The Lives of Genius

by AuburnRed

Summary

AU What's it like living in a family of geniuses? Stuart and Farkle Minkus through the years in a series of short stories.
Chapter Summary

Elementary School. A lonely Stuart Minkus finds understanding and comfort at the home of his Grandpa Ginsburg.

The Lives of Genius
A Boy Meets World/Girl Meets World Fanfic
By Auburn Red
Disclaimer: None of these characters belong to me, of course you know that. They belong to Michael Jacobs and Disney. There is a reference and later cameo/guest appearance by Michael Ginsberg from Mad Men and he belongs to Matthew Weiner and Lionsgate. I created the characters of Tom and Nancy Minkus. There are some other original characters and they will be noted accordingly. :D The order of the Boy Meets World episodes may not be right but I thought it worked for this episode.
This chapter will refer strongly to the episodes “Once in Love With Amy,” “The Play’s The Thing,” and “Kid Gloves.”

Author’s Note: Because of developments in the Girl Meets World canon, i.e. “Girl Meets Farkle,” this story’s status has been moved to an AU story. Think of it as what if Jennifer’s personality hadn’t changed much and was the same “darling” we knew in her high school years?

A series of short stories about Stuart and Farkle Minkus through the years.

Chapter One: Grandfather Genius (Stuart Minkus Age 11)
Stuart Minkus walked dejectedly through the sidewalk, Mr. Feeny’s words echoed through his brain: You’re wrong, Mr. Minkus!....How could he be wrong? He was never wrong in school! This was ridiculous! It was insane to get this bent out of shape over one lousy word problem, but how could his calculations not fit? All he had in school were his grades, if he didn’t have those what was he? Maybe his parents were right maybe there was something wrong with him! Maybe the other kids like Cory Matthews and Shawn Hunter were right, he was weird! He kicked the leaves in contempt barely acknowledging the excited shouting from the other kids particularly Cory and Shawn who were no doubt getting their friends together for some sport like baseball or perhaps a game of taunting the nerd. Stuart didn’t want to deal with it, so he turned around and made for a shortcut.
When Stuart Minkus was at a moral conundrum, he knew of only one place to go, the closest thing to an oracle that he knew in Suburban Philadelphia and it wasn’t home (Mom and Dad would probably be at the hardware store anyway). It was to the house down their street, the home of Grandpa Ginsburg.
Grandpa Malachi Ginsburg was the only adult that was a blood relation that Minkus felt close to. His paternal grandmother died when his father was still a teenager and his maternal grandmother and her second husband died before Minkus could even form a mental image in his head of what they looked like. Grandpa Minkus was a different story. Even up to when he died when Stuart was 6, he always filled Stuart with fear. When Stuart was three years old, he saw the concentration camp tattoo on his arm and naively asked him what the numbers meant. Grandpa Minkus became furious and whacked the boy on the bottom. Stuart’s father then grabbed him by the arm, slapped him, and told him never to ask about it again. Stuart obeyed. (He later learned about the Holocaust
and the story of how his grandfather survived those days and felt sympathy for him, but he still remember that encounter and how it filled him with dread). Grandpa Minkus was a stern man who almost never smiled and often derisively talked about his son’s son when Stuart was in ear shot saying he “had his head in the clouds” and asking Tom Minkus if he was turning his son into a sportsman, which Tom always answered, “I’m working on it, Dad.” Grandpa Ginsburg however had a bond with the boy that the two shared being mutual geniuses. They often talked about problems in the world, or school issues. Sometimes they played games or shared a secret language and sat on the roof of either Stuart’s or Ginsburg’s house to stargaze. Unlike other adults with the possible exception of Mr. Feeny, Minkus knew where he stood with his grandfather and knew that the old man was proud of him no matter what. He found the elderly man sitting on the front porch facing a table with his hand on small objects. Minkus didn’t have to look too closely to see that he was playing his favorite dice game, farkle. He pounded on the table with an excited, “Ha!” He wrote on a pad and paper not doubt tabulating the score.

The older man looked up with a smile. He still dressed in his black clothes, berets, and his goatee now long grayed from age, a testament to his young beatnik days. “Stuart,” Ginsburg greeted his grandson with a warm hug. “What a farkle it is to see you boy!”

Minkus smiled thinly at the secret language that the two shared. “Grandfather, I live just down the road. It’s hardly a surprise,” he said interpreting the definition.

Ginsburg nodded. “True, my boy, but it is always a joyous occasion,” he reminded him of the other secret definition. He looked closely at his grandson. “Though it doesn’t look so joyous to you. What happened?”

“How do you know something happened?” Minkus inquired.

“When someone comes walking up to my porch with a long face like that, I think one of two things, either he’s got troubles or he’s been drafted,” Ginsburg said.

Minkus looked at his grandfather confused. “Grandpa, the United States government ended the draft after the Vietnam War was completed and I’m only 11!”

The older man smiled and nodded. “Then you got troubles, want to talk about it?” He invited the boy to sit on the porch by his side while he held the dice inside the cup and gave it a shake. “Now come on let it fire. Let it sparkle. Be ready to give yourself a farkle!” He invited his grandson. The two continued to roll the dice counting the fives for 50, the 1s for 100 and so on. The two even guessed how many points the next roll would be. “1,000,” Minkus guessed. Ginsburg then lifted the cup and counted. He had a photographic memory when it came to numbers. He could just look at something or be asked a problem and would instantly be able to calculate it in his head. So Minkus knew that his grandfather was purposely pausing for suspense. “Cosmic, you learned at your grandpa’s knee!” He gathered the dice and rolled it again. “1500,” Minkus guessed how many points the dice was going to add.

“Aces again,” Ginsburg replied. “Genius, my boy, pure genius.”

Minkus’ face fell. “I don’t think I am anymore.”

“How do you know something happened?” Minkus inquired.

“Now who says,” Ginsburg demanded. “Tell me and I’ll give them what for!”

“Nobody, “Minkus said. “I got a word problem wrong in school. Mr. Feeny asked it and I gave the answer but he told me it was the wrong one.”

“What was the question?” Ginsburg asked.

Minkus recalled. “If Al washes a car in 6 minutes and Fred washes a car in 8 minutes, how long would it take for them to wash the car together?”

“4.5 minutes,” Ginsburg said almost as soon as his grandson finished the question.

“That’s what I said,” Minkus said in shock. “Mr. Feeny said it was wrong!”

Ginsburg was about to object but he held up one finger as if to say wait a minute. He and his grandson then scribbled furiously different facts and figures on the paper. After a few minutes, Minkus looked closely at his grandfather. “Are you alright, Grandpa?”

Ginsburg shrugged. “I don’t know but with these calculations, you may end up inventing time
travel before you solve this problem to Feeny’s liking.”
“You know, Grandfather, I’ve been reading about child prodigies going to seed,” Minkus said.
“Sometimes they peek before they reach their teens and twenties, what if that’s happening to me?”
The older man waved his hand. “Nonsense, Stuart, you should never doubt yourself, Little Man.
When all is said and done, you’re all you got. Sometimes you got to find the sparkle to make the
fire.”
“I don’t know Grandpa,” Minkus reasoned. “Sometimes I’m not so sure that it wouldn’t be so bad
being normal like most of the other kids.”
“Normal is overrated,” Ginsburg said sagely. Minkus smiled thinly at the familiar quote.

“Everyone at school thinks I’m weird,” Minkus pointed out. “Maybe they’re right.”
“Sure if everyone says so it must be true,” Ginsburg said matter-of-factly. “I’m sure not everyone
thinks you’re weird. What about that girl, Tilly? Tippy?”
“Topanga,” Minkus corrected knowing with his memory his grandfather was just putting him on.
Ginsburg nodded. He met Topanga Lawrence once, a sweet girl with very crimped hair and a
unique style. “Yes, a name like Tilly isn’t special enough for a girl like her.” Minkus smiled at the
compliment of the girl he had a crush on. “She doesn’t think you are weird does she? If she does,
she certainly has no room to talk.”
“No, she likes me for how I am,” Minkus said.
“Alright then that’s hardly everyone,” Ginsburg said.
“It’s not just at school,” Minkus confessed. “Do you think that there is something wrong with me
like…?” He didn’t want to finish.
“Like your mother and father do,” Ginsburg prompted. The genius nodded and shrugged. Ginsburg
cupped his beloved grandson’s face in his hands. “Stuart, your mother and I say this with the love
that a father bears for his only begotten daughter, his blood, is a wonderful woman but she has a
terminal disease that she inherited from her late mother, God if there is one rest her soul, if she had
one. She wants to be ordinary and it was her unfortunate luck that she married a man with the same
drive to be the most ordinary normal couple on the block. You however took after me and that’s
something in which to be proud.”
“Mother and Father don’t always think so,” Minkus reasoned. He remembered earlier when his
father tabulated the receipts earned at the end of the day at the hardware store. Even though Dad
used a calculator he computed the numbers wrong and was completely off the mark. Stuart
corrected him on the error and well his parent’s response was not very congratulatory to say the
least. “I think they are afraid of me.”
“Well I’m not,” Ginsburg remarked. “Come inside, kid, and I’ll fix you some green tea. We can
look through my windows and talk.”

Stuart waited patiently as his grandfather boiled the tea over the stove and offered him the tea in
his favorite mug, which featured a picture of Albert Einstein and his famous theory of relativity.
Grandpa Ginsburg’s mug had quotes from the poem, “Howl” including “I saw the best minds of
my generation destroyed by madness.” Minkus looked through the boxes of old photographs that
his grandfather had collected over the years of the patrons of Café Hey. He called those photos his
windows, because they “captured someone at sometime doing something and to them it was
important. So it was important to me too.” Ginsburg held up a photograph of a man with wild
black curly hair and wearing a checked sports jacket, a pretty brunette woman in an A-Line loud
print mini-dress, and a large man with long hair and a beard, wearing a fringe jacket. Ginsburg
pointed fondly at the curly haired man. “My nephew, Michael,” he said. “You know we went to
school for years, close to the same age, same grade, and same last name though different spellings,
but it never occurred to us that we were related until his father told me. Oddly enough neither of us
was related to the poet, a lot of Ginsburgs running around. See, I got lucky; I left Germany with my
Mom and Pop when I was three. I mean sure we lost a couple of siblings and a few other relatives
to the Nazis, but at least we made it to the States. It never occurred to me that my oldest brother
would eventually find his way to New York himself with this orphan he adopted from Sweden, an 
orphan who would later end up being my closest friend in school.”

Minkus looked closely at the photograph. Under the faces he could see a caption with his 
grandfather’s handwriting, “Michael Ginsberg (beloved nephew), Peggy Olson, Stan Rizzo, 
October 14, 1966.” Ginsburg grinned. “It was a lot of fun when Michael entered the café. We used 
to love confusing people when he would call me, ‘Unk’ and I would call him, ‘Nephew.’ “He 
pointed at the woman in the photo. “I still remember what that girl, Peggy, said to me, ‘Aren’t you 
a bit too cute-er I mean young to be an uncle?’”


“He became a big shot copywriter for one of those ad agencies, you know the one that made that 
‘Teach the World To Sing’ thing?” the older man glowered. “I hate them for that. I still can’t get 
that song out of my head.” He had a long look as he fingered the image of his nephew. “Poor 
Michael.”

“What happened to him?” Minkus said knowing there was more to the story than him becoming a 
copywriter.

“Well he went a little funny in the head,” Ginsburg admitted. “I guess he thought that the 
computers they installed in his office were doing some sort of experiments on him turning him into 
a homosexual or were taking over the world or some such.”

“What?” Minkus exclaimed. “That’s crazy. Computers are the wave of the future! Do you know 
how much information can be obtained from only one byte of knowledge?”

Ginsburg held up his hands in defense. He knew that his grandson spent a great deal of time on the 
Internet, so if anyone would know its benefits it would be Stuart Minkus. “Hey, I’m just telling 
you what he said,” the older man said. “I told you funny in the head remember? Well they took 
him to the hospital and did things to him, electric shocks, lobotomy. He hasn’t been the same since, 
been in and out many times since then. He was brilliant, not with numbers and technology like you, 
but he had a gift for words. He was the type that always knew what to say and was brazen enough 
to say it. But sometimes that brilliance got twisted in his mind and well-the results aren’t always 
good. Sometimes that brilliance can overwhelm someone and they become consumed by it.”

“Oh,” Stuart said feeling a strange kinship with this relative whom he never met but through his 
grandfather’s words began to understand. “Is that why you think Mother doesn’t like me? She 
thinks that I’m too much like Michael?” It was kind of unnecessary. After all, Minkus obviously 
harbored no ill feelings towards technology and if what his grandfather said was true, then Michael 
was adopted. There would be no biological possibilities of mental illness inherited between them. 
But then again there were studies that indicated mental illness was an effect of background, nurture 
rather than nature.

“Michael and well like me,” Ginsburg said ruefully to his son. “And your Mother likes you. You 
two are just on different parts of this vast universe, that’s all.”

Minkus thumbed through the “windows,” hoping to change the subject. He held up a picture of a 
man dressed in cowboy clothing and a black hat, a woman wearing a black pantsuit and brown hair 
in a ponytail, and a woman with long blond hair and a red dress. Unlike the earlier picture of 
Michael and his friends, this was unmarked. “Who were they, Grandpa?” Minkus asked.

them the Mystery Man, the Observer, and the Singer. Merlin and May were quite good singers, 
unfortunately not much came of them. I still remember Rosie always writing in her journal. She 
was just always willing to see the good in people. I never saw anyone with such a genuinely loving 
soul as her.”

“What happened to them?” Minkus asked.

Ginsburg shrugged. “I don’t know, they never returned to the café. Sometimes I captured regulars 
and sometimes I captured people in one moment. They were just one moment. Three people who 
wanted to be well known, but for some reason or another, it never happened for them. 
Occasionally, I would see if I could find a book by Rosie or an album by Merlin or May and always
came up short. Merlin released one 45 before he came to the café and that was it. Probably the types who wanted to take over the world, but listened when people told them that they were weird. So they just gave up.”

Minkus bristled at the point his grandfather was trying to make. “You really think I could take over the world, Grandpa?”

Ginsburg gave his grandson a tight embrace across the shoulders. “If anyone can, son, it would be you.”

“So someone became overwhelmed by his brilliance,” Minkus indicated the picture of his second cousin, Michael and then nodded at the picture of Merlin, May, and Rosie. “And others decided not to listen to their brilliance and possibly fell into mediocrity. Which one am I?”

Ginsburg put his hand on the young boy’s shoulders. “You are whichever one you want to be, one, the other, both, or neither.” Minkus shook his head. Sometimes his grandfather was hard even for him to understand.

Minkus looked closely at Rosie and May. “They are very beautiful, but Rosie reminds me of someone. I can’t figure out who.” He looked closer trying to find some recognition, but still couldn’t figure it out. “Never mind.”

Minkus worked on his homework while his grandfather listened giving advice and his guesses at the answer. Occasionally he would ask a brain teaser question. “A man is standing between two doors and one leads to certain death and the other leads to a castle of riches. Unfortunately one door tells the truth and the other always lies. Door A says that Door B would say that Door A leads to the castle.”

“Door B leads to the castle and Door A leads to certain death,” Minkus answered without even looking up. “If Door B is telling the truth, Door A wouldn’t be. But if Door A is telling the truth then Door B wouldn’t be so the only way that makes sense is for Door B to lead to the castle.”

Ginsburg nodded approvingly at his grandson, “Aces, pure aces.”

Grandfather and grandson looked up to the sound of a key turning and the door opening. A woman with dirty blond hair, the same color as her son’s appeared. She was dressed in a pair of black slacks and a white top under a black blazer. “Stuart, it’s time for you to come home for dinner,” she said. “You’ve bothered your grandfather long enough.”

Stuart gathered his books and stood. “Oh it’s no bother, Nonnie,” Ginsburg encouraged. “I’ll make him dinner and he could stay a little longer.”

Stuart Minkus’ mother rolled her eyes. “Pop, for at least the hundredth time, it’s Nancy, not Nonnie,” she corrected.

“-You’re still my little Nonnie,” Ginsburg said clearly egging on his daughter.

Nancy held her hand forward motioning her son to follow her. “Stuart, come on. It’s a school night and you’ve got homework to do.”

“I’ve already finished it,” Minkus replied.

“Of course you did,” Nancy said confused by her son. “Just come on, you’ve taken enough time here. Me and your father want you to come home now.”

“It’s your father and I,” Minkus corrected. “I is the proper form when using a first person subject.”

Upon his mother’s narrow stare, Minkus silenced himself.

