

Notes From a Punkass Kid: Age 20

Saturday night, like every other weekend night. Loud music, whatever's popular, comes from the room next door. Biron knocks hard on my door, the next door, then the bathroom door. I can hear his muffled screaming from inside.

"Shots, guys, shots!" I unlock the door and he comes in. "Alright, here's the plan. Pre-game here, then in like, two hours, at 11, House B is throwing a party. We'll get shitfaced, and I don't know, hopefully get laid. Yeah?" I turn from my desk to face him. Having just shaved, he's wearing a tanktop and is still in boxers, holding a towel over his shoulder.

"You're not even dressed." I say, ignoring the fact that I am not as well.

"So?"

"I'm not partying with you in boxers."

"Why not?" He sways his hips. The bulge under his boxers dances on its own accord. Before anything peeks out, I lunge and slam the door on him. I think I hear 'ow my knee.'

"By the way," He yells through the door, "Karl's coming."

"Why?"

"He's throwing the party in B tonight."

I groan. "He's been so weird..."

"Probably cause you fucked his sister."

"Asshole!"

"I didn't do it. You fucked her."

"Holy shit, shut the fuck up."

He laughs and thumps away. I continue reading but the printed words are hazy in the presence of the impending party . The buzzing of a naked audio cable echoes through the walls before it is dampened by a music player's socket. The entire suite reverberates music and, as if a flare was lit, people begin pouring into the common room. Part of me wants to study more. I close my literature textbook, push off my wooden chair and throw on a pair of jeans, a nice button-down, and a nice matching vest. The vest is superfluous but we might end up outside and it gets chilly on the grass. I've recently been complimented on what I wear and need to capitalize on expectations. Vaughn, my roommate, rushes inside, donning a cap, shorts and a sweat-drenched shirt. I will never understand the point of working out if drinking is to be had later at night. Vaughn is frantic. He tries taking off his shirt and his shoes at the same time. He finds leaning on his tall bedframe supports his lanky, doughy body.

"Dude, Sheila's coming and I'm not even ready," he says, grabbing shaving cream, 2-in-1 shampoo and body soap, moisturizer, and a towel from his side of the room.

"Ooh," I tease. "Sheila's Vaughn is coming tonight."

"Fuck you dude, I like her. And I think she likes me. "

"Did you guys do it yet?"

"No, we didn't do it yet. I want to take her out on a real date first. So she knows I'm serious." He walks out of the room. Cheers, whistles, and "woos" carry him into the bathroom where he's assured a shower shot. I've taken it before. Once I got over the hairy foreign hand inside a small shower stall, drinking while showering is pretty damn cool.

I walk outside and am welcomed by a loud cheer and yelling of my name. Small schools means everyone feels liked. The girls from next door have also joined us. They've been a blessing in disguise, giving us a little more staying power against other parties, especially since

they're a year ahead of us. Surprisingly, Biron is already dressed. Unsurprisingly, he and the rest of the filled room are holding red cups filled with alcohol. I look down; I am also holding a red cup. Smells like orange juice and perhaps vodka. Whatever it is, it's good. Biron runs into his room, yells "shots" and comes out with a bright yellow tequila bottle and stacks upon stacks of small shot cups expertly held atop each finger. He meticulously goes around and passes a cup to each person, fills it up and gives them strict orders to wait until everyone has theirs. One time a couple didn't listen. They took the shot and claimed he never gave them one. Biron, stopped the party and kicked them out. The awkwardness lasted two minutes until Biron giggled, smiled that bigass smile of his and continued his shot pouring. We all had a good night except for the two idiots who didn't want to listen.

He opens the door that leads outside. Karl and his sister, Farina, look dumbfounded, still preparing to knock. They too are given shots and scurried inside. She looks at me for a split second. She might be asking me what I'm asking myself. Will we have sex tonight? Last semester it was a common occurrence. But since the 'confession' – her words – to Karl, we've done nothing and never mentioned it. I have hinted at it multiple times. I don't know if she's dense or if she ignores it. Karl no longer greets me with exuberantly high-pitched yells and forcefully playful bearhugs hugs. Instead his cold shoulder looms wide over me as he takes his large body and wild gestures to all the other present tenants of our suite in our dorm.

We spend the rest of our time here like we do all party nights. We drink, take shots, dance, yell, toast often, and laugh. Discussions over classes, grades, majors, and professors are not uncommon. Eventually we talk about the other parties we went to, the other weekend, dude I drank so much last night, and then we find that we've exhausted all our stories, yeah you told me

that one already, I was there, and we desperately try to create new experiences tonight in fear of having nothing to say next weekend.

