sip from his whiskey, actually enjoying it, then replied, "Hey, better shareholders than taxpayers. I've been on State and Federal projects and it's no different. Well, they're even more lax with the expenses, but the core philosophy is the same. At least shareholders have a choice, taxpayers... not so much."

"Amen to that," I said as we finished our drinks. I tried to conceal the pained look on my face.

Near the end of my internship, I received an offer to continue full-time after graduation. I had developed a camaraderie with Rob, so I was honest when he asked if I planned to accept.

"Rob, I learned a lot here, and working with you has been great, but I don't think I will. I chose International Relations because I want to help people, contribute to society in a positive way. I've been working on an application to a World Bank fellowship and if that doesn't work out I think I'll go on to get a Master's. I just think institutions like the IMF and World Bank will bring my interest in finance and economics together with my desire to make a contribution. So many of the world's problems can be solved economically, you know?"

He smiled in a way that simultaneously appreciated my sincerity and mocked my naiveté. It would be a smile I wore often in the years ahead.

"Of course. You've gotta make your own choices in life cause you're the only one who has to live with 'em. But do me a favor, think it over, you don't have to give an answer to human capital until November."

A couple weeks later, the project was over, with predictable conclusions and a beautiful presentation to back them up. My final day on-site, Rob handed me a package wrapped neatly in recycled brown paper. That Rob really was a sly bastard. Instead of arguing with me about my future plans, he presented me with a book that would dramatically alter the trajectory of my life. That book was *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*. The premise of *Confessions* is that the sponsors of organizations like the IMF and

World Bank, primarily Western nations, gain a foothold in developing countries by giving loans to poor governments, so provincial politicians can pursue their ambitious infrastructure projects. The contracts for the projects naturally go to companies like Halliburton and Bechtel, which brings the loaned money right back into western coffers, while saddling the host country with a pile of debt. When the debt inevitably becomes unserviceable, the coalition of lender nations gain influence over the fiscal and monetary policy of the developing nation, opening it up to Western corporate interests with forced privatizations and the sale of national assets. Over the course of the book, Perkins describes his involvement in perpetuating this insidious sort of imperialism, one that eschews traditional armies in favor of bureaucrats, accountants and financiers, in Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Iran and more.

Obviously the chapter on Colombia stood out to me. There, John's employer Chas. T. Main, Inc (MAIN) tasked him with drafting financial documents that would justify "exceedingly large loans" to the government since MAIN had already been awarded contracts to build hydroelectric facilities and electrical distribution systems in the country. The hydroelectric dam would provide thousands with electricity but it would also flood the lands worked by the Indians and mestizos. Given the political situation at the time, they were left with no option but to organize guerillas to fight back. John would go on to meet a local in Baranquilla who expressed her sympathies for the rebels, much like Isabella had to me. She justified their training by Russians, saying "they [needed] to learn about modern weapons and how to fight the soldiers who've gone through [American military] schools." She was referring to mercenaries the Western organizations hired to protect their foreign investments. It was here that John had his own crisis of confidence, and the parallels struck me deeply.

Reading that book at that particular juncture was one of those moments you reflect on later in life, when you're awed by the infinite string of coincidences that conspired to get you to where you are. I finished the book and it left me disheartened. It was only back at home, when my mother asked me what I planned to do with my savings that I snapped out of my funk. Figuring out what to do with the money gave me a new problem to solve and I began researching investment options with a voracious appetite. It was but the start of my torrid love affair with money.

Spring 2005

Senior year, Austin rented a huge Victorian house a couple blocks from campus with some friends and I was able to snag a room. The house was a zoo. It seemed like every evening we would be sitting out on the stoop, drinking 40s, and a couple friends of one guy would show up and then a couple friends of another. Next thing you know, we'd have twenty people at the house drinking, smoking and jamming out to Public Enemy, NWA and Wu-Tang; pretending we could relate to the lyrics describing life in the inner city.

It was under these auspices that Claire entered my life and I found myself unwittingly playing the obsequious boyfriend. One day we were casually dating and the next she was telling me we should begin to think about where we were going to live after we graduated. I should have known, since she was a Film Studies major, that she'd be good at assigning roles to the actors in the drama of her life. Not only that, she set the stage pretty well too.

"Bro, you really need to tell Claire she can't go around rearranging shit in our house," Austin said one evening, noticing the Pop-A-Shot had been moved from its central location in our living room.

"You never should have introduced me to her man, her next project is to replace the poker table with a real coffee table. I don't even know how to tell her it's over, every time I'm close she gives me that look and I freeze up."

Mike, our high testosterone roommate chimed in, "Dude, if she touches the poker table I will personally TP their whole sorority house."

The thought of Mike throwing rolls of toilet paper over their house in the middle of the night made me chuckle. Knowing him, now that he had the idea in his head, he was probably going to do it regardless of Claire's redecorating.

"I'll figure something out," I said, as I headed out the door for my Poli-Sci lab.

It was a year-long course that had no homework, essays, or exams; just a weekly discussion and a project to complete. According to some upperclassmen, the project was usually a short presentation. Of course that year, the professor decided to throw us a curveball, tiring of the reputation his class had earned as an easy A. He directed us to work on a student senate campaign or run for a seat ourselves. We'd eventually have to make a presentation about the experience.