Nancy snapped her fingers. “Stuart, I don’t want to have to tell you again!”

Minkus stepped forward to stand next to his mother. “Good-bye, Grandpa,” he said.

“Good-bye, Little Man,” Ginsburg waved.

“Stuart stand outside while I talk to your grandfather alright,” Nancy said. Minkus shrugged and then waited outside on the porch while he listened in on his mother and grandfather’s conversation.

“Please do not encourage my son to be rude to us,” Nancy said chastising her father like he was a small child.

“He wasn’t being rude,” Ginsburg objected. “He just said that he had already finished his homework and he did. I don’t think he meant anything by the “me/I” thing. He was just trying to be helpful. You don’t even have to look at the homework; I know it’s going to be all As.”
“Of course it will be all A’s,” Nancy said as if that were a terrible thing. “All that boy does is study.”
“You know, Nonnie most parents would think that was a good thing,” Ginsburg teased his daughter.  
“Nancy,” Nancy corrected. “It’s not just that he gets A’s, in school. It’s that’s all he does. You know he quit the Warriors Basketball Team.”
“He said something about it,” Ginsburg said. “It was a waste of time.” It was, Stuart thought silently agreeing with his grandfather.
“Well his father is disappointed in him about that and so am I,” Nancy Minkus remarked. “There’s more to school than just books. There’s friends, parties, get togethers. I don’t want Stuart to spend all of his youth holed up in his room! He should have friends like that nice Matthews boy or that Hunter boy.” Minkus groaned. The terms “nice” and “Cory Matthews and Shawn Hunter” were oxymorons. (Well some kind of morons considering it was Cory and Shawn that he was thinking about).
“If those kids don’t get along with him then why should Stuart be friends with them?” Ginsburg objected.
“He’s never even tried,” Nancy corrected her father. “And I think that you’re encouraging his anti-social behavior.”
“I beg your pardon young lady,” Ginsburg argued.
“I don’t think that Stuart should spend so much time here with you,” Nancy said. “I don’t want him coming here after school anymore.”
“You don’t or Tom doesn’t?” Ginsburg asked. He never got along with his son-in-law, Tom Minkus and now found further reasons not to.
“We both don’t,” Nancy Minkus defended her husband and herself. “Stuart is our son, Pop not yours. We know what’s best for him and best for him is not spending his youth holed up in his room with his books and his computer and with an adult who tells him that it’s alright to do so.”
“I’m your father dammit,” Ginsburg argued.
“Phillip was more my father than you ever were,” Nancy shot back referring to her stepfather. Nancy opened the screen door and motioned her son forward to follow her. Minkus looked dejectedly at his grandfather, but Ginsburg smiled and shrugged like “what can you do.”

While Minkus didn’t go to his grandfather every day, he didn’t stop visiting him completely. He was just more circumspect about it, visiting while his parents weren’t home and making sure that he came home before they did. As always, Grandpa Ginsburg was delighted to see his beloved grandson. Minkus told his grandfather about the recent production of Hamlet, in which he took the advice from a dramatic interpretation in which Elizabethan England sounded like American Southern. “Makes sense to me,” Ginsburg encouraged. “Who wants to always see Hamlet portrayed the same way as some British fellow?” He opened a cigar box and took out some green leaves. “I’m sure it was a success.”
“Not quite it was ruined by a couple of spear carriers,” Minkus said sarcastically. “A certain curly haired spear carrier.”
“Let me guess that Matthews boy,” Ginsburg prompted as he rolled the leaves inside white paper. “Possibly followed by a prank by the Hunter boy.”
“Who else?” Minkus glowered. “I don’t understand what the problems are with them.”
“I get the feeling they don’t understand what the problem is with you,” Ginsburg playfully suggested. “Sometimes there are people who just don’t get along, but you later find that you have more in common than you thought you would.” He then struck a match and lit his incense burner. He waved the smoke with his hands letting it move towards the direction where the grandfather and grandson were seated. Minkus could smell the powerful incense in his direction. It almost made him gag over how strong it was.
“I would have something in common with Cory Matthews and Shawn Hunter?” Minkus asked his
grandfather in shock. It was almost as though the old man was challenging the theory of relativity. “What can I possibly have in common with those incompetent brainless idlers?” “That’s how you see them,” Ginsburg shrugged. “Keep in mind they see you as a sycophantic dull nerd.” “I am not,” Minkus objected amid his grandfather’s laugh. “I’m just teasing you my boy,” Ginsburg said as he lit the joint and smoked it. “If you keep seeing each other without really listening then you will never get beyond what you see. Take your grandmother and I, we had some good years together…” “Grandpa you were divorced most of the time,” Minkus reminded the elderly man. “Well I didn’t say that the good years were consecutive now did I?” Ginsburg answered. “True we wanted different things, she wanted a house with the picket fence in the suburbs. I wanted to be at the center of it all meeting the best artists, thinkers, and doers. But we still had those good years to fall back on and we had our little Nonnie to remind us that we had something great.” He hesitated before he continued. “Eventually maybe not even now, you will find that you have more in common with Cory Matthews and Shawn Hunter than you think you do.” Minkus thought about it, but he looked at his grandfather’s activities. “Grandfather you know that you shouldn’t be smoking marijuana. The New England Medical Journal states that it slows your reaction time and causes detrimental effects to your health.” “Yes son,” Ginsburg said. “But according to the American Medical Association research it is also beneficial to curing glaucoma and helps relax during chemotherapy.” “Do you have glaucoma?” Minkus asked his grandfather. Ginsburg shrugged. “Well, I’m…trying to prevent it.” Minkus shook his head figuring that he didn’t want to continue arguing this point. Ginsburg continued to smoke silently as he thought. “Nairobi.” Minkus considered the odd change in subject, but then he grinned playing along thinking of a city that started with “I”. “Istanbul.” “Lisbon,” Ginsburg said. “New York City,” Minkus answered. “Ypres.” “Stockholm.” “Madrid.” “Denver.” “Rome.” “Edinburgh.” “Honolulu. Try to top that one,” Ginsburg taunted. Minkus thought for a minute for a city that started with “u.” “Ur!” He said triumphantly. “The rules never stated that the city still had to be in existence.” “I’ll allow it,” Ginsburg said. Suddenly, the door opened. Ginsburg quickly doused the joint while Minkus unthinkingly threw the cigar box under the table. “Nancy, Tom,” Ginsburg greeted his daughter and son-in-law. “Malachi,” Tom said coldly greeting his father-in-law. Tom Minkus was a tall man with hair darker than his wife’s. He peered at Ginsburg through his glasses as though he were a fly at a picnic. “Stuart I thought that we discussed this,” Nancy said. “We didn’t want you coming over to your grandfather’s after school.” “We were just talking,” Minkus said. “Besides you told me that you wanted me to get out of the house. Technically, I am.” “Don’t smart mouth your mother, Stuart,” Tom warned his son. “You deliberately disobeyed us. Now come on before we ground you further.” Minkus gathered his books and followed his parents when his mother pointed at her son’s arithmetic book. “What’s that?” she said.
“What?” Minkus asked looking down. Nancy reached over and brushed off the green spots and examined it. “Grass,” she said showing her husband letting him take a close look. “You have been encouraging our son to smoke marijuana?”

“No,” Minkus objected.

“It’s mine,” Ginsburg said. “Stuart doesn’t have any part of it.”


“The two of you need to come to our house where we will have a little talk,” Nancy said shepherding her son and her father out the door.

Stuart listened through his bedroom door trying to ignore the raised voices in the living room. He tried to keep his mind on the computer and what he was watching on the Internet, but the web page held no interest for him. Instead the heated argument downstairs was taking precedence.

“It was an honest mistake,” Ginsburg said. “Some of it spilled onto his textbook and I only smoked in front of him this one time. I certainly would never ask him to light up with me!”

“It’s not just about the joint, Dad,” Nancy said. “It’s about everything. Stuart deceived us by coming to see you. He doesn’t have any friends. He ruined that play!”

“From what I understand the spear carriers did their part,” Ginsburg argued.

“Before that he gave the worst performance anyone had ever seen,” Tom said.

“I almost couldn’t show my face in public again,” Nancy agreed.

Well that would have been quite an achievement, Minkus thought. His parents almost never showed up for anything that their son did in school. Maybe they thought because he had the lead in the school play, it was something to brag about.

“He was trying something new, something that was different,” Ginsburg said. Nancy said. “We think it’s about time that we took Stuart to see a therapist.”

“For being a creative genius,” Ginsburg said. “I would hate to think what Mozart or Picasso would have been like if they were your children.”

“We aren’t talking about Mozart and Picasso,” Tom said testily. “We are talking about Stuart.”

“You don’t understand him,” Ginsburg said. “You never did.”

“Don’t tell us what we don’t understand, Pop,” Nancy argued. “All we know is that our son is not normal and we need to fix that and we need for him to spend less time with you.” She paused. “I think it’s time for you to move.”

Minkus felt ill at the thought of Grandpa Ginsburg leaving. “No,” he mouthed quietly but he continued to listen.

“He’s my grandson,” Ginsburg argued. “You can’t keep me from him.”

“He’s our son, Malachi and we will,” Tom said determined.

“I came here to be a part of that boy’s life,” Ginsburg said.

“Well that’s great that you want to be a part of his life, Dad,” Nancy’s voice dripped with sarcasm. “Because you sure as hell didn’t want to be a part of mine!”

There was a long silence. Stuart waited for the words to continue. When it seemed several minutes passed, he heard his grandfather say slowly. “I’m sorry, Nonnie er Nancy. I’m sorry that your mother and I married too young. I’m sorry that we had a child before we were ready for it. 17 is no age to marry let alone have a baby. I’m sorry that I moved to the Village and opened the café rather than stay with your mother and be the happy ‘Father Knows Best’ dad that she wanted me to be. I’m sorry that we couldn’t be in the same room without biting each other’s heads off and that I wasn’t there for you as much as I should have been. I’m sorry for all of that. But I don’t think that Stuart has to pay for the things that I did and the things that you still blame me for. I missed out on you, and I regret that. Don’t ask me to miss out on Stuart because you are still angry with me.”

“It’s too late for that, Pop,” Nancy said hoarsely. Even though he couldn’t see her, Stuart knew that his mother had been crying. “You can’t make up for any of it. We want you to leave and we want Stuart to be normal.” Her voice wavered. “Please, dad, I don’t want him to end up like Michael, in an asylum or you, so caught up in your thoughts and incapable of making any sort of commitment.”
“Neither do I, Nonnie,” Ginsburg said. “I love that boy.”

Nancy for once did not object to her original birth name. “Then if you do love him, you will leave.”

A few days later, Stuart watched as his grandfather handed his parents the house keys. Minkus looked downward as his grandfather patted him on the head. “Don’t worry, Little Man. It was getting old here anyway. I’ve got an urge to move on.”

“But I’m going to miss you,” Minkus said laying his emotions out. His eyes watered. Ginsburg tilted the boy’s chin up. “Hey none of that. You and I are geniuses. Geniuses rely on logic remember? Logic says that it’s time for me to go and it’s time for you to accept that.”

“I will miss you,” Minkus said.

“I will miss you too, Little Man,” Ginsburg said. The two hugged until his grandfather pulled free from him and headed for his son-in-law’s car. Tom was going to drive Ginsburg to the bus station. “You may not understand it but we are doing this for your own good,” Nancy said to her son. “It will build your character.”

In the annals of great unanswered questions that thinkers have pondered for centuries such as if a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it does it make a sound or why hot dogs come in packages of 10 while hot dog buns come in packages of 8, Stuart Minkus could add this one: Why do parents seem to think that the worst things that a child could go through are always for their own good? Where were all the good character building experiences? Minkus could not understand how something that ripped his heart out and made him feel this terrible could ever be for his own good.

As the car pulled away, Minkus could feel his body become cold. This is what happens when someone you love leaves you. They always disappoint you. The 11-year-old vowed that he would never feel that strongly for someone ever again. He never wanted it to hurt as much as it did then. “You can finally be normal,” Nancy said to him. Minkus didn’t respond but looked directly at her. He still felt the coldness pushing all feelings of love aside. He was never going to be hurt again.

The next day at school Mr. Feeny talked about the scuba diving club. At first Minkus didn’t want to be any part of it, but he overheard Cory and Shawn make their usual lame jokes. Cory saying something about scuba standing in for dooba and Shawn saying that the acronym stood for “Something’s Creepy Under Boat…Andy.”

Mr. Feeny turned to the young genius. “Take it away Mr. Minkus.”

Minkus considered what his grandfather meant to him and how much it hurt when he left. He also remembered what his mother said, You can finally be normal. If normal is what it took, then maybe he should give it a try.

“No,” Minkus said. “I don’t want to know everything. I want to be one of the normal guys. I want to be stupid. I’m going with dooba.” The others laughed at his comment.

Feeny looked confused. “Well if Mr. Minkus doesn’t know…”

Minkus drummed his fingers on the table. Okay he would take the bait. “Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus.”

“Thank you, Mr. Minkus,” Mr. Feeny said.

“I hate myself,” Minkus said knowing that he was referring to more than just the answer that he gave.

“You’re not alone,” Shawn said and in Stuart Minkus’ mind he could hear his mother and father saying that as well. He pushed that thought away feeling his body and his mind become cold and turn colder.
Beginning of Middle-High School years, Minkus begins school with the label, "emotionally disturbed child," a label that causes conflicts in more ways than one.

“Autism, you mean like Rain Man?” Nancy asked.

“That is one form of autism,” the doctor explained. “Stuart’s isn’t that severe. In the movie, Raymond was unable to function with others. In Stuart’s case his inability to function is more voluntary. He chooses not to. This causes severe distress including emotional problems.” Emotional problems, Stuart thought to himself, that’s what you have when you can’t fit in at home or at school. An inability or maybe a lack of interest in talking to other people. Minkus felt the old hurts threaten to reopen. He forced them as always in the back of his mind. He felt the release of coldness seal his emotions as Dr. Payne continued to speak.

“Your son would be going to John Adams High School in the fall,” he asked.

“Yes he would be,” Nancy agreed.

“They have a special section there for gifted but troubled students with emotional problems,” Dr. Payne said. “It might be beneficial for him to attend there.”

Minkus turned away from the window not wanting to listen anymore but he couldn’t resist he had to hear a description of what he was going to have to go through.

“What’s this special section like?” Nancy asked.

“Well it’s a program, Stratford Program for Troubled Students,” Dr. Payne said. “It is in place in a few of the public schools in the Eastern Seaboard. Your son will have the benefits of a traditional public school education, but it will be tailored for his special needs.”

“Special needs,” Nancy questioned. “My son is not retarded! Far from!”

“That isn’t what I had in mind, Mrs. Minkus,” Dr. Payne replied. “It will also cater to any emotional and social development that your son may have. The curricula will be tailored to fit his learning capacity, but there will be some provisos that will counter his behavior.”
“Such as?” Nancy inquired.
“He will be required to attend mandatory therapy sessions,” Dr. Payne began. “There will be more emphasis on cooperating with others, being accepted as part of a group rather than individual merit. It is a highly regarded program. In fact many children have come through it and emerged successfully.”

Nancy hesitated. Stuart knew what his mother would say and furthermore knew that he would not be consulted on the matter. “Alright, I think we’ll give it a shot. I will of course discuss this with my husband, but I think Stuart will attend school there.”

Normally, Stuart would have been thrilled to start school, the crisp newness of recently bought supplies, and the excitement of anticipation of how he was going to impress his teachers, the thrill of receiving new assignments that would challenge his brain. But this year he was looking for it as much as getting a root canal. Is this the way most students felt when starting school? It was an altogether novel experience for him.

He didn’t like the idea of starting school with the label of “emotionally disturbed child.” He had been going to school for years and knew that such labels stuck. Eventually people would talk and his high school career would no doubt prove just as disastrous as the previous years. Going to a special section at the school would only increase that status.

He explained this to his parents the first morning after breakfast. “Well, son, maybe if you made a bit more of an effort to be more accommodating then we wouldn’t have to go through with this,” his father said pointedly.

His mother nodded. “Stuart, it is for your own good.” Stuart sighed. It was the refrain of his life.

He gathered his books and was about to step out the door. Before he opened it, he heard his mother talk. “After this, I don’t know what else we can do for him,” Nancy said.