"Alright let's go!" someone yells. They turn in a blur and I can't make out the face.

I follow the amorphous crowd. Vaughn, it sounds like, tells me to finish my drink, but I just refilled it. Fuck it, the cops won't see it. I'm drunk anyway, a little of bit raucous is expected. A line of eight or nine, me included, walk out of the suite, down two flights of stairs, pass through clear doors, and out into the air. The cool breeze opens my eyes to the wide expanse of trees and parking lots. It's brown and blue. An ugly juxtachotomy but there's no time to notice. Not pretty. It's unfortunate that I am reminded of Farina just now. She is next to me, talking to me about something, probably complaining. One of those people you'd rather not talk to alone. Her issues and problems easily spill out like alcohol in a cup held by a drunk in heels. In groups she's happier, funner. She agrees with anything anyone says which must be why she talks so much when she's alone with me. She bottles in personality like others bottle in rage. On her other side is Karl, who's been a dick all night. Drunk, he gets a head as big as his belly, believing he can start and win any fight. Despite his bad back, despite his round clumsy body, despite his good actual nature. We walk down to not-House B. At some point we changed plans. No need to know. Just follow the others and fun is inevitable. I walk to the front of the line and get inside a different dorm hall, where the seniors live.

Inside it is dark. The music blares and I say hi to the people I know. Others I recognize but I walk past them. I forget or don't know your name and I'm sure it's the same for you, no need to make it awkward or weird. Except we're drunk so that's impossible. I push myself past the very unsexy dancing pairs into the only lit section of the floor, the kitchen. The heavy-trafficked opening is hard to go through. Everyone wants beers, a mixed drink, or the

townhouse's special 'jungle juice' known to be spiked with other substance by seedier houses or frats. I look at the large orange drink container, obviously stolen from a sports team. Someone slightly shoves me from behind. A line has formed and quickly I make my drink and my way out of the kitchen. Vaughn passes by me and goes up the stairs slapping me on the arm with a condom. A girl follows, it might or might not be Sheila. I can't tell and I don't care. If he fucks her here, my room is empty. Amid the dance floor, minimally lit by the kitchen, I see Biron and Karl and a few others dancing with girls they've mentioned before. The girls from our next door are with their guys. Fuck. People here make a big deal about dancing; you can't just walk up and ask, you have to know them, you have to be friends. Sometimes you can get lucky, hey don't I have you in Calculus, Lit 101? Wanna dance? Great! And maybe you can bring her back to your room. But that becomes beyond lucky and I don't feel much like playing tonight. Leaning on a wall near the window, Farina holds a cup and checks her phone, looking around when she puts it down. It's the universal sign of boredom, perhaps no one has asked her to dance. Lucky me.

"Hey."

"Hey Markis." She smiles, but she's always smiling when someone's giving her attention. Her large round cheeks encase her white bright teeth. It's great what alcohol does, with how pretty she looks and I'm almost okay with just talking to her for a while.

"This party kinda sucks. You wanna go somewhere else?"

"Okay, sure."

"I'm pretty sure Vaughn won't be in. You wanna just come over? Actually, I'll leave and check, then I'll text you if it's cool." If she asks why the separation, I'll tell her it's for Karl's sake.

She hesitates, looks around. “”Actually Karl and I were going to go to Jansen’s suite. He says his party just got good. A lot of people just came. Come if you want.”

“Really? Won’t it be weird? We can just leave now if you want.” She looks off somewhere. Karl makes his large presence known; his eyes droop as he looks at me and smiles, though I can’t say why. Drunk, he’s always jolly, but not to me. Not since the ‘confession’.

“You coming to Jansen’s?” He asks.

“Yeah. Sure.” I finish my drink to keep my mouth shut and follow them to the door. Outside, the trees sway and the clouds swirl. Grass melts and lights don’t know where to shine. Every girl that passes by looks amazing, from tall to short, fat to thin. I can stand their high-pitched squealing and ugly laughs. Even the ones that try too hard look great. Lots of makeup, short dresses no matter the weather. Heels when you know you’ll be walking on sticky floors, this gritty ground, and even dirt. They must prey on the very drunk. Farina walks near me, while Karl takes the lead, yards ahead, walking with his shoulders because he’s such a tough guy. Farina walks with a lull. Is she drunk too or is it just me and Karl? She’s older than him but hangs out with his friends rather than the other way around. The first time I heard Karl’s sister was two years older and in the same school, I was excited. Having made good friends with Karl, I saw an opportunity to meet new people, make new connections and party not like a freshman, but like upperclassmen. Instead Farina parties with us, makes friends with us and we have one upperclassman to call our own, rather than many.