I knew my only chance for an A was to get Austin to run for a Senate seat. He was well-liked, photogenic and he had plenty of money to throw around on a campaign. Most importantly, he had no idea what to do with his life so he was going to stay in school for another year, making him eligible to run.

When I got home I told him about my predicament in the stupid lab.

I finally asked him if he would run and he replied, "What do I get out of it?"

"The glory of victory? I don't know, what do you want?"

I said it in a tone that I hoped would inspire maximum pity. It worked.

"I'm kidding man, my classes are a joke this year anyway. Could be fun. Plus, it'll be an excuse to talk to some random chicks."

We set about the task ahead of us in earnest. In order to run you had to get a 100 nominating signatures. That, in itself, was a joke. It took all of 10 minutes at the frat house to get done. The bureaucratic paperwork was another story. We needed to fill out innumerable forms and take the signatures to the Student Government office, but before we could do that we needed to identify a campaign. As luck would have it, that very week the school announced it was implementing a policy of capping the number of fraternities and sororities that could be active at any one time and was enacting new rules on frat events. It was only appropriate for a Greek senator to oppose these absurd restrictions. With a platform like that, we felt we could win the hearts and minds of the people, young populists that we were. At least compared to our opponents, who championed causes like extending library hours, starting a mental health awareness campaign, or raising funds to renovate the water polo stadium.

A few days after submission, the Dean of the Social Sciences College asked us to come into his office. Austin and I exchanged a few casual pleasantries with him before nervously taking our seats.

"Boys, now you've got me in a bit of a pickle here. Normally, I don't interfere with campaigns... but I can't approve this."

"Why? This is what we want to run for," Austin said.

"Now you don't strike me as the naïve type, so I'll be blunt. You're interfering with my work, Austin. Do you know what that is?"

"To manage the college?" he ventured.

"No son, that's the job of my administrators. My job is to improve this college. And I intend to do that job to the best of my ability. You see, just like you have grades, I have grades. Want know how my performance is measured?"

We sat there dumbfounded.

"As silly as it is, my performance is measured by our US News college ranking. This year they've implemented a new factor in the algorithm, the number of fraternities and sororities. As you can imagine, it has a negative impact on the academic rating."

He focused his attention on Austin, before continuing, "I know you're a brother. All this does is prevent new competition for you guys. I don't see why you would run so adamantly to prevent the cap."

He had a good point, and I personally wanted our school to rise in the rankings as much as possible after I graduated, so as his campaign advisor I shot Austin a glance to back off. He told the Dean we'd think about it and we picked up our bags and left his office, feeling a strange mixture of confusion and enlightenment. So this was politics.

We wracked our brains to find another compelling campaign platform, but we couldn't quickly think of anything that was acceptable yet still said "*fuck you.*" A few days before the deadline, Austin ran into our living room excitedly, grabbed a ball from the pop a shot and threw it at me as hard as he could while I was watching TV.

"The fuck, man!?"

"Dude, I got it. Dean Perry, he lobbied for the new Politics Library right? Well guess what, I looked up all the subs on the project. One of 'em has a Perry on their board. Guess who?"

"How the fuck should I know dude, move outta the way."

"Perry's fucking brother!"

"So what?"

"Dude, that's completely unethical. You said it didn't matter if we win right? Let's just fucking make a big ruckus about it, it'll be hilarious."

I looked up from the TV, "Won't be so funny when they shut us down."

"Whatever. You're graduating and my grades can't get much worse anyway. Let's just fucking do it."

With that said, we set about filling out the dreaded forms again, this time demanding an audit of the College finances and subcontractors. We submitted our campaign for approval and immediately received another email from the Dean.

This time he didn't even bother with a hello.

"Sit down."

We sat.

"Sir—" I began but he cut me off with the wave of a hand.

"Are you boys really going to force me into this position?"

Austin answered before I could open my mouth, "And what position is that Professor?"

"Don't play stupid Austin, just because your grades indicate you're a retard doesn't mean you should act like one."

We were stunned into silence and the Dean gave us the lowdown. It went about how we expected. He said that the school would reject our application on some regulatory grounds if we didn't rethink our campaign. After doing the paperwork twice, we had no intention of doing it a third time, so we told Dean Perry fuck it, reject the damn thing. We got a rejection notice the next day and breathed a collective sigh of relief. Activism didn't really suit us much anyway. At least I got a good story about the

reality of politics and I didn't even have to go through with the whole thing. Who knows, maybe it changed the life of some aspiring politician in my lab. Project completed, my mind wandered back to the Claire problem.

I googled '*how to break up with your girlfriend*', having learned from the mistake of following my gut freshman year. The article I found said 1) minimize the heartache 2) give an honest explanation and 3) be reassuring. Fucking hell, wasn't that exactly what I'd done with Monica? I decided to just tell Claire I'd cheated on her. When she came over after class the next day, I informed her as apologetically as I could muster. Rather than get upset, she shamefacedly told me she'd cheated on me herself. Twice. Out of pride, I couldn't even express my indignation at her twin betrayals. I was dejected but I found comfort in the fact that the cosmic balance was restored. For a notoriously slow worker, karma sure settled the score quickly this time.

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