“Nancy, we are going to have to face the facts that we have one disturbed child,” Tom said. “I’d give anything for a normal kid that plays video games, basketball, and talks about girls,” Nancy said. “Sometimes, Tom, I’m actually afraid of what he could do to himself, other students, or us. You know sometimes he gets these weird obsessions like over the summer when he was trying to put together a bomb.” Minkus rolled his eyes. He was not trying to make a bomb. He was weighing the different amounts of formula that it would take to improve on creating a faster lighter fluid. Some of the chemicals just happened to explode when he mixed them.

Nancy continued, “You know they say some of those dangerous people, serial killers and them have genius level I.Q.’s.”

“Hon, you’re being an alarmist,” Tom said, but Stuart could tell that his father was unconvinced. He didn’t want to hear anymore as he slammed the door shut and headed for school.

Stuart walked inside the crowded hallways as students and teachers gathered for class. He barely stepped through a couple of kids almost side swiping and tripping into them before he stumbled into somebody.

“Hey watch out, you little four eyed freak,” said the large person that he bumped into. Stuart turned around to see a tough kid, who looked older than the average student at least in his twenties. He was surrounded by two other thugs, a large overweight boy and a smaller boy with a high-pitched hyena like laugh.

“Four eyed freak, that’s a good one, Harley,” the high pitched one said with a laugh. Stuart Minkus. He heard from other students that this was none other than Harley Keiner, the school bully. The other two by his side must have been Joey Epstein and Frankie Stecchino, his resident thugs. This was not going to be good.

Harley turned to Joey. “Did I say you could talk?”

Joey shook his head. “No, sir, Harley you didn’t.” Harley glared at Joey. The smaller thug shook his head frantically instead of talking.

“You see it seems we have a very uncoordinated kid here,” Harley said. “What’s your name kid?” “Stuart Minkus,” Minkus stammered feeling his words fail him.
“Well Stuart Minkus,” Harley said patting the young boy by the shoulder. “Would you like some
dancing lessons? Maybe Frankie will teach you!”
Frankie stepped forward. “How about the cha?” He asked menacingly.
Minkus laughed trying to keep some humor. “Well I’m more of a waltz person. But, all kinds of
dancing is quite beneficial for improving leg muscles and coordination-ulp.” Frankie picked the
young boy by the neck.
“Where you heading?” Minkus pointed at the area of the school, a separate area from the rest of
John Adams. “Yeah figures, you look like a Strat Freak! They’re over on the other side. It would
be in your best interest to stay there wouldn’t it?” Minkus didn’t say anything at first but Frankie
shook him. “Wouldn’t it?” He asked severely.
“Yes, I suppose it would,” Minkus wheezed.
“Good and just to give you a bit of warning,” Harley snapped his fingers at Frankie. Frankie
dropped Minkus from his grasp. Harley then kicked Stuart before he fell down on Harley’s knee.
When Minkus landed on the bully’s foot, Harley kicked him towards a locker. The three toughs
laughed hysterically until they heard a voice interrupt them.

“We have got to stop meeting like this, Harley,” a man in a New York accent said. Though Minkus
felt dizzy, he could see the newcomer was a tall dark-haired man in a leather jacket. He seemed to
be at least 30. So did anyone ever graduate from high school at age 18 anymore?
“First I have to stop you from messing with Matthews and now this kid,” the man said. “You just
have a lot of bad habits don’t you, Keiner?”
“Stay out of this Turner, this don’t concern you,” Harley said with a defensive but slightly
weakened voice.
“You know I do have a first name,” Turner said. “You know it as Mr. Now unless you want to
spend a life sentence in detention, you ought to leave this kid alone.”
Harley looked at his thugs and nodded at them. “Joey, Frankie, we’re out of here.” The three
bullies glared at Turner but left.

Mr. Turner then knelt down and helped the student to stand. “You okay, Minkus,” he asked.
“I think so,” he said. He held onto his forehead. The dizziness was beginning to pass, so his vision
improved. He could feel the blood on his lip. “You know my name?” he asked.
“What teacher doesn’t know Stuart Minkus, the boy genius?” Turner asked. “George told me a bit
about you. He said you were coming here.”
Minkus nodded. “Mr. Feeny, that makes sense.” He remembered reading that Mr. Feeny had been
promoted to principal/American History teacher at John Adams High. Minkus sort of hoped that he
would have Mr. Feeny as a teacher this year, but he knew that there were special reserved teachers
for the Stratford kids and Feeny wasn’t one of them. It would have been nice to at least have one
ally.
“That’s a pretty bad bruise on your lip there,” Mr. Turner said with concern. “You ought to
probably get to a nurse.”
Minkus felt the blood drip to his teeth. “No, it’s okay. I’m used to it.”
“No one should have to be kid,” Turner corrected.
Minkus felt a bit shaky from the encounter. “I’m fine really.” After all what’s one more experience
with bullies? “I just need to go to the bathroom to wash it off,” he said.
Turner shrugged. “Well alright kid. By now you’re going to be late. I’ll do you one favor. I’ll tell
your teacher-who is it?”
Minkus looked at his schedule. “Mr. Kilgore, Arithmetic.”
Turner nodded. “On the Stratford side huh?” Minkus looked downward but Turner held the boy’s
head up. “Hey nothing wrong with that.” Minkus nodded. “Well get yourself washed up and I’ll
tell him that you’re running late alright?”
“Thank you, Mr. Turner,” Minkus said as he turned from the teacher.
“You’re welcome, Minkus, now take care of yourself,” Turner replied.
True to his word, Turner reported Minkus’ tardiness to Mr. Kilgore. The instructor peered at the new student through piercing eyes. He looked almost like a human pencil. He was tall, thin, with very chalk white almost yellow skin. His gray hair came to a point over his head. “I trust that there will be no tardiness in the future, Mr. Minkus?” Mr. Kilgore asked.

“No Mr. Kilgore, there won’t be,” Minkus said. He looked around at the other students. One blond girl was staring at the window. Another boy was viciously writing something in a notebook sometimes stabbing the paper. A red haired girl was reading a book, her hair in front of her face. Some other students in the back were making a great deal of noise talking at once. A dark haired Goth girl glared at everyone around her not making any sound.

Take a seat, Mr. Minkus,” Kilgore replied.

Minkus sat in the front row behind the red-haired girl. “Welcome to the Oubliette,” the girl said almost as if she wasn’t really talking to Stuart. “You know what that means.”

Minkus nodded. “It comes from the French word ‘oublier’ for ‘to forget.’ In the Middle Ages, inquisitors would create prisons in which there were no doors or windows, no means of escape or entry except one small door on top in which the prisoner was dropped down from.”

“Right they put people in there to forget about them,” the girl said.

“Enlightening our new student Ms. Galihue?” Mr. Kilgore asked.

The red-haired student looked up. “No, sir just letting him know how unforgettable his experience will be here.” The other students laughed hysterically until Mr. Kilgore rapped on the desk with a ruler and ordered them to be silent.

Mr. Kilgore began to write on the board a series of numbers. “Now can anyone tell me what this is?” Minkus raised his hand. “You.” He pointed at the genius.

Minkus stood up. “It is the formula for fractions. He was confused. “But if you please sir. I must be in the wrong class. I already learned fractions in the third grade.” Actually he taught himself when he was younger than that.

Kilgore laughed. “Oh so of course you know everything about the subject,” he said condescendingly.

“No sir I didn’t mean that,” Minkus stammered.

“And you think that you should be teaching the class shouldn’t you?” Kilgore repeated.

“No sir, I just think that this might not be challenging enough for me,” Minkus said. He could hear some of the other students particularly the Goth girl give audible laughs and clicks of the tongue as though the genius was already setting himself higher than the others. “I wonder if I could be transferred to another-”

“-Minkus,” Kilgore interrupted. “Here we believe in cooperating with others. Part of that cooperation involves accepting what is given. You do not challenge what you are being given, do you understand?”

“But sir the whole point of education is for students to think for themselves isn’t it?” Minkus asked.

“Not children on your level,” Kilgore patronized. “Now have a seat and if you want to remain on my slight good side that is quickly disappearing, I suggest you remain quiet for the rest of the hour.”

Minkus sat back down listening to the lecture, taking notes, and never raising his hand or talking once.

Minkus’ first therapy session was only slightly better than his first day of school, but not by much. At least his therapist wasn’t Dr. Payne. In fact she was a young woman with blond hair tied in a ponytail, Carla Deighton.

“Okay, Stuart,” she said in a sing-song voice. “Why don’t we start off by telling me a bit about yourself?”

“My name is Stuart Minkus,” Minkus said. “I live with my parents. I’m talking to you because I make all A’s and my parents think that’s weird.”
“Why do your parents thinking that you making all A’s is weird?” she asked.
“Because they think I’m weird,” Stuart said.
“Why do they think that?” Carla asked.
“Because I make all A’s,” Minkus answered dryly.
“Is there more to it than that?” Carla prompted. “After all most parents would be proud that their child would make an A average. How do you react when you get A’s?”
Minkus shrugged. “I don’t know. I make them so often, I don’t really think much about it anymore.”
Carla nodded. “And how do you react when you get a lesser grade than an A?”
“Luckily, that has never happened,” Minkus remarked. “So I would have no idea.”
Carla wrote for a long time in her notes before she talked to the young student. “Stuart, Mr. Kilgore and some of the other teachers said that you have been questioning their methods.”
“Well it keeps my brain occupied,” Minkus answered.
“And your classes do not occupy your brain enough?” Carla inquired.
“Not these classes,” Minkus replied. “It’s hard to be occupied with lessons that I learned already.”
“So you are saying that the classes are too easy for you?” Carla asked. “That you don’t feel stimulated or challenged enough?”
Minkus nodded. “In my English class, we are reading books that I read when I was 8 or 9. I already can work ahead several lessons in my Arithmetic book all the way to the end of the entire book.”

“Well it would be difficult to explain the curricula to a student of your capacity,” Carla began. “Try me, despite what you seem to imply I am not stupid,” Minkus countered.
“No one is saying that you are, Stuart,” Carla said. “But these lessons were designed to encourage students so they do not tax their-your intellect. We focus on your emotional development.”
“How developed do you think I would be if I have to go back to memorizing the times tables?”
Minkus snapped. “In my English class, we are reading books that I read when I was 8 or 9. I already can work ahead several lessons in my Arithmetic book all the way to the end of the entire book.”

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“Why do they want a normal child, do you think?” Carla asked.
“I don’t know,” Minkus shrugged. “I heard my mother say that she was afraid of me.”
“Why is that?” she asked.
“Because they think that I could do…things,” Minkus said. He couldn’t resist offering a devilish grin. “Things outside of normal behaviors.”
“Stuart, you are a very bright boy,” Carla began. Her voice seemed to raise an octave. “So you do understand the difference between right and wrong?”
Minkus smirked. “You mean am I like the Nietzsche ubermensche where I believe that I am above such concepts? Nietzsche, not on the Stratford approved reading list, I imagine. Could I say create a bomb and throw it in class after a tough day of bullying by students and teachers? Maybe after an argument with my parents?” Carla nodded. To her credit, she wasn’t as frightened as Minkus thought that she would be. But then again she was a Stratford therapist. She probably heard worse. Minkus shrugged. “I probably have the knowledge and the capability to do so. Now would I want to?” He thought for a minute. There were days when he really felt like it. “I suppose I would have no idea.”
Carla looked closely at the teenager. “Well Stuart, that’s what we are trying to work through so
you wouldn’t want to do something like that.”

7th grade passed as the previous years. As in all assignments (though to Stuart these As held no meaning, since he could have obtained them in his sleep as easy as the classes were). He had joined the Debate Team and the Science Club, becoming a key speaker in the former and President in the latter. Out of force of habit, sometimes he scanned the heads to see if his parents would be there at the public events. Of course they never showed. When he confronted them over the issue, his father would ask snidely, “Do you think we would sit through another Hamlet?”

His mother would then add, “You know Stuart, that kind of stuff never really interested us. Maybe if you got involved in a sport—”And Stuart left them not wanting to continue the conversation.

Also bullies like Harley Keiner continued to mess with him almost considering it their right to do so. One time he had been hit so badly that his parents were called in. His father instantly started on him. “Stuart you shouldn’t make yourself a target for them. You need to man up and learn how to fight them back.”

“So it’s my fault that they hurt me?” Minkus countered as he put the damp rag over his bruised cheek.

“Well Stuart what did you say to them?” Nancy asked.

“Nothing, they just make fun of me,” Minkus objected.

“Stuart people don’t just take a swing at you for no reason at all, you must have said something to anta- antag-“

“Antagonize them?” Minkus corrected his mother.

“Annoy them,” his mother said severely. “Something like that.”

“You know Stuart it’s no wonder that these kids don’t like you,” Tom added. “If I were in school with you, I wouldn’t like you.”

Sourly Minkus thought well why don’t you give me up for adoption and take in one of those kids then? They must be a great improvement over me. “I’m going to my bedroom,” Minkus said. “I don’t feel well.” He slammed the door shut before his parents could say anymore.

Stuart was determined as dull as the classes were to do just as well in them as he had in previous years. He would get through school somehow and he would make sure that he would never be hurt by his parent’s assessment of them. True coldness was not to react when things like that upset him. He would no longer reach for or expect their love.

8th grade began as a slightly better year than 7th. He had some fun between grades 7 and 8 by taking part in the public events like the screening of Leon’s Revenge. (Horror movies really weren’t his forte, apart from psychological thrillers like Silence of the Lambs, Se7en, or Rosemary’s Baby. But it was a free movie and a night away from his parents), watching the wrestling match between Cory Matthews and Joey Epstein (He was definitely rooting for Cory the whole time. He would love to see Joey Epstein go down), and the 8th grade elections. When Alvin Meese, Cory Matthews and Shawn Hunter’s competitor resigned, Minkus couldn’t help but think “Sucker!” If it had been him, he knew tons of things that he could have said about Cory and Shawn that would have made at least the election a bit more of a fair fight. Of course he voted for the unopposed Topanga Lawrence.

Also the teachers were better that year. While his parents had pre-selected the courses once more, at least the teachers were more sympathetic than the ones of Mr. Kilgore’s ilk. Among them was Jonathan Turner. While Turner worked mostly on the main side of the school, he did teach one course in the “other side.” He was one of those type of teachers that didn’t want the kids to think of themselves as any less than others.

“People think that you are unable to learn, well I say you kids got this far,” he said. “I think we ought to show them that those labels like “problem kid” or “disturbed,” are no truer than the words people say about someone’s skin color or religion.”
One of the things Turner did was challenge the curricula by teaching the students something fresher and newer. When he taught Shakespeare for example instead of teaching a more well-known play like Hamlet or Romeo and Juliet, he settled on a lesser known play, Timon of Athens. “Now what did you learn about Timon?” Turner asked.

“Hakuna Matata?” one of the students, the dark haired Goth girl Christine said. Some of the kids in the background even broke into the Lion King song.

Among the kids laugh, Minkus rolled his eyes. He guessed that there was a Cory or Shawn in every class. “Not that Timon,” Turner said.

Minkus raised his hand, “Timon was a man who thought he had everything wealth, friends, girls just for the asking. Then when he lost his money and status, his friends abandoned him. Timon became so furious that he cut himself from Athenian society. He no longer wanted to have anything to do with it.”

Turner nodded. “Right, Minkus. Timon felt that the world turned his back on him so he turned his back on the world.”

“But his servant Flavius stood by him,” the red-haired girl, Rita, asked reading her novel.

“He wanted to stand by him,” Turner corrected. “Flavius was loyal to him.”

“-Because he was a servant,” Minkus said with a raised hand. “Timon paid him.”

Turner shook his head. “No, because Flavius was a genuinely good man. Even after Timon no longer had the money to pay him, Flavius said that he would stay with him and be his servant for free. Unfortunately, Timon had already retreated into his hermitage and suspected even that loyalty and rejected Flavius. In his mind it became Timon vs. the World and no one could help him. Can you imagine being pushed away so much by society that you even doubt the people who want to help you?”

Minkus looked downward. He didn’t have to imagine it, he had a feeling that he was heading towards it.

The other interesting thing that happened in 8th grade was the 8th Grade Science Fair. Minkus was determined to not only take part, but win a prize. He began work immediately on putting together a small hand-held portable device. He formed the frame, wiring, and circuitry from old computer parts that he had found in his bedroom. He pushed himself by stitching together the device and writing the scientific steps during the night after he finished his homework. When he was on a studying high like this and inspiration hit, he didn’t want to do anything regular like sleep.

He also made an interesting ally/competitor the aforementioned, Alvin Meese. Meese’s project was also technology based involved creating a faster operating system to get on the Internet. He took one look at Minkus and said, “My project is better than yours.”

Minkus smirked smugly. “Bring it then. You will have to get past me and my-“

“-Tiny Munchkin sized computer?” Meese challenged.