"I fucking hate this school. Everyone is so fake," Karl yells as a group of giggling girls walk through.

"Calm down Karl, you're drunk," Farina says.

"So, everyone else is too."

"Yeah, but no one is being loud like you," I say.

"And? We're outside, I can be as loud as I want." We turn a corner, pass two very drunk guys holding onto each other for support. Laughing and drawling. Karl laughs to himself then at them.

"Why are you walking like that anyway?" I smile to myself. Farina elbows me. "It's like you want to fight or something."

"I do. I'll fuck anyone up. But everyone here is a pussy. This school won't do shit anyway." he yells certain words to no one, hoping someone would take him up on his barely-existing challenge. The clear, large-windowed doors of Hall 17 are in sight. A beacon to many a drunk, for on the first floor, the pizza place is open til 3am.

"Don't be ridiculous," Farina, tells him, still calm. She's seen this fraudulent drunk act before.

"I'm not being ridiculous. Let anyone say something, try something. These fucking fake people, that's all they know. Everyone's the same. The same personality, jokes, comments. Even the same coats! I fucking hate it. It's all bullshit."

"Come *on*. Talk about being fake. You're way too nice, then you have one drink and all of a sudden you're Mr. wanna-be-badass." I scoff and chuckle. "You're not gonna hit anyone." In an instant, he turns and grabs my vest collar, pulling me to his face.

"You think so?" Cause I'll fuck you up, I don't even care." He stares at me with furious intensity. His wandering pupils slowly recede into stillness as I'm snapped into sobriety. A part of me wants to talk back, say something. But I don't. I'm scared. He lets me go and continues walking. It takes two steps of his before I move forward.

"The fuck was that?" I ask Farina. "He's being an asshole, we should just leave."

"Are you serious? What are you doing? God, you're so immature." She quickly catches up to Karl. They become silhouettes in front of Hall 17's bright, fluorescent lighting. Her wide body is exacerbated by her short stature, looking very much like Karl's sister. She puts a hand on his back. His head is down, his fist balled up. If he hits her, I would do nothing, walk away and say nothing, deny I ever saw anything, I left after he threatened me, I don't know what happened after, I'll say. They go in and turn left to the pizza place. I walk inside the Hall. There is no ID I can show the security guard to prove I live here. Instead, I follow them inside Pizza Ditoria. The brown-tiled walls echo the loud voices of the drunk and hungry. They consume pizza and the pizza consumes them. I see familiar faces but don't say hi. With mouths full of cheese and tomato, they nod at me and acknowledge. Shame-faced I walk past Farina who stares at me and sit on a windowsill at the end of the restaurant. I look at nothing. Immature, he's the one that's fake, a faker talking about fake people, then he threatens me. He didn't hit me and look what I did. I fucked his sister. He's never hit anyone in college and he never will. It's all about image. What would our friends say if I came back, black-eyed and bruised and I said "Karl did it."? He'd lose his friends, his parties, his life. I don't see her coming but Farina is in front of me, a scowl on her face like I was six years old and said a bad word.

"You're an asshole you know that?"

"What?"

"You're an asshole. You treat me like shit and you've never apologized to Karl for what we've done. And you provoke him? I'm surprised he didn't kick your ass."

"Are you?" I smirk.

"Yeah. I won't stop him if he wants to anymore." A flash of concern runs across her face.



"And I don't treat you like shit, what are you talking about? Cause I asked you to come over? Like I never did that before."

"That's all you do now. You know we used to be friends."

"We still are. Who says we're not?" I say. Her words are pitiful and sad, yet she's stoic while I'm the one reacting.

"You're always making comments. Putting me down, making fun. Even my roommates say it. They tell me not to even hang out with you because you're such a dick."

"But, but it's sarcasm, I'm not..." I grip my leg tightly and say things slowly. "I don't mean to be mean. You laugh, how-"

"I laugh because I don't wanna call you out on it. After a while you just get really mean. It's *always* sarcasm, you never actually say anything nice. I can't even make excuses for it anymore."

"First, you don't have to make excuses or laugh. And if you were bothered, then fucking say something. Don't just expect me to figure it out on my own."

"You're supposed to! God." She scoffs in disgust. "I'm not supposed to tell you these things, I mean, fuck. You really are a little kid. You don't even see how these things work. What are you, twelve years old? Trying to put others down, for what? So you feel better, so you can laugh at them? Who wants to be friends with that?"

"I'm not a little kid I-"

"Yes you are. You're so worried about what everyone else thinks, we all know that. You think we can't tell? That's what we say when you're not around. And it's so funny how you say and pretend you 'don't care' about anything when it's obvious you do. You're like a fucking

bully, just making fun of everyone else so no one can actually notice how terrible of a person you are."