Minkus turned on his portable device and demonstrated its working capabilities. Meese didn’t want to show it but Minkus could see in his eyes that he was impressed. “Well still can’t beat mine.”

Meese showed off his operating system and Minkus too was impressed.

“Pale imitation,” Minkus scoffed. He stuck out his hand. “Stuart Minkus. I like you. You are every bit as smart and competitive as I am.”

“Alvin Meese,” Meese shook his hand. “I like you too. I think we have the firm basis for a beautiful rivalry.”

Minkus and Meese were about to go into another bit of verbal volleying when Minkus heard a familiar voice make his heart flutter. “Stuart?”

Minkus turned around to see Topanga Lawrence facing him. While he had seen her a few times in the hallways, he had very little contact with her and hadn’t seen her up close in sometime. She had completely changed, he wouldn’t have recognized her. Gone were the crimped hair, the hippy clothes, and the easy going nature. In her place was a girl with straighter hair, trendy clothing, and a bit more of an aggressive personality. Stuart didn’t know whether he should be fascinated or
disappointed.
“That’s an interesting project, Stuart,” Topanga said. “Of course you have always done really well
in your projects.”
“Thank you, Topanga,” Minkus said with a smile. He glanced over at her display. It was one that
featured wind turbine and solar energy as alternatives for fossil fuels. Okay, maybe she wasn’t as
far away from the hippy Topanga as he thought. “Yours is pretty fascinating as well.”
“Thank you,” Topanga repeated. She was about to step away from Stuart when the young genius
gathered as much of his courage as he possibly could and followed her. “Topanga, I was
wondering. We’ve known each other for a long time, and well would you like to go out with me
after the Science Fair?”
Topanga smiled but her expression dropped. “Oh Stuart that would be nice but I’m going out with
Cory Matthews now.” Minkus felt like he had been hit with a brick, a curly haired brick. “I’m his
girlfriend. Didn’t you know that?”
Minkus smirked. “No school gossip doesn’t always reach our side.” He said sarcastically. “Cory
Matthews that idiot though? “
“Stuart he is very sweet and kind and cares about his friends and family,” Topanga objected
severely. “Maybe if you got to know him you would see that.”
“But he’s nothing like us-you,” Minkus argued. “Why him?”
Topanga shrugged. “Maybe because he isn’t anything like us. I like to think we balance each other
out and I love him.”
Minkus shook his head not wanting his eyes to fill. “What about me?”
“Stuart,” Topanga said. “Now that I know what love is, I know that I never felt that for you. You
are just a good friend. I would like to continue just being your friend.”
Minkus glared at her. “So you leave me with a consolation prize. Thank you but I’d rather not all
the same.” He walked away not listening to Topanga call his name. He returned to his project
thinking that yes Topanga had disappointed him. What made her unique was gone and now she
was, he shuddered, normal. Well he was better off without her.

The next day was the judge’s evaluation. Stuart tried to hide his growing nerves as he fiddled with
his device. He was pleased to see that both Mr. Turner and Mr. Feeny while not judges had stopped
to take a look at his project. “You’re a super genius kid!” Turner said. “You sell this thing and you
could make a fortune.”
“Thank you, Mr. Turner,” Minkus said with a grin. He would keep that in mind.
“I am impressed Mr. Minkus,” Feeny replied. “Though you have always impressed me no matter
what side of the school that you are on.”
“Thank you, Mr. Feeny,” Minkus answered.
The judges then stood around Minkus’ project as he explained the portable Minkus device and
what it would do. He also explained the steps that he took to build it and the scientific process that
went in creating it. The judges, two men and a woman did not react to the young man and
continued take their notes. They stepped away and investigated other students’ projects including
Topanga’s and Meese’s.
One of the judges, a Dr. Peterson from the Philadelphia Science Center stood up to the microphone
and spoke. “Now here is the moment that you all have been waiting for. The selection of prizes.
Third prize a $1,000 savings bond goes to Andrew Tripp for his project on manufacturing better
steel for tomorrow’s buildings.” The students applauded as a young African-American boy stepped
up and received his prize. Dr. Peterson returned to the microphone. “The second prize for a bond of
$1,500 goes to Ms. Topanga Lawrence for her project on wind turbine and solar energy as an
alternative to fossil fuels.” Minkus clapped warmly for his old friend. Topanga accepted the bond
graciously as Peterson returned to the mike. “And first prize the recipient of the $2,000
Philadelphia Science Foundation Scholarship to the college of their choice goes to Alvin Meese for
his operating system for the Internet.”
Meese smirked and pushed past Minkus purposely hitting his elbow in a gesture of catty smugness.
He accepted the scholarship award from the judges. Minkus clapped but felt ice cold inside.

After Dr. Peterson thanked the sponsors, he and the other two judges approached Minkus’ project. “Stuart Minkus, I’m afraid that you were disqualified from the competition.”

Minkus looked at the three people warily. It was one thing to lose. He was prepared for that, barely. But to go through all of that trouble and not even be allowed to compete? “Disqualified on what grounds?” he asked.

“This is a well thought out, researched, and put together project,” Peterson said. “In fact you could have won first prize if we believed that you actually did the work.”

Minkus was stunned. “I did do the work! You can ask anybody.”

“We don’t have to,” Peterson interrupted. “All we had to do was look at your school records. A student with your…background would not be able to put together such a device. I believe that you had assistance actually more than assistance. Since this is hearsay we cannot prove this so we will not take this further. But in the future do not do this again.”

After Peterson walked away, Minkus felt stunned tears in his eyes. It was because he was in the Stratford program. That’s why they questioned it. His grades didn’t matter, his genius didn’t matter. All that mattered to them was the “disturbed child” label, the label that his parents and the school allowed to be bestowed upon him. He glanced up at the project and felt something he never felt before, rage. He grabbed his project and threw it to the ground. He ripped the cardboard holder in two. He then threw the portable device down and stomped on it. He continued to stomp until he couldn’t feel anything.

“Minkus, hey Minkus,” Turner said. He grabbed on to the teenager by the shoulders to steady him. “Calm down, its okay. You don’t always get to win.”

“It’s not that,” Minkus said. “They disqualified me. I’m just a freak to them to everybody!”

“Come on, kid,” Turner said. “Don’t turn your back on society yet. It’s not Stuart Minkus vs. the World.”

Minkus looked up at the teacher through the tears in his eyes. “You mean like Timon?” he asked. “Actually I’m worse off than Timon, Mr. Turner. I don’t even have a Flavius.”

He thought for a minute. Yes he did have a Flavius, one that would never turn his back on him. One that would never run from him. “I want to go home,” he said.

“Okay,” Mr. Turner said. “Hey George, can we do something about this?”

Feeny approached the young teenager. “I think so, but I will have to inform your parents.” Minkus cringed but nodded. “And Mr. Minkus, I would like to see you in my office tomorrow morning. There are some things that we need to discuss.”

“Yes sir,” Minkus said warily. Minkus was about to follow the two teachers out when Topanga called him.

“Stuart, I’m very sorry,” she said. “I overheard what Dr. Peterson said. It’s not true at all.”

“Save it,” Minkus snapped. The last thing that he wanted to hear was sympathy from Topanga Lawrence. He could take some cold comfort in the fact that at least his parents weren’t there to see him fail.

Minkus looked downward at his feet on the carpet as he listened to his parents rant. “You threw a temper tantrum because you lost?” Nancy yelled. “Stuart when are you going to grow up?”

“They disqualified me because they didn’t believe I did the work,” Minkus argued. “They thought that I was incapable of the work because of my classes, which I might add that you two signed me up for.”

Nancy slapped her son fiercely on the cheek. “Do not talk back to me!”

“I don’t know what we are going to do with you son,” Tom said warily. “The therapists don’t think that you should be in private school. You obviously aren’t prepared for public school. Maybe reform school.”

Minkus scoffed. Reform school with students like Harley Keiner? Why don’t they just kill him
now? “Maybe I could go to another school. Maybe I could live somewhere else.” “With who?” Nancy asked. “You’re still a minor remember?”

“I want to live with Grandpa Ginsburg,” Stuart said. The moment to announce this idea had come. Grandpa Ginsburg, his mentor, his favorite relative, the only one who ever loved and understood him, Stuart’s Flavius. “He understands me, you don’t. You don’t have to worry about my behavior. We get along. It’s perfect.”


Nancy crossed her arms defiantly. “Well for one thing he’s getting on in years. He probably is not capable of taking care of a teenager.”

“He’s always looked after me when he lived across the street,” Minkus said. “And if he is having trouble with his faculties, I can take care of him.”

“For another reason, Stuart,” Nancy said. “Remember we wanted to curtail his influence on you. That’s why he chose to leave remember?”

“You mean you pushed him away,” Minkus corrected. “What other choice did he have?” Nancy silenced her son with a savage look but continued. “Another reason I don’t know where your grandfather lives now.” She said. “We haven’t spoken in a while. He just packed up and left like he always did.” She had a heightened tone in her voice and played with her hair. Minkus recognized the tell. He knew that his mother was lying.

Tom shook his head. “Stuart you are our son and you belong with us, no one else. I know you don’t like hearing this but what makes you think that your grandfather would want you to live with him?” Minkus faced his parents. He couldn’t find any reasonable answer. “I just do,” he said. “Well you are not going to so forget about it,” Tom said as though it were their final word on the matter. “Who knows what your grandfather would get you involved in?”

After midnight, when Stuart was convinced that his parents were asleep, he crept inside his mother’s study. The rest of the night, he gave no outward appearance to his plans. He just silently obeyed and went through the motions of the rest of the day without much feeling. But now he set his plan into motion. He sneaked inside and gingerly flipped on the switch for the desk lamp. The lamp’s light gave an eerie glow around the furniture. Minkus listened carefully for any noise or sign that his mother or father had woken up but since there was none. He put his hands on his mother’s desk and investigated the drawers. As he suspected, they were all locked. He was miles prepared for this. He took out the small thin screwdriver from his tool kit and worked at jimmying the locks.

He tried the top drawer. After a bit of struggling with the lock, he managed to get it clean open. With a whispered cheer, he reached in satisfied to see his mother’s address book. He quickly flipped through the pages which mostly contained friends, business clients, and contacts for the store until he came to the “G’s.” He said a delighted, “yes!” as he saw the name Ginsburg, Malachi! He quickly grabbed a piece of paper and a pencil and wrote down the address: 1320 Sycamore Apartment 518, Brooklyn, NY.

A noise interrupted him. He could hear his mother’s footsteps as she left the bedroom door. Stuart hurriedly flipped off the desk lamp and waited in the dark as his mother walked to the bathroom and then left a few minutes later. Stuart waited until her footsteps died down before he left into the darkness and retreated to his bedroom with his grandfather’s address in hand.

Stuart Minkus considered himself a realist. He knew that he didn’t have the money to make such an endeavor yet and run away to his grandfather’s. He knew that there were many reasons why it would not be possible just yet. He couldn’t however wait until he was 18 and on his own before he could leave. So in the cold light of day, he came up with a plan, a plan that Feeny inadvertently helped him with during their talk.

It wasn’t as bad as Stuart hoped, in fact it was actually pretty terrific. Feeny became aware that the
classes that Minkus’ parents selected were too easy for the young genius. “Perhaps you and I could work together to discuss next year’s schedule independent from your parents, one that is more conducive to your intellectual level but is still affiliated with the Stratford program,” Feeny suggested.

“Thank you sir, I would like that,” Minkus agreed.

“As you are getting older Mr. Minkus, you must always remember to strike a blow for your own independence,” Feeny reminded the young man.

Minkus nodded. The principal didn’t know how close he was to those words. Of course Minkus was smart enough not to just run off simply because an adult suggested it. That seemed more like something that Shawn Hunter would do. It would take some planning, would take some saving, and would take some money. Inadvertently his parents would help him with that.

He made the suggestion at dinner to work part time once a week at the hardware store. “I think it would help you two,” Minkus said. “You always want me to become more involved and I want to be.”

Nancy and Tom looked at the young boy like he sprouted two heads. “Really Stuart?” Tom asked. “You never seemed interested before.”

“Well I am now,” Minkus said. “I’m sorry for acting the way I did. I should never have lost my temper at the Science Fair. You’re right I do need to grow up and try new things. One way could be to learn the business. It could also help me work with people, you know to be..normal.”

Nancy and Tom looked at each other. “What do you think Nance?” Tom asked.

Nancy shrugged. “I think we could give it a shot.”

“Alright, Stuart,” Tom said. “You can sort merchandise on the shelves but don’t argue with us, don’t cause trouble, and don’t correct us.”

“Of course not,” Minkus agreed. In the back of his mind, he was thinking of the money that he would end up saving. The money would be his “Going Away Fund” and would be what would allow him to live in the welcome home of Grandpa Ginsburg. He couldn’t wait.

Author’s Note: I chose Timon of Athens partly because of the symbolism with Timon’s retreat from society correlating with Minkus’ current and future problems with his version of “society,” but also because it’s a really good not as well-known play. I highly recommend it, the relationship between Timon and Flavius always moved me.
Chapter Summary

High School to Graduation, Minkus tries to find happiness with his grandfather and comes up short. The after effects prove to be even more difficult.

The Lives of Genius
A Boy/Girl Meets World Fanfic
By Auburn Red

Chapter Three: Education Blues Pt. II: Stumbling Towards a Breakdown (Stuart Minkus Age 15-18)

9th grade, 10th grade. They passed rather quickly for Minkus. The only difference was that Mr. Feeny made good on his word that he and Minkus would arrange the class schedule before his parents did. Minkus was satisfied with the classes, Advanced Calculus, World History Ancient-Renaissance, 19th Century Novels, Astronomy, Computer Technology just the perfect classes for the average male high schooler, if the average male high schooler had an IQ of 196 of course. His parents raised token objections, the first year that he made his own schedule, but after a discussion with Feeny they decided to let it go. He still had to attend mandatory therapy sessions with Carla, but even this didn’t bother him as much as it did previously.
He still had plenty of issues however both at home and at school. He was still getting bullied and plenty of frightened looks from other students for being on the “other side of the school,” the Oubliette. He also still had disagreements with his parents but he continued to work at the hardware store, shifting items and collecting his money saving for the future goal of moving away.

At 15 years old, he checked his savings account. $1000! Hardly enough to be self-supporting, but certainly enough to buy a bus ticket to New York and for food and other essentials. Grandpa Ginsburg would certainly take him in. He could look after the young man with his Social Security, but even if that wasn’t enough to provide for them, Stuart had other ideas. He could help get a part-time job while attending school and look after the old man, maybe moving up to full time while he took classes online when he entered college.
He kept up a correspondence with his grandfather never letting him know his plans, but hinting at generalities of troubles at home. Ginsburg wrote back often advising him that he was still a genius in the old man’s eyes and to remember that “you’re all you’ve got.” Sometimes the letters got a little confusing and the words and messages became garbled. He remembered his mother mentioning that the older man was “getting on in years.” Logically, this should have deterred Minkus’ plans but emotionally it made him more determined. If his grandfather was truly becoming ill, then he should be with family at the end and who better to look after him than his beloved grandson?

His mother never knew that Stuart was writing to his grandfather. When the mail arrived, Stuart always collected it early taking his grandfather’s letters and giving the rest to his mother. She never caught him but one time.
Stuart excitedly thumbed through the letters looking for the familiar handwriting when he heard his mother’s voice, “Stuart,” Stuart looked up as Nancy held out her hand. “I’ll take those.”
At first, Stuart had the presence of mind to throw his grandfather’s letter behind his back but
Nancy was wise to that. “All of them,” she said. Stuart sighed and handed her his grandfather’s letter.

Nancy didn’t say anything about the letter then or afterward. Minkus never learned whether his mother read it or not. He was prepared for punishment or worse, but his mother still did nothing. It was as if the incident never happened.

At first, Minkus thought that his mother didn’t care about it but when he wrote to his grandfather again, he received a letter in the mail. This one was in his own handwriting and stamped “Return to Sender. Not Accepted By This Address.” Stuart winced. Grandpa Ginsburg was no longer living at his apartment. He felt his heart sink, where was he and why did he go? The genius’ eyes narrowed into slits as reality hit. Something must have happened between his parents and his grandfather after she caught them communicating. They were trying to keep their son from talking to Ginsburg. If it was bad enough that they had try to interfere with Stuart’s education now they continued taking him away from the only person who understood him. Stuart Minkus knew one thing: It was now or never! It was time to put his “Going Away Plan” into action.

The next few days were a blur of Stuart making final plans and not letting people know what was on his mind. He gave no information at school, just studied, made high marks, and avoided most people as much as possible. He spoke to his parents mostly in generalities making everything seem average, becoming secretive and inscrutable. He withdrew his savings into cash at different times and from different branches, so his parents wouldn’t know how much he was taking out. He had walked down to the bus station and ordered a bus ticket in person. Since he was still a minor, he needed his parents’ signature to order it. He practiced forging his mother’s signature, even making some story about how he wanted to surprise his grandfather by visiting for his birthday. The teller gave him the ticket without question and thankfully without calling his parents to confirm it. Minkus hid it in his coat pocket, then he returned home.

He packed one suitcase late at night and hid it in his closet. The next day when he returned home from school, his parents were still working at the hardware store. Minkus then dialed the number for a cab and arranged for it to meet him several blocks down, in case any nosy neighbors were watching. Minkus then grabbed the suitcase and walked to the intersection, his heart pounding with excitement as he waited for the cab to arrive. “The Franklin Ave. Bus Station” Minkus told the driver. The driver then put the car into ignition and headed for the destination.

Minkus’ drummed his fingers nervously as he watched the Pennsylvania horizon through the bus window. He had planned his getaway to perfection. There shouldn’t be any slip-ups. It may be before the next morning before his parents realized that he was gone, if they bothered to look at all. He could see one of two possibilities: His parents would be relieved and wouldn’t bother caring or they would actually be worried, not so much about their son, but afraid of what he could do to anyone else. He may be listed as a missing person. But since he was crossing state lines, it may be awhile before anyone found him.

Now that he was heading for New York, what should he do first? If his grandfather wasn’t at his old address where was he? Minkus’ first step would be to ask at Ginsburg’s old Brooklyn address, maybe they would know where he was taken to. Beyond that, he wasn’t sure. Perhaps he could try phoning various apartment complexes and senior living centers. He also needed to reserve enough money to check into a hotel. He didn’t exactly have the money to spend the night in the Plaza, but maybe he could stay in one in Brooklyn or failing that across the river in New Jersey. He hoped that they wouldn’t ask for I.D. Though perhaps the sleazier ones wouldn’t care as long as he paid for it.

The plans and excitement of the past few days had drained Stuart to the point where he was beginning to fall asleep. The night time view across the countryside was getting monotonous lulling him into an uncomfortable rest. He wasn’t conscious of anything until he heard the driver call, “Manhattan Bus Terminal.” Minkus woke up feeling tired and groggy but he followed the
passengers out of the bus and onto the streets. He picked up his suitcase and thanked the driver. He then looked around for an MTA bus that took passengers from Manhattan to the other boroughs. Luckily, he found one heading for Brooklyn and waiting to take passengers. Minkus handed the man money and accepted an all-day pass.

With traveling by state bus and then city bus, it was almost dawn by the time Minkus arrived close to his grandfather’s Brooklyn address. It was still several blocks from where his final destination was but he was prepared to walk. Minkus stepped down and looked around the area. It was a predominately Jewish neighborhood, possibly the type of area that Ginsburg grew up in when he was a boy. Minkus could instantly smell the kosher products cooking from the windows. He passed by several small stores such as a Hassidic jewelers, a few delis, and others. He felt like a 19th century immigrant appearing in New York after going through Ellis Island for the first time, confused, bewildered, almost alien. Some people were heading out to work, others opening their stores. A few children had staggered out carrying their schoolbags no doubt waiting for the bus or walking. Minkus even saw a couple of Orthodox Jewish men with beards and hats speaking in frantic Yiddish to each other. He wondered how his agnostic grandfather felt about being surrounded by the trappings of a religion that he had longed abandoned.

Minkus continued to walk to the address getting lost a couple of times. Ultimately he found the apartment. It was an old-fashioned pre-war apartment that might have been classy once but was now fallen into disrepair. Minkus held his breath and walked inside the door. Just to double check, he looked at the mailbox for the number: 518. He walked upstairs and knocked on the door. Through the door, Minkus could hear the sound of small children yelling and a baby crying. Minkus knocked again and he could hear the cacophonous symphony through the door again. A female voice said, “Alright, alright I’ll get it,” she yelled.

The door opened and Stuart saw an overweight tired-looking brunette woman in her forties. She looked the teenager up and down, with a very nervous and annoyed expression. Minkus wondered if she thought that he was either a magazine salesperson or a rapist. “Yeah?” she asked.

“Hi, I’m looking for a Malachi Ginsburg,” Minkus said.

“I don’t know anyone by that name,” the woman said. She was about to shut the door when Minkus held it open with his hand.

Maybe he could appeal to her sympathy. “Malachi Ginsburg is my grandfather,” he said. “I’ve been trying to look for him for a long time. Please, he’s a sick man.”

The woman looked at little more understanding. “I’m sorry but no one of that name lives here.” She held up a finger. “Wait are you talking about the old guy who lived here before us?”

Minkus nodded. “Yes, I think he moved.”

“Yeah we rented this apartment after he left,” the woman said. “But I don’t know where he lives now.” Minkus’ looked downward feeling fatigued. Oh well it was off to a hotel and playing telephone tag with various apartments. “You might want to talk to our landlord, Mr. Cohen. He lives downstairs, Apartment 105. He don’t fix anything for shit around here, but he’s pretty nosy. He might help you.”

Minkus nodded and shook her hand. “Thank you, ma’am. I appreciate it.” He then walked downstairs.

Mr. Cohen responded right away to Minkus ’ring. “If you ring the doorbell and run one more time kids, I’ll tan your hides and then I’ll tan your parent’s hides!” he yelled. Minkus stepped back at the large bald man glaring at him through wide spectacles. He looked the young skinny genius up and down. “Oh you’re not them are ya?” he said. “What do you want?”

“I’m Stuart Minkus and I am inquiring about one of your tenants, a Malachi Ginsburg,” he said. “Oh you can ‘inquire’ all you want, kid,” Mr. Cohen said mimicking Minkus’ educated speech. “But he don’t live here anymore.”

“I know that sir,” Minkus said. “I just want to know his current address. He’s my grandfather.”
“If he’s your grandfather wouldn’t you already know where he was taken to?” Cohen asked suspiciously.
“Yes but my mother and I lost contact with him,” Minkus said. He forced as much emotion as he possibly could from his voice. “You see my mother is very sick sir and one of her final wishes is to make peace with her father.”
Cohen looked the young boy up and down. “Beautiful story, lying.”
Minkus rolled his eyes and tried again this time telling the truth. “I don’t get along with my parents and I am trying to move in with my grandfather who is the only person who ever understood me.”
Cohen shook his head. “I liked your first story better. Where you from kid?”
“Philadelphia,” Minkus answered.
“That’s quite a trip,” the landlord said. “Obviously the old guy must mean something to you.”
Minkus nodded. “Yes, he does.”
Cohen shrugged. “Okay against my better judgement and so you don’t pass out on my carpet, I’ll tell you.” He looked through a rolodex for a few minutes. “Yeah let’s see his daughter had him transferred to a nursing home, Shalom Retirement Center right here in Brooklyn.”
Stuart started confused. “His daughter transferred him?”
The landlord nodded. “Yeah his daughter. You know what a daughter is don’t you? He gives his seed to the kid’s mother and lo and behold she pops out a girl?”
Stuart shook his head. “Can you give me the address?”

Minkus entered the Shalom Retirement Center. It was a small nursing home with narrow corridors and plain furniture. He saw a couple of residents talking to each other. One said angrily, “They won’t find me this time. I’ll hide in the midden!” Minkus could see that the woman had a concentration camp tattoo on her arm. Obviously she was still trapped in her memories of the Holocaust. He breathed a sigh of relief that at least his grandfather didn’t have that to look back on. He wouldn’t wish those days on anyone.
“Can I help you?” the receptionist, a young dark haired woman asked with a whisper. Her name tag read “Naomi.”
“Yes, I’m here to visit my grandfather, Malachi Ginsburg,” Minkus said.
Naomi looked through the computer at her records. “Yes, here is! Room 217.” She then called an orderly, a tall muscular man over. “David, could you take this young man-“
She prompted for his name. “Oh Stuart Minkus,” Minkus replied.
Naomi nodded. “Stuart Minkus?” She asked quizzically as if she had heard that name before. Insanely, Stuart wondered if he should have given the woman a fake name. Oh well, he attributed his slow thinking to fatigue from traveling and concern for his grandfather. “Could you take him to see Malachi?”

David motioned the teenager to follow him. Minkus picked up his suitcase and walked down the hallway behind the orderly. “How is he?” Minkus asked.
“Okay, sometimes,” David answered with a shrug. “Sometimes he can be a mean old bastard, oh sorry kid.”
Minkus shrugged. “That’s alright, I understand. He has Alzheimer’s,” He guessed. David nodded. “Early onset, I would guess because of his age. He’s only 57.”
“He gets these moods where he forgets things, kind of unpredictable,” David said. “Now well see for yourself. “ He opened the door to the small room.

Minkus held onto his mouth as he broke into a smile. His grandfather was seated on the bed looking out the window. He still had the same goatee, but his face was drawn more aged. His hands shook and his posture was stooped. There was a lost sad expression on the old man’s face. He seemed older now, more tired.
Minkus stepped forward and tapped him on the shoulder. Ginsburg jumped startled. He looked at the teenager confused. “Who are you?”
“Grandpa, it’s me Stuart,” Minkus said. “Your grandson.” He held his shaking hand in his own steady one. “Remember? I used to come to your house every day and we used to play farkle? You called me your Little Man?”

Ginsburg smiled. “Stuart? Stuart!” He wrapped his arms around the young boy. “How have you been Little Man?”

“I’m okay,” Minkus said. “I wanted to come see you.”

“Well of course you did,” he said grandly. “But let’s keep this between you and me. We don’t want Nonnie to find out!”

“No we don’t,” Minkus said as he sat down next to his grandfather. Stuart opened his suitcase taking out the six dice as the two played farkle.

“You got a long face kid, what’s the problem?” Ginsburg said. “Look out at the beautiful scenery and just be.”

Minkus looked through the window. There was nothing visible but a brick wall and some trash cans. “You always know what I’m thinking Grandpa,” Minkus said. “How do you do it?”

“For a genius you’re not that good at hiding your emotions, son,” Ginsburg replied.

“Are they treating you well here Grandpa?” Minkus asked.

Ginsburg looked at the dice. He did something that concerned the young teen. He counted the numbers not in the fake stalling for time that Minkus was used to, he was actually counting them. Sometimes he lost count. He pointed at one of the dice. “What is this, Stuart?” he asked.

“It’s a die, Grandpa,” Minkus answered.

“What are we using it for?” he asked.

“We’re playing farkle remember?” Stuart asked.

Ginsburg smiled far off. “Oh of course we are.” He looked up. “They’re good here, but it’s kind of lonely. I wish Nonnie would let you come over more often.”

“I wish she would too, Grandpa,” Minkus said. “In fact how would you like me to live with you?”

Ginsburg looked at the young boy confused. “Live with me here?”

“Well not here,” Minkus said. “I can legally emancipate myself and find work. I will continue to go to school and I can take care of you.” He held onto the old man’s shaking hand. “Grandpa, I can’t let you stay here by yourself.”

Ginsburg looked at his grandson. “But I’m not here by myself. Your parents live just across the street and it’s not like I live on the dark side of the moon. I live right near you.”

Minkus’ heart sank. “No Grandpa, you don’t anymore.”

Ginsburg shook his head and stomped his foot like a child who wouldn’t get his way but stubbornly insisted upon it. “I live right near you and how come you don’t see me anymore?”

Minkus held onto his grandfather trying to calm him down. “Grandpa, Grandpa, I don’t live near you anymore. I live in Philadelphia and you live here in Brooklyn.”

“I’m in Brooklyn,” Ginsburg said as if the concept was altogether new for him. “I’m in Brooklyn so who are you?” Minkus wouldn’t answer, so Ginsburg continued. “You heard me! Who are you?” He threw the dice on the ground. “Get the fuck out of here!” He attacked the young man sending him flying from his chair. He tried to strangle the teen as Minkus called for help. “I said get out! Get out!”

David and another orderly opened the door and pulled the old man off of him as he screamed bloody murder. They sedated him. Minkus still stunned let frightened tears fall from his eyes as his grandfather fell into unconsciousness. David reached for the teenager but he shrugged him off and stood on his own. “We tried to warn you,” was all David said as Minkus gathered his suitcase and left his grandfather’s bedroom.

Minkus staggered out into the gray Brooklyn late afternoon. He felt exhausted and realized that he hadn’t slept since he was on the bus, not the most comfortable position. Perhaps now it was time to look for hotel. He mentally counted the money in his head. He was so caught up in assessing his monetary situation that he didn’t notice the person following him until he stuck his foot out.
Minkus fell on the ground and the suitcase dropped from his hand. Minkus looked up just in time to see a boy and girl a little older than him pick up his suitcase and run. He stood up and ran after them for a few blocks. He could barely make them out in the crowd, but they got lost in a group of passers-by and Stuart knew it was useless. Defeated and weary, the young teenager sank onto a flight of stairs. The scene with his grandfather had left him shaken. He didn’t know if he had the capability to look after him if he was that far gone and certainly not by himself. Now his suitcase including his clothes and money, the hard earned money that he had saved for over a year working in his father’s store, were gone. He was lost, broke, alone, and stranded in an unknown city. “Nice going, genius,” he cursed himself feeling all of the aching fill him at once. He broke down in tears and sobbed curling his knees with his arms and burying his face. He was so down and feeling sorry for himself that he didn’t see the police officer look at him and talk in his intercom. He didn’t hear him approach until he put his arm on his shoulder and told him to stand.

Stuart didn’t say anything as the Philadelphia police officer led him to his parent’s house. He just felt numb and devoid of any feeling as they knocked on the door and his mother and father led him inside the house. Turned out, he had been reported a missing teenager in Philadelphia. Naomi the receptionist at the Shalom Retirement Center had recognized him from a news report and had phoned the police. The NYPD contacted the Philadelphia department and they informed his parents that he had been found. His mother and father gave the boy a hug and told him how worried they were about him and then led him inside.

“What were you thinking?” Tom asked when the three of them were alone. “Were you thinking at all?” Nancy said. “Stuart I thought you were smarter than that!” Minkus glared at them. “What were you thinking not telling me that Grandpa Ginsburg was in a nursing home? He’s dying out there!”

Nancy and Tom exchanged glances. “We wanted to keep it from you,” Nancy said. “He is a sick old man who needs round the clock care.” “You mean away from you,” Minkus challenged. Nancy’s only response to the obviously true assessment was to slap her son on the face for his smart mouth.

“Who’s going to take care of him son, you,” Tom snapped. “It was the only option.” “You should have told me where he was,” Minkus yelled. “You knew I was writing to him!” “We didn’t know how you would react,” Nancy said. “It was for-“ “-My own good,” Stuart mocked very chilly. He walked upstairs. “I’m done with that. I’m done with both of you.”

Stuart Minkus continued to go to John Adams High School but the fire was gone. He took the courses, studied, wrote and rewrote his homework until it was perfect. He stayed up most nights sometimes well past midnight until he could be sure it was perfect only dropping off from exhaustion. He didn’t reach out for anyone anymore. Instead he saw everybody as a rival. He learned that his once-crush Topanga Lawrence had an equal amount of A’s and he was determined to beat her no matter how many it took. He suspected rivalry and competition in everyone pushing his peers away from him.

He never spoke to anyone at school beyond academic reasons, never looked for praise from his teachers though many of them like Turner complimented him, but there were some like Kilgore who didn’t. It was usually those words that stuck out in the young genius’ head and made him determined to prove himself. He never spoke to his parents. He had dinner a separate time from them and didn’t look at them whenever they happened to be in the same room as he was. He took the Driver’s Ed course and passed it as he expected. Of course he didn’t have the money to buy a car, but it was one more rite of passage that he could check off, one more A earned.