I say nothing and look beyond Farina, unable to face the truths vomiting out of her mouth. A bulbous droplet wells up in the tear duct of my eye. An uncontrollable snuffle. A stuffed sob. The air conditioning cools the trail a tear has made on my cheek. Farina sees I'm crying and keeps talking, using what she sees as evidence that she's right. I stop hearing and she eventually walks away. I'm sure it was another accurate analysis of my personality. My sobs continue, unhindered now. For once, I don't think of others. I don't care who sees me. If anyone would come and ask me what's wrong, I wouldn't mind. Farina and Karl leave. For the next fifteen minutes I cry silently in my nook. No one comes up to me, no one questions me. I stand up and make my way to my dorm room.

The common room stinks of spilled alcohol and at least one puker. Biron's room slams, a girl inside laughs. He never closes his door unless he needs privacy. Some commotion is present in the bathroom. The underside of my closed door is dark and hollow, Vaughn must still be with Sheila or that Sheila look-a-like in the other party. The key turns and I am allowed into my room. There is no reason to turn on the light. I sit on my bed. Shoes, socks, pants, shirt and vest come off. The sheets feel cold on my chest and legs. I turn to face my wall where it's darkest in the unlit room. The ridges in the wall are still visible due to the lamps outside my window. Black dots dance in front of me. They rattle and warp as tears gloss my eye and fall. I try not to think about what happened and perhaps I need this. How did a high school city kid sneak in here? They all saw right through me, a false presentation of cool, uncaring with a charming wit. Backfired. Was Karl talking about me before? Am I that fake crowd? Was I stupid or arrogant not to get it? Maybe they all feel that way. They're only tolerating me until the end of

the semester. Then they'll sit me down. Vaughn and Biron with insincere sad looks on their faces, we're not gonna live with you next semester, Karl's taking your place, sorry, we'll stay in touch though. I'll be left alone with an unknown roommate who'll see I'm a fraud instantly and the next three years of my life is spent trying to fix a broken bridge. A knock at the door. I didn't lock it. More knocking. The door opens. A column of light falls on my wall. It expands, blinding me but quickly disappears. The knob shifts, the door locks. In the silent pause, I sob. A hand softly touches my side.

"Hey." It is Farina. I shudder and cry violently. I am reminded of her words. They ring truer the second time. Instances and past events flash in my head. I can see laughs and smiles were really groans and eye-rolls. I'd leave the crowd. That's when they laugh at me, put me down, and never let me know it. The bed dips when she sits on it. With my back turned towards her, she clasps my left shoulder. "Hey, I'm sorry. I didn't mean what I said. I was just frustrated. Don't cry. What I said was not true. Hey, come on."

My sobs drown out her voice. Apologies only make me feel worse. She tugs at me. Conceding, I lay flat on my back. She is sitting on her leg, the other propped on the floor, holding her up. "But it is true." It is hard getting that out clearly. My voice needs water.

"No it's not! You're still just a freshman, everyone is like this. It goes away, trust me. You're not the only one. Look at Karl, you called him out and look how mad he got. Just don't, don't cry over it."

"I'm sorry. I never meant to make you look bad. Or feel bad. We are friends." I say that but am not sure how true it is. Is this another attempt at being accepted?

"I know. And you are funny. I don't pretend to laugh. I know you don't mean it. If you were a bad person I wouldn't be talking to you. I really should not have said all that, it's just been

really hard lately since I told Karl that we messed around.” She looks at her fingers. “And I yelled at Karl for treating you like that. But, you know.”

I take a deep breath and exhale, it is thick and throaty. I turn to the wall again. My leaky eyes don't stop. Her weight falls next to me. She whispers in my ear, hugging my midsection.

"Hey...stop. Please? Don't do this. You're a good guy." She hugs tighter and shifts her body. A wet kiss lands on my cheek. "Kiss me." I ignore this plea. The crying subsides and a stretched minute gives me endless time to think. It is broken by another kiss. Then another. I hold my breath until each kiss comes. "Why won't you kiss me?" Her wet voice begging. This is what desire sounds like. Honest, intimate, real. I can't be imagining this, misunderstanding it. It is the first time I'm wanted like this. I turn to face her. Her large eyes are visible in the dark. My eyes feel sore. I kiss her on her thin lips and raise the sheets, welcoming her inside. Her thin, skintight leggings brush up against my calf. I hug and press her body against me. Her hand quickly goes inside my underwear. Sex was not on my mind but now it can't get out. This will be the last time we fuck.