Minkus began to not care about his personal care. He hardly ever ate anymore and when he did, it
was only spare small meals when he felt the absolute limits of hunger pangs and headaches. His sleep schedule changed from a traditional 8-10 hour block to whenever he felt like it which was almost never. During the week, he was often too keyed up and involved in his studies to sleep sometimes relying on a steady diet of energy drinks to stay awake. On the weekend he dropped off sometimes sleeping all day rather than talk to anybody. Sometimes he wore the same clothes for days forgetting to change until someone in school pointed it out. There were even days when he forgot to shower or bathe. He could feel the grime on his body, but it no longer seemed important. It seemed silly and unimportant to bathe when he had to the next day. Nothing seemed important anymore. Sometimes late at night during his study sessions, he thought that he heard his grandfather calling to him. Sometimes he was speaking to him like he always did, wise, strong, reassuring. More often than not, the memory of that last day came to him where once again he would ask who he was and tell him to get out. Out of the corner of his eye, Minkus even thought he saw his grandfather watching him through the window. When that happened, Minkus would lay at his desk holding onto his forehead and rubbing it fiercely. He remembered what his grandpa said about Michael, his nephew and Stuart’s second cousin. The man had lost his mind and ended up in a mental asylum. He also remembered his grandfather’s behavior. Was this it? Was Stuart Minkus finally losing his mind? Was he really falling apart? He no longer knew and wasn’t sure that he cared.

When he was in the midst of this behavior, he had accidentally bumped into someone in the hallways at school. “Watch it,” a girl commanded.

Stuart Minkus looked upward to see Jennifer Bassett, one of the prettiest richest girls in school. She was a notorious heartbreaker. Even some of the guys on the Stratford side had spoken of her. He knew from them that she had dated Shawn Hunter and had broken up with him. Stuart couldn’t resist finding a way to stick a knife into his former enemy’s back. He was always looking for a way to score off an enemy or a rival.

“Hi Jennifer?” he asked.

“What?” Jennifer asked clearly not wanting to be seen in the same stratosphere as him let alone seen talking to him.

“I was wondering if after school you would like to do something with me,” he said.

Jennifer laughed and clapped her hands as if that were the funniest thing that she ever heard. “Me go out with you? A Strat Freak? In your dreams,” She pointed and laughed. The other students around her laughed as well. “Look at yourself. You look like a bum and a loser as well as a nerd!” Minkus felt the room spin. In his mind he could picture the whole school laughing at him, his parents laughing at him, everyone around him laughing at him, even Grandpa Ginsburg laughing at him. He had to run from them, run away from everyone, run away from himself. He dropped his books and ran past the principal’s office when Mr. Feeny emerged. “Mr. Minkus,” he called.

Stuart Minkus stopped and rather than respond, he turned to face the principal. “I want to kill all of them!” he manage to mumble loud enough for the principal to hear. “I want to kill myself!” He felt his legs give way and his vision turn into blackness.

When Stuart awoke, he was in a white room. His arms had been restrained and he was dressed in a hospital gown. The room was completely bare and white with rubber walls surrounding him. He felt groggy like he had been drugged. The door opened and a nurse and doctor appeared. “Oh so we’re finally awake are we?” the doctor said. He was a young-looking African-American man. His name tag read, “Dr. Hanlon.”

“Yes we are,” Minkus said recognizing how hoarse his voice sounded. “Where am I?”

“You are in the psychiatric ward of Philadelphia General,” the doctor said.

“I guessed that from the rubber walls,” Minkus said dryly. The nurse gave him two pills and a cup of water. He swallowed both. “What are these?”

“Paroxetine,” the doctor said. “It’s an anti-depressant. Also with Trazodone, it’s an anti-anxiety.”

“What do I need them for?” Minkus asked.
“Well first let me ask you a few questions to test your memory,” Dr. Hanlon said. He checked his notes. “What’s your full name?”
“Stuart Nathaniel Minkus,” Minkus replied with a yawn.
“How old are you Stuart?” the doctor inquired.
“16,” Minkus answered.
“And what is the date,” the doctor asked.
“March 11, 1997,” Minkus replied.
“Close enough,” the doctor said. “Actually it’s the 14th, but since you’ve been sleeping for most of it, I’ll let it slide. Who’s the President of the United States right now?” Dr. Hanlon asked.
“Bill Clinton and he’s the 42nd,” Minkus answered. “Elected for his first term in November 1992 and his second in November 1996. His wife is named Hillary and his daughter is named Chelsea. His achievements include health care, diplomacy between the PLO and Israeli government, and recent improvements in the United States economy. He has had sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky, his White House intern and possibly with Gennifer Flowers and Paula Jones, among others. Would you like to hear about his governorship of Arkansas?”

Dr. Hanlon involuntarily dropped his pen. “Uh no, that’s not necessary. Now Stuart do you know why you are in here?”

Minkus thought for a minute. Everything seemed a blur. He knew that he had been sick for a long time, sick and tired. He remembered hearing laughter and hearing Mr. Feeny’s voice. Hadn’t he said or did something before he collapsed?

“Sort of?” he said. “Did something happen?”

“Well your principal said that you had threatened to kill others and yourself,” the doctor said. “He also said that there were concerns from other teachers that you had signs of depression, not eating well, not sleeping enough, not taking care of yourself. He also said that you were pushing yourself too hard at school.”

“So in other words, I had a nervous breakdown,” Minkus translated.

“Well we don’t like to use that term anymore,” Dr. Hanlon said. “It’s somewhat outdated.”

“But that’s what it was,” Minkus insisted.

“If you look at it that way, yes,” Hanlon remarked.

Minkus shook his head and hid his face with his hands. “I am so weak,” he said.

Dr. Hanlon put his hand on his shoulder in a gesture of comfort. “It’s not weakness, Stuart,” he said kindly. “Sometimes it feels like life puts too many weights on you. You just keep wanting to take more and more but your body wants to give in. This is just a way for your body to say, ‘Enough! Just let me sleep for a while.’ How are you feeling now?”

“Tired,” Minkus said. “I should be in school. What’s going to happen to my A average if I miss school?”

“Well we can worry about that later,” Hanlon said. “Right now let’s just concentrate on you getting better. That’s the good thing in a place like this. There are no outside distractions. All you have to do is rest and just ‘be.’

Minkus smiled. “That sounds almost like something my grandpa would say.”

“I can tell from your voice that you are fond of him,” Dr. Hanlon said.

“I was, am, and always will be,” Minkus answered.

The doctor smiled. “I take it he was very special in your life. Why don’t we start by you telling me about him?”

While Minkus at first was shy about opening up, he began to answer a few questions. Suddenly, he felt acceptance wanting to talk to the psychiatrist about everything on his mind.

Minkus felt a bit more relaxed. He used his time in the hospital wisely. He took his medicine at first gradually but then accepted the pills especially when the anxieties were threatening to return. He managed to get plenty of rest and relaxation. He talked to Dr. Hanlon about his issues including his problems at school, his parent’s indifference, and his relationship with Grandpa Ginsburg including
his aborted attempt at running away. The doctor made him see that what had happened was not his fault and he shouldn’t feel guilty about the older man’s condition. “He needs his rest too,” Dr. Hanlon said. “But he knows that you love him.”

He didn’t have too many visitors. Just Feeny came a few times. Minkus insisted on the principal bringing the student his homework and Minkus insisted on finishing it still wanting to retain his a average. Feeny shook his head but was impressed that the genius student was still greatly inspired by his education. If anything else, that was what made Minkus determined to get through his time in the hospital and return to school as soon as possible.

Mr. Turner visited him once, but stopped after a while. Minkus was concerned that the teacher had forgotten about him, but Feeny told him that he had been involved in a serious motorcycle accident. After he told him that, Minkus felt panic and anxiety swell up inside him. He became hysterical until a nurse arrived and gave him an increased dosage of medicine. As Minkus felt himself return to sleep, he pictured in his head Turner mangled on his bike and sent not exactly a prayer, but a concerned thought that he would recover.

No friends his age visited, but Minkus really wasn’t surprised truth be told. He didn’t exactly go out of his way to make close friends, so why should they come to see him? He also wasn’t surprised that his parents didn’t come to see him either. He had long stopped expecting miracles from them. He told Dr. Hanlon about them. “Sometimes I wonder what I did to make them hate me so much.” Minkus said with tears in his eyes.

“No you really think that they hate you?” Hanlon said.

“I think I disappoint them,” Minkus answered. “They don’t understand me.”

“Do you understand them?” Hanlon asked.

“I don’t know,” Minkus shrugged. “I think that they’ve been trying to change me into a son that they want and when it didn’t work, they gave up on me.”

“Do you think that you’ve been trying to get them to notice you and accept you for who you are?” Hanlon inquired.

“You mean by running away and being in the hospital?” Minkus asked.

“Possibly,” Hanlon suggested. “In my experience many of the kids who run away are just counting the seconds until someone finds them and brings them home.”

“But what if no one wants to bring them home?” Minkus asked.

“Maybe you just haven’t found it yet,” Hanlon suggested. “You’re 16. In two years you will be a legal adult. Maybe you will find it then. In the meantime, find a way to live with your parents. Sometimes loving someone means seeing them for who they are, flaws and all.”

Minkus didn’t feel any sense of a breakthrough or sudden epiphany with the psychiatrist’s words. But he did feel a sense of peace and maybe understanding. Perhaps it was time for Timon of Athens to come out of his hermitage and give the world another chance, flaws and all.

A few days later, Minkus was discharged from the hospital. He met his parents at the desk and said nothing until the three returned home. He stood in the living room and began to talk. “Here’s how it stands,” he said. “I am 16 years old and I will live with you two. We haven’t been emotionally close to each other in years and since I can’t be physically separated from you, then I will be emotionally separated from you until I come of legal age. I will continue to go to school at John Adams. I will graduate. I will live under this roof and continue to be under your guardianship. But that is it. I will provide for myself. I will no longer ask anything from you and you will no longer ask anything from me. When I turn 18 and graduate high school, I will move out to an apartment near whatever university that I will attend. Until that time, we are not parents and their son. We just live together.”

“Are you sure about this, Stuart,” Tom asked.

“I am serious, Fath-Tom,” he said. “We can’t keep making something work that isn’t going to.” Nancy drummed her fingers. “Well we’ve tried everything and I should know by now that you will do whatever you want anyway. Stubborn just like your grandfather.”
“I know, Nancy” Minkus said proudly. “And I’m glad of it.” He couldn’t resist a gibe. “It is for our own good.”

Tom and Nancy sighed and looked at their son. They nodded in defeat. Minkus almost felt sorry for them. But he wasn’t going to relent. It was the only way the three of them were ever going to survive the next two years without doing something desperate like kill each other. Minkus returned to his bedroom knowing that his parents no longer had any power over him. He wished he could feel more victorious but he knew that now that he was emotionally an adult, the world was going to be more difficult for him from this point on. He was ready for it.

The next two years flew by. Minkus continued to maintain an A average being constantly tied neck and neck with Topanga Lawrence. He had counted the total of A’s earned in school. They were tied at 699 each! It would make a very merry rivalry indeed to find out who would be valedictorian. He took a few basic university courses online including English composition and trigonometry so he could breeze past his basics once he began college. He also applied for various universities including some Ivy League schools and scouted for scholarships. He found one that was intriguing, the Bill and Melinda Gates Scholarship for Technological Students. He happily applied for it giving the details of his grades, his essay on how “Technology Will Improve the 21st Century,” and an account of his Minkus device as well as other technology based projects that he had contributed.

A few months later he received two very important packages in the mail, a stuffed envelope from Pennsylvania University congratulating him on his acceptance and another letter with a scholarship check informing him that he received the Gates scholarship! He cheered with delight and began looking for apartments near Penn.

On graduation day, Minkus leaned against a doorway listening to Cory Matthews and Shawn Hunter excitedly talking about catching up with old friends that they hadn’t seen in a while. It was fate he supposed that he would be in the presence of those two who had caused such trouble for him in the past.

Cory turned to Minkus. “Hi Minkus,” he said with a wave.

Minkus smirked at the two. In the past four years he had survived being sent to an area for troubled students, his parent’s indifference, running away from home, his grandfather’s illness, and a nervous breakdown. He could survive a few minutes conversation with those two. “Oh so now it’s hi Minkus,” Minkus said sarcastically. “For the past four years it’s like I haven’t been in the same school with you guys.”

Of course he wasn’t really disappointed. He was just ribbing on their feeble grasp of the obvious. Okay maybe he was slightly disappointed. It might have been nice to have close friends like Cory and Shawn to have helped him through all of the difficulties. He shrugged. No used dwelling on the past when it’s time to look forward to the future.

“We just never saw you around,” Shawn

How could those two still be so thick and manage to graduate? And how could Topanga Lawrence choose Cory Matthews over him, Stuart Minkus would never know.

“I was,” he said. “I was in the other part of the school.” He pointed at the Stratford side.

“What other part of the school?” Shawn said.

“You know over there,” Minkus hinted pointing at the Stratford side.

“We don’t go over there,” Cory said making it sound like the place was haunted.

“Yeah when you go there, you never come back,” Shawn said.

Stratford. The Oubliette. Those comments were meant for only Stratford kids to say, those who have been there and know what it’s really like. It was silly for everyone to be so worked up about it like it was cursed or something. It was just simply another part of the school! Minkus laughed.

“That’s silly!” He was about to say more when he saw a familiar face. “Hey Mr. Turner, wait up!” He called.

He ran to the English teacher. After the accident, Turner was now in a wheelchair but he managed
to teach one class this semester. “Hey Minkus,” the teacher said. “Looks like we’re both survivors! We left and came back!” Minkus nodded. “Yes, we did. Thank you, Mr. Turner for believing in me.” “Anything for my students,” Turner said clasping the young man with a handshake. “You take care of yourself, kid and change the world.” “I will,” Minkus promised.

During the graduation ceremony, Stuart Minkus couldn’t resist verbally complaining that Topanga got one A more than him and became valedictorian. Oh well if he had to lose to somebody, at least it was her. He would willingly concede. Besides he still had Penn to look forward to and who knew what he would come up to there? Like the other students he couldn’t resist laughing at Eric Matthews for lack of a better word rendition of “To Sir With Love.” He felt somewhat embarrassed for Mr. Feeny and for Eric’s family and he would never listen to the Lulu song in the same way again. Still in a strange way Eric was like Cory, someone who could always be counted for a laugh and to make a person feel a bit lighter. If you could ignore the overall exterior idiocy of course.

The best part of the ceremony was after Mr. Feeny called his name. Stuart accepted the diploma and approached Cory and Shawn. In a burst of exuberance, the two friends reached over and gave Minkus a hug! The genius was shocked. He would have never expected it from either of them. It was odd but at the same time, it felt warm and trusting. He smiled and embraced this gesture of friendship. Maybe there would be more in the future.
Bassett Benefits (Stuart Age 18)

Chapter Summary

The beginning of University and Minkus International. Minkus and his new colleagues find funding for their projects and Minkus finds more than one benefit in the alliance.

The Lives of Genius

Chapter Four: Bassett Benefits (Stuart Minkus Age 18)

Author’s Note: While I created Elliot Smackle, he will later become the father of Isadora Smackle, Farkle’s frequent rival. Ingrid Iverson, Elliot’s girlfriend (and Isadora’s future mother) is none other than the brainy girl that Cory and Shawn made up in “Turnaround,” and of course you are all familiar with Meese. With the exception of Jennifer, the Bassett family are original as well as Gina, Meese’s “date.”

Stuart Minkus peered through the thick microscopic lens as he focused the drill on the tiny microchip.

“Almost got it,” the voice of one of his colleagues Elliot Smackle said in his ear standing next to him. “Wait for it,” he cautioned Minkus.

“I know, I know,” Minkus said quietly. They had enough problems using the connectors that the university provided for them. He was well aware that the slightest wrong movement could cause several weeks of research, study, and work to go down the tubes. He joined two of the wires.

“There there,” encouraged Ingrid Iverson, another colleague and Elliot’s girlfriend. Minkus put them together. “No, back back!” Ingrid stammered as the wrong wires had crossed.

“Alright, you’re making me nervous stop,” Minkus half-shouted as he separated the connectors and disconnected the wires. He was about to try again when a fizzle and a pop erupted from the machinery.

“Was that a pop,” the voice of their fourth colleague, Alvin Meese emerged from the door as he entered. His question was answered by a larger pop.

The four university students stepped back terrified. Minkus picked up the fire extinguisher as red flames emerged from the electronic part and consumed the area surrounding it. Minkus gamely turned on the extinguisher to put out the blaze.

“Was that a pop followed by a crash followed by a bang!?” Meese demanded his voice raised by a full octave.

“No,” Elliot said. “That was a fizz followed by a pop, followed by a crackle, followed by a kaboom.” He paused. “Followed by a bang.”

Minkus held the charred remains of what used to be their connector. The four students were working on the MIMS portable device. It was a variation of the same device that Minkus put together in the 8th grade Science Fair with strong improvements provided by the other three. They not only used Minkus’ original design, but combined it with Meese’s operating system to improve on faster Internet connectivity. In their freshman year, the two geniuses met with Elliot and Ingrid who also helped improve on the design. Elliot was involved in the hardware aspects, putting together the exteriors of the device and Ingrid was involved in creating the software design systems inside. Since the four had provided their own contributions, it made sense for the device to be named after all of them, so Minkus suggested calling it the MIMS after Minkus, Iverson, Meese, and Smackle each student’s last initial. They would be a success if they could get new equipment
to put it together that was.
Minkus looked at the connector in despair. “Well this is fried. I hope no one was planning on
working today.” He threw the now useless object in the sink. He washed his glasses removing the
ashes that had gathered on them. Finally, he could see through them. For what seemed to be the
millonth time in the past few years, Stuart mentally vowed if he ever got enough money, he was
going to get LASIK eye surgery.
The other three students collapsed on their chairs. “Well we will just have to get another one won’t
we?” Ingrid asked. Meekus, Meese, and Elliot glared at her.
“Sure,” Minkus stood up. “Let’s pull out our money hidden in the safe behind the Monet,” He
looked up at the empty wall behind them and said in mock horror. “Oh no the Monet and the safe
are gone!”
“You forget that this was put together from the wiring that we had on our last connector that blew,”
Meese reminded her.
“Hey, I just asked! You don’t have to be rude with me,” Ingrid defended herself.
“Well you asked a pretty dumb question,” Meese said continuing being rude.
“Leave her alone,” Elliot said.
“I can fight my own battles thank you, Elliot,” Ingrid argued with her boyfriend. Elliot towered
over Ingrid by a head and his dark hair and tanned skin contrasted with her strawberry blond hair,
pale skin, and small height.
The three student’s voices began to raise while Minkus held up his hands. “Hey, hey, knock it off
alright?” He yelled. “This pointless bickering is getting us nowhere! We still have another hour in
our time in this lab so let’s use it for more useful practices.”
“Like what, Project Leader,” Meese asked testily. “We don’t exactly have the tools or the money to
continue working. We can forget about our finals, heck our whole future!”
“Good-bye Penn,” Elliot moaned. “Hello flipping burgers.”
“Everyone relax,” Minkus told his colleagues. “Let’s keep our heads. Remember during this whole
Y2K thing. Everyone else is panicking and we’re not.”
“Because we knew it is a lot of hooey,” Ingrid said.
“Right, we know it’s nothing to get upset about,” Minkus reminded them. “Like this. This will—“He
looked at the destroyed object and put it next to the other destroyed equipment. “—soon pass. We
hope. Remember Steve Jobs’ LISA program failed and he went right on working creating the Mac
and later he owned Apple.”
“He was already an established computer programmer,” Meese reminded his colleague. “We are
four scholarship students, while at a prestigious Ivy League campus, receive the lowest of the rung
in money, which we already used most of, I might add. If we don’t get any extra funding, the
closest we will come to Apple will be selling Red Delicious and Granny Smiths at a fruit stand!”
Minkus put his hands through his hair. Meese did have a point. “Well I wonder if we could find
some rich donor to finance us.”
Meese scoffed. While Minkus and Meese had known each other for years, they had a yin-yang
personality which bounced each other off rather well. Minkus was the leader, innovator while
Meese was the reviewer, the realist. Minkus took care of the big ideas while Meese saw the details.
The two had a combative working relationship that often put them at odds but they recognized each
other’s strengths as well. It was not a friendship. Minkus no longer saw himself as someone who
was capable of making lasting friendships, but it was a close working relationship. “Well who do
you have in mind? We didn’t acquire much interest at the Technology Expo.”
Minkus groaned. The Technology Expo, he forgot about that. The four students brought their latest
development gadgets which looked plain and scrapped together compared to the expensive grand
exhibits that were there. Minkus felt like someone wearing a cheap frayed second-hand suit
surrounded by men in Armani or Ralph Lauren. After all they had a group of small nanochips and a
couple of rinky dink portable devices and other displays had laser technology, artificial
intelligence, cloned animals and Minkus wasn’t sure but he think one even had a time machine. If
that wasn’t bad enough, stormy weather made the attendance at the Expo very sparse indeed. So
the four felt embarrassed and foolish as if all their plans had been for naught. Minkus tried to put the failure of the Expo from his mind. “Well maybe we can canvass around for someone?” Minkus turned to Ingrid and Elliot. “Who haven’t we talked to?” Meese rolled his eyes and pointed at the door. “What do you expect some big shot millionaire to come walking through that door saying, ‘Excuse me, I saw you at the Technology Expo. I’ve heard about such talent as yours and I would like to provide funding for you for the next five years.’”

“Excuse me,” a voice interrupted them. The four students turned around to see a thin man with balding dark hair. He peered at them through narrow eyes. “Which of you is Stuart Minkus?” Ingrid, Elliot, and Alvin all glanced at Minkus. Minkus stepped forward reluctantly. “Well no one else wants to be. I’m Stuart Minkus.”

“And you are the leader of the MIMS portable device project?” the man asked. Minkus nodded. There was no way out of it. The man took out his hand and Stuart shook it. “Well my name is Thomas Hathorne and I represent Edward Bassett,” he said. “Mr. Bassett saw you at the Technology Expo. He has heard about such talent as yours and he would like to provide funding for you for the next five years.” He offered the young man some paperwork.

The four students let out a unanimous gasp of surprise. Elliot held out his hand to the door. “And I just won the Pennsylvania State Lottery!” He snapped his fingers in disappointment when no announcement came.

“You will do just fine,” Hathorne said. Of course he was. “But it is true that Mr. Bassett is interested in providing funding for your project. In fact he wishes to speak to you personally, Mr. Minkus.” Minkus pointed at himself. “Me? Edward Bassett wants to speak with me?” Edward Bassett was the head of one of the most prestigious investment firms in Philadelphia, organizer of the Bassett Foundation, and benefactor of various university programs around the Eastern Seaboard including Pennsylvania and New York. Minkus felt weak at the knees. “Mr. Hathorne, this is wonderful! I don’t know what to say except-is there anywhere to sit down?” Ever helpful, Ingrid pulled out a chair for Minkus to collapse into.

“Mr. Bassett would like you personally to meet him at his address this evening at 7:00 pm” Mr. Hathorne handed the young man a business card. Stuart looked at the address in surprise the Main Line! He had never even been anywhere near the Main Line let alone imagine that he would be personally invited there. “He will discuss the particulars then.” Minkus stammered. “Are you sure that he doesn’t want all of us to be there?”

“You will do just fine,” Hathorne said. He turned to his colleagues. “Come on, Stuart you’re our leader,” Elliot encouraged. “A win for one of us is a win for all of us,” Ingrid replied.

“We’d do the same to you,” Meese reminded him curtly. Minkus nodded. He had no doubt that Meese would do the same. In fact he would probably find a way to cut the other three out and keep the glory for himself. Part of the reason why Minkus was declared Project Leader. He at least had some standards.

Minkus’ hands shook as he thanked the man again. His mouth felt dry and his body tight. He shook Mr. Hathorne’s hand while trying to maintain a cool demeanor while inside he was screaming with delight. “Thank you, sir! I will be there!”

“He will look forward to seeing you,” Mr. Hathorne said. “Messers Minkus, Meese, Smackle. Ms. Iverson.” He nodded at each student and left.

The four waited until he left before they let out howls of jubilation and excitement. “I told you things would turn around for us!” Minkus cheered.

“I never doubted you for a minute!” Meese hollered back. The other three looked at their colleague skeptically. “Okay, maybe a minute,” Meese amended.
“This is incredible,” Elliot said. “I’m going to wake up now!” He affectionately kissed Ingrid on the lips. “My positive electron!”
“My negative neutron,” Ingrid kissed her lover back.
Minkus and Meese looked at the two in disgust. “My soon to be emptied stomach,” Minkus quipped.
“Do you know what you’re going to say to Mr. Bassett?” Ingrid asked.
Minkus thought as he motioned Elliot forward to imitate Mr. Bassett. “Well I will probably take out my hand and with a firm hearty handshake say ‘Mr. Bassett thank you for the funding, my name is Stuart Minkus. It is an honor- no it is a privilege to meet you!’”
“Likewise,” Elliot said getting into character and shaking Minkus’ hand.
“Make sure you bring some samples of our work,” Meese suggested. “He will probably want to know what he’s getting into.”
“I will bring samples of the work,” Minkus agreed as he picked up the prototypes and documentation.
“Be confident, engaging, but be modest,” Elliot suggested. “Don’t monopolize the conversation.”
“I will be confident, but modest,” Minkus agreed.
“Dress professionally but not too formal,” Ingrid suggested.
“I will be professional but not too formal,” Minkus said as he headed to the door. He absently pushed on the door.
“Pull the door open,” Meese suggested dryly.
“I will pull the door open,” Minkus added as he pulled the door open.
“Oh and Minkus,” Meese said. “No pressure. I mean it’s just our futures and several million dollars riding on this. You’ll do fine!”
Minkus glared at his colleague. “No pressure here,” he said as he left to get ready to meet Mr. Bassett.

Later that evening, Stuart was dressed in a white turtleneck under a black blazer and slacks. He held the case that contained the group’s portable device prototypes, documentation, research, and other pertinent information to his chest as though it were a magical talisman. He glanced upward through his glasses even removing them so he could get a second look at the house in front of him. It was a white ornate Georgian style house, no more like a mansion with its cherub frescos and white turrets. Minkus gingerly walked towards the gate and pushed the talk button on the intercom.
“Name,” a husky voice asked through the device.
“Stuart Minkus,” Minkus said hoping that his voice didn’t squeak as much as he thought it did. There was a slight pause but the gate opened to let the young man enter.
Minkus shyly walked up the immaculately cut lawn and headed for the thick paneled stained glass door. He pressed the doorbell.
A woman in a maid’s uniform opened the door. “May I help you?” she asked.
“Yes, my name is Mr. Bassett and I’m here to see Stuart Minkus,” Minkus stammered. “I mean I’m Stuart Bassett here to see oh I meant-“
“Stuart Minkus and you are here to see Mr. Bassett?” the maid asked dryly. “And you are nervous.”
“Something like that,” Minkus confessed.
“Of course,” the woman answered obviously trying to hide her laughter and stepped back. “Step right this way.” She encouraged the university student to enter and pointed at the hallway in front of the stairs.
“Wait right here,” she said. “I will get him.” The maid then climbed the stairs.

Minkus looked around the Bassett home. The inside was just as gorgeous as the outside. The winding staircase, polished floor, and ornate rugs made the house look more like a hotel than someone’s home. Various landscape paintings dotted the walls along with family photos and religious icons. Minkus waited patiently looking around the room when he heard the front door
open.
He stepped back as two people entered. They were both young people, about his age and dressed in
tennis whites and carrying racquets. The man had dark hair with bangs hanging down his forehead.
He waved his racquet as though he were demonstrating a move. “Well I still think that we could
have taken them,” he said.
“They owe us a rematch,” the woman said. She was a tall Amazon-like blond woman with her hair
in a braid. Minkus was instantly stricken by her beauty and also intrigued. “Jennifer Bassett,” he
asked trying to maintain composure. Of course Stuart would see her again, after all she was Edward
Bassett’s daughter.
“Yes?” she said confused and perturbed at the introduction. “Do we know each other?”
Stuart nodded and took out his hand. Jennifer smirked but offered it politely in return. “Well sort
of. We went to John Adams High School together. I’m Stuart Minkus,” Minkus said.
Jennifer shook her head as the blank look continued. “No, I’m sorry. I can’t place it.”
Minkus shrugged feeling flushed. “Well we never had any classes together. I asked you out once
and you laughed at me.” He felt extremely vulnerable and embarrassed.
Jennifer again looked at the genius blankly. “No, I’m sorry that doesn’t narrow it down.”
“Now Jen, enough of this guessing game,” the other man said. “We still have to meet Dana and
Ethan later.”
“Oh of course, Brian,” she said kissing her tennis partner on the lips. “I’ll just go get ready. I’ll be
right back.” She turned to Stuart. “It was nice seeing you again, Stephen.”
Even though the girl irritated him with not remembering his name, Minkus was fascinated by her
and wondered what it would be like to have such a beautiful girl by his side. He gave an audible
sigh and felt a slight rising of body temperature.

He didn’t have much time to wallow in the lack of introduction when the maid reappeared. “Mr.
Bassett wants to meet you in the study,” she said. “Follow me.” Minkus gamely followed the
woman into an adjoining room.
“Mr. Stuart Minkus,” the maid said announcing the young man’s presence.
When he entered the study, he saw five people looking out at him. He instantly recognized Mr.
Hathorne who nodded back. Stuart then observed the four strangers.
The first was a gray haired thin man in a tailored pin stripe suit. He looked in Stuart’s mind like a
combination of a mafia don and a Bond supervillain. Minkus knew that he was Edward Bassett,
from the TV commercials. The second was a small ash blond faded woman dressed in a white
Chanel suit. She seemed to Stuart like a non-entity, one who blended into the house and
furnishings. Stuart had to blink thinking at first that he was seeing double, then he realized that he
saw a pair of twins. They were both young men in their early twenties dressed in white suits and
jackets and blue silk shirts. They both had long black hair down close to their shoulders. They
stared at Minkus in equal parts contempt and suspicion.
“Stuart Minkus,” Mr. Bassett said taking out his hand. “I’m Edward Bassett.”
Okay this is it, Stuart thought feeling a tightness in his chest, no pressure, no panicking, just be
confident. He shook Mr. Bassett’s hands. “Mr. Bassett, it’s a privilege to meet you.”
“I’m sure it is young man,” the older man said. He pointed at Hathorne. “Mr. Hathorne, you
already know.” Minkus nodded as he shook the aide’s hand.
“This is my wife, Eunice.” He nodded at the older woman and Minkus shook her hand. It smelled
of hand cream and perfume. “Ma’am,” Minkus said to Eunice.
Bassett then motioned to the twins. “And these are my sons, Edward Jr. We call him, Teddy and
Thomas.”
“It’s a pleasure,” Minkus greeted the young men.
“So you say,” Teddy said.
“For you,” Thomas agreed leaving the rest purposely unsaid. The two continued to look at the
college student with the same contemptuous gaze. Minkus had an uncontrollable urge to ask which
“Mr. Minkus, please have a seat,” Bassett invited the young man to sit in a nearby chair while Bassett sat right across from him. Teddy and Thomas sat in identical chairs around Minkus’ still peering at him. Minkus felt instantly like a dying animal between two vultures who wanted to peck at him and deprive him of his mortal remains. Eunice sat in a love seat in a farther corner of the room, clearly not wanting her presence to be known. Hathorne excused himself to make a phone call.

The door opened and Jennifer Bassett reappeared this time dressed in a dark red blouse and matching knee-length skirt. She kissed her mother and father and greeted her brothers who rose to meet her. “Hello Daddy,” Jennifer said.


“Of course she did darling,” her father said. He motioned to Stuart. “Jennifer, this is Stuart Minkus, I believe you attended John Adams High School and you go to Penn together.” He turned to Stuart. “Jenny, here is studying Interior Design. She will make the world beautiful, one house at a time.”

“Oh daddy,” Jennifer said with an exaggerated and fake modesty. She then turned to the newcomer. “Yes I know him. We met at the door.” She said in an obvious hint that the door is where Stuart Minkus should have remained.

“We even reminisced,” Stuart remarked.

“Of course we did,” Jennifer replied. She turned to her father and mother. “Daddy can I take my car out? Brian and I are going with Dana and Ethan.”

Eunice stood up and faced her daughter. “Jennifer, you know that you are still under probation—‘She whispered the last word as though just saying it would create a scandal. Jennifer rolled her eyes and glared at her mother in an “I-wasn’t-talking-to-you” glare. “For the last time, Mother, it wasn’t my fault. We got into a speed trap. That police officer was just waiting for somebody!”

Eunice hissed Trying to keep her voice low, but spoke loud enough for Stuart to hear her. “You went 80 miles per hour on a 55 road plus you attacked the officer when he wrote you a ticket!”

“Eunice,” Edward Bassett corrected. “We don’t discuss such things in front of strangers.” He nodded in Minkus’ direction. “Plus, we fixed that problem and it’s over. Jennifer learned her lesson, didn’t you, Jenny?”

“Of course Daddy,” Jennifer agreed. Edward then held up his daughter’s car keys and handed them to her. Delighted the young lady hugged her father. “Thank you, Daddy, I love you!” She said. “Goodbye, goodbye Mother, Teddy, Tommy.” She turned to Stuart. “Stephen.”

“Still Stuart,” Minkus corrected again. But the girl just turned her nose at him. Minkus once again felt the equal parts of irritation at the girl’s behavior but also mesmerized at her very appearance and he couldn’t describe it, her presence, and her charisma. He could tell that she was the type of girl that knew what she wanted and got it, the type of girl that Stuart Minkus could never have gotten outside of his own fantasies.

Eunice sighed. “Drive safely, dear.” But Jennifer was out of there.

Stuart could just barely hear one brother whisper to his twin brother. “Jenny gets her way as usual.”

“We all know who Dad’s favorite is,” the other brother agreed also whispering.

Stuart turned to the wealthy man. “You knew that I went to John Adams High School sir?” he inquired remembering the man’s earlier comment to Jennifer.

“Of course,” Bassett replied. “I make it a point to know everything about my potential employees and investments. Uh—He turned to his wife, Eunice. “Eunice, this is going to be boring shop talk. You may want to go off now.”

The smile on Eunice’s face tightened as she glanced at her husband. “Of course, dear. I will go see how Mrs. O’Boyle is doing with dinner. It was nice meeting you, Mr. Minkus. Excuse me.”
Minkus nodded his head. “Likewise, Mrs. Bassett.”

Bassett then held out a file that was several papers thick. He searched for his name, but Minkus could tell he was making an act of it. “Let’s see Minkus, Minkus, ah here it is! Stuart Nathaniel Minkus, son of Tom Minkus and Nancy Little-Minkus nee Nonnie Ginsburg. German Jewish on your mother’s side, Danish Jew on your father’s. Original name unknown, but your grandfather was adopted by a family during the Second World War who changed his name to Minkus. Paternal parents are both dead; Mother’s mother dead and father is still living but currently…unwell. Only child, you were born on August 2, 1981 here in Philadelphia. Your father runs Minkus Hardware which now has two locations in the Philadelphia area; Mother is an office_SUPPLY manager for your father’s stores. You attended Thomas Jefferson Elementary and John Adams High School, high marks in every subject, considered an honor student. However, you were a member of the Stratford Program for Troubled Students at John Adams because you had oh my ‘anti-social behavior and emotional disorders, tendency to veer towards anxiety and obsessive compulsive behavior. Perhaps even mild juvenile autism’. You had a nervous breakdown between your sophomore and junior year and was at one time reported a missing child. Salutatorian in your graduating class of 1998, one A less than the valedictorian, a Miss_interesting name-Topanga Lawrence, 699 A’s compared to her 700. So close and yet so far. Recipient of the Bill and Melinda Gates Scholarship Award for Technological Students to attend Pennsylvania University. A Computer Science major, you are currently in your second year at Penn, even though you are only 18. You ‘fast tracked’ through your freshman courses even taking some of them in high school via online curricula and could very well do the same through your entire undergraduate career. Never had any long-term relationships, though as many anti-social loners can be, often dream of being with a girl. For hobbies you like building worlds online, star gazing, and reading classic literature. Oh and you enjoy ordering mocha lattes and bagels with cream cheese at Starbucks.”

Minkus nodded impressed as Bassett handed over the file. He felt uncomfortable about someone knowing that much about him, but tried not to show it. “That is quite thorough,” he said nervously. “Like I said I like to know everything,” Bassett replied putting his hand on the young man’s shoulder. The older man’s hand felt cold and almost reptilian to Stuart. He had an irresistible urge to pull away. “But son, I wouldn’t go through this much trouble if I didn’t think it was worth something and I think that your projects are worth something. I think that you have a good chance of becoming the future.” After he said, ‘future’ Bassett waved his hand around the study as though he already owned the future. “Of course I want to be sure that I am getting my money’s worth as do my sons.”

Teddy and Thomas nodded. “You see Father is aware that we must be careful about who we invest our money in,” Teddy (or was it Thomas? Minkus couldn’t tell them apart) said.

The other one Thomas (or Teddy?) added. “After all we can’t give it to just every person who walks up to our door wanting a handout. Where would we be?” The brothers laughed snidely.

Minkus smirked. “But I did not come to your door. Mr. Bassett asked to meet with me. So he must recognize my skills.”

Bassett nodded. “Skills I recognize. Talent, I recognize. I just want to be sure that you have the drive to be a proper investment. I want to see exactly what MIMS can provide. My sons, my aide, and I would like to see a demonstration.” The door opened as Hathorne returned to the room and sat in the seat vacated by Mrs. Bassett.

“Oh of course,” Minkus replied. He stood and then gathered the case and his courage and headed towards a table. He opened the case and took out the prototype devices and paperwork and began to speak.

“You see the MIMS device will be a vast improvement on the current portable devices,” Minkus said as he held up the devices and passed them around. He even pushed a few buttons to demonstrate the ease of their usage. “Anyone can download and save information. They are useful for taking notes, for recording lectures, keeping track of schedules. Also since they are Internet compliant, a person can use them to search and save information and check their emails.”
One of the Bassett twins held up his hand. “This sounds awfully similar to some of the devices on the market already, what are they called Palm Pilots, Black Berries?”

The other twin agreed. “And I believe Microsoft and Apple are planning on releasing some versions, what will it be called the i-something?”

Minkus nodded. “Yes, but our device will benefit those who are in the most financial need.” He handed the men hard copies of their research. “My colleagues and I have conducted research to show that the average first year student spends $1,200 on books and supplies. Many entry level workers out in the so-called “real world” are financially strapped for the supplies that they need to work at their jobs. For many college students and entry-level workers who have financial need this can cause great strife to their pocket books. They can’t always afford to buy the latest gadgets at the initial price. Our devices are meant to be cost effective as well as technologically beneficial.”

“How much are you planning for the cost of such a device?” Hathorne asked.

Minkus held his breath. This was a source of contention between the four, particularly Minkus and Meese over how much the final product would be. Meese wanted to charge more for the labor while Minkus recognized the benefits of appearing altruistic to the public (“They care about the poor college student, let’s go with them!”). “Well the devices themselves will cost $9.95 plus sales tax of course. The buyer will also wish to buy multiple storage drives which will vary from 2-5 GB and they will cost anywhere from $2.75 to $5.75 also plus tax.”

“Cheaply made and cheaply sold,” Teddy and Thomas said in unison with a snide laugh. Minkus already disliked them and had a feeling that it was mutual.

“Perhaps but many people who are starting out would see a benefit in the cost,” Minkus said. “Plus people who consider themselves technologically illiterate may perhaps be swayed to embrace technology that they can afford and understand.” Minkus pointed at the final slide which showed their slogan. “It’s MIMS: Technology for Those Who Need it The Most.”

Bassett rose and paced back and forth. “That’s a fine presentation you have given us, young man. It will reach many people, particularly those who are the hardest hit technologically speaking. You recognized a need and sought to fill it. You have a far reaching goal that you wish to achieve. I like that in an investment.” He took out his hand. “Welcome to Bassett Investment, son. I think one day we will brag about how we first donated money to Stuart Minkus!”

Minkus smiled warmly and shook the old man’s hand excited. “Thank you sir. This is a tremendous honor!”

Bassett put his arm across the young man’s shoulder. “Now we will invest money but the ideas, the technologies will be all yours. We simply provide the seed money for you to get started. Think of us as your silent, invisible but very stern partners!” He pushed on Minkus’ shoulder towards him. He was so close that Minkus could smell the Camel cigarette odor on the old man’s breath. Suddenly the warm grandfatherly like voice changed to something hard and sharp. “Don’t let us down,” he whispered severely.

“I won’t sir,” Minkus promised with a gulp. “Good,” Bassett said. He pulled away. “Now, I think you are off to a good start in your future! Hathorne,” he called his aide over. “Please draw up the contracts for Mr. Stuart Minkus and his colleagues!” Hathorne led the young man to the desk and took out the paperwork. Minkus tried to remain calm, but inside he felt like dancing.

Minkus, Meese, Elliot, and Ingrid had joined the Bassets and several dignitaries at a formal gathering celebrating the Bassetts’ investment in the MIMS device. Minkus glanced at Elliot and Ingrid. Elliot was dressed in a tux and Ingrid in a Little Black Dress that came down to her knees, her strawberry blonde hair tied back in an up do. Elliot whispered something to Ingrid and she giggled and kissed him on the lips. Minkus rolled his eyes and then glanced over at Meese. Meese was also dressed in a tux and by his side was a tall red haired woman. Minkus didn’t know her personally, but had a feeling what she did for a living. Her flashy jewelry including sparkling anklet, garish makeup, and skin tight bright red dress gave it away. Minkus stood in his formal blazer and slacks and white button shirt, dateless and tried to make small talk, but after a while
Minkus tried to enjoy himself at the party, but there were some issues to deal with. The MIMS weren’t quite yet ready to go into production. There were still some bugs to work out particularly in translating data. Plus there were some issues with the contracts with the Bassetts including the naming of the company as well as other things that had yet to be ironed. At the very least, he needed to find a quiet second to take a look at the bugs.

Bassett tapped his glass with a fork and stood. By his side were two placards hidden by cloth. “Ladies and gentlemen, I feel as confident as you all do that the Bassett Foundation has made a wise choice in the future in financing these fine young people. If they will stand and we will give them a round of applause, Stuart Minkus, Elliot Smackle, Ingrid Iverson, and Alvin Meese.” The four students stood accepting the applause of the audience and sat back down. Bassett continued. “While these fine young men and lady are providing us with one form of technology, the MIMS—‘He opened the cloth showing the placard which featured the device. ‘-The fertile minds of these bright young individuals will not stop there. Oh no, they have other ideas that we will see more of in the future so it makes sense for them to find an extensive use for their ideas. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the next step to the future. I give you—‘He opened the cloth and turned the placard over. ‘-Minkus Technologies! We will make millions!”

The audience applauded. Minkus looked sickly at his colleagues. The other three applauded but he could already see that their smiles were artificial. To give him credit, Meese did wait until Minkus had excused himself to get some champagne from the bar, before he confronted him. Minkus picked up a crab cake when he felt a severe poke on his shoulder. Not surprisingly, Minkus turned around to see a very angry Elliot, Ingrid, and Meese glaring at him. “Just what the hell was that about?” Meese hissed. “Suddenly, you’re getting the credit for this! I’ll bet you’ll take all the money too!”

“No, I won’t,” Stuart corrected him. “The four of us are still the owners. We have equal shares in the holdings. We still have our 25% cut each. Mr. Bassett is very interested in all our other ideas and he thinks that MIMS is only the beginning. He just felt that we needed an umbrella company to store them all.”

“But just named after you,” Elliot said. “Why not the rest of us?”

“Why can’t we just call it MIMS?” Ingrid asked. “It has all of our names.”

“Because Mr. Bassett sees me as the leader,” Minkus explained. “He thinks that the company would fare better with a specific CEO in mind, sort of a face and name to the company and frankly I agree with him. I am the leader of our group, I hand-picked and recruited the rest of you and I came up with the ideas and innovations. The original design idea is mine. I made the final decisions and am the one who goes around begging for money when our second-hand equipment falls apart. I have put my ass on the line for this. But this is still a team and you are all still a part of this.”

“Yeah well I didn’t expect to be Keith Richards to your Mick Jagger,” Meese argued.

“No because you want to be Mick and don’t deny it,” Minkus objected. Meese shrugged. After all he couldn’t. He turned to the other three. “It’s just a name, that’s all. I am no different than the rest of you and I still would like to continue our relationship. Elliot, I know of no one better involved in putting together the hardware and Ingrid, your ability to create the software systems is second to none. Alvin, your business acumen is what we need. I recognize your skills and I just ask that you three recognize mine.” He knew appealing to their talents would get them to remain part of the team.

Elliot and Ingrid softened instantly. “Well it is still all of our babies,” Ingrid said. “And we did say a win for one of us is a win for all of us.”

Elliot agreed with his girlfriend. “Minkus, MIMS, we’re still going to kick some Microsoft/Apple ass!” Minkus and Ingrid laughed.

Minkus turned to Meese. He still didn’t look convinced even icy. “You will make me Vice-
President in charge of Business Accounts?
“I will make you Prince of Fa-Flooga Land if it will keep you on,” Minkus told him.
“Vice-President will do,” Meese said with a thin smile. He shook Minkus’ hand who took it.

A red nailed hand touched Meese by the shoulder and his date appeared at his side. “Alvie, I’m getting very lonely,” she said.

Meese smiled lecherously. “Well let’s see what we can do about that, Gina.” He winked at his colleagues as the woman led him away no doubt to have private celebration of their own.

Elliot and Ingrid smiled. Elliot held his girlfriend’s hand. “Hey why don’t we go off and get you a drink?” He held out his elbow.

Ingrid laughed and took it. “Of course, darling.” She turned to Minkus. “Coming Stuart?”

Minkus shook his head. “No, I’ve got some things that I need to work out.” Ingrid and Elliot looked a bit disappointed but instead walked away lost in their own world of a twosome. Minkus swallowed the champagne then headed towards a private separate room with his laptop in hand.

What he didn’t see was the tall Amazon-like blond woman finish up her champagne and stare at the young man. She apologized to her date and then followed the young genius out the door and into the room.

Minkus flipped on his laptop and continued to type at the program. He keyed some information to see if he could improve upon the bugs. He cursed silently when his first try didn’t work. He then typed in an alternate code when a voice called out, “Working hard?”

Minkus turned around to see Jennifer Bassett standing next to him. She was dressed in a strapless sequined dark blue almost black dress. Her hair hung down across her shoulders. She stood next to the door, her tanned athletic body leaning against the door. To Minkus she looked like the portraits of beautiful women he had seen in hundreds of museums, Venus out of her Shell or Pandora opening the Box. Despite the fact that he was aroused by the sight of her, Stuart returned to the computer.

“You know Stuart,” Jennifer said. “The party’s in there.” She pointed to the main room.

Minkus shrugged as the blond woman approached him. “It’s considered rude to be stand-offish at a party especially when it’s one in your honor.” She moved closer to him and Minkus tried to keep his eyes on the screen.

“Well I’m not a big party person,” Minkus said. “Plus there’s some work that still needs to get done before we go into production.” He thought for a minute. “But thank you for calling me Stuart.”

“You’re welcome and I’m sorry for how I treated you earlier,” Jennifer said. “I’ve been, you see I was a total bitch in high school and I’m still trying to work through it. Mother thinks that I have some emotional issues.”

Minkus stopped pressing the keys for a minute to look closely at Jennifer. “I know what that’s like,” he said. He turned back to the screen not wanting that little bit of personal contact to show.

“You’re welcome and I’m sorry for how I treated you earlier,” Jennifer said. “I’ve been, you see I was a total bitch in high school and I’m still trying to work through it. Mother thinks that I have some emotional issues.”

Minkus stopped pressing the keys for a minute to look closely at Jennifer. “I know what that’s like,” he said. He turned back to the screen not wanting that little bit of personal contact to show.

“Really I have to work or your father won’t like what he’s paying for.”

Jennifer giggled and put her hand on the laptop to block his vision. “Come now, Stuart, don’t you ever get tired of working?” She put her hand on his shoulder. “You should have some fun. After all your friends are.”

Minkus sniffed. “Yes well Elliot Smackle and Ingrid Iverson have each other, God, if there is one bless them, if there is such a thing.” He glanced upward at the Virgin Mary statue glancing at them. He wasn’t sure if a Catholic family like the Bassetts would appreciate some agnostic humor. “I’m sorry.”

Jennifer scoffed. “It’s alright.”

Minkus continued to talk about his friends. “Alvin Meese should be having fun, he paid enough for it.”

Jennifer smiled wickedly. “You mean his date is a-“
Minkus nodded. “She’s a call girl and she’s not his first. They’re making complete fools of themselves.”

“Well that’s a very cynical thing to say about your friends,” Jennifer said.

“They’re not friends,” Stuart corrected. “We just work together. They contribute to the company and we benefit each other in a professional capacity.”

Jennifer seemed to smile seductively. “A man without close friends, now that’s a novelty,” she said as though she were waiting for just such a man. She put her hand around his arm. “But still don’t you want to have some fun?” She pushed her face closer to Stuart’s and almost placed her lips on his when he pulled away.

“I’m not in the mood to have fun,” Stuart said continuing his work.

“Surely you dream of being with somebody,” Jennifer invited.

Stuart stood up. “Now listen, I only ever wanted to be involved with one other person and she never felt the same about me. She only ever saw me as a friend. I don’t like to make the same mistake more than once.”

Jennifer stood up and walked closer to him. “I’m not exactly asking you for your friendship am I?” She put her hand around his shoulder and was about to kiss him again when Minkus pulled away. “Now hold on,” he said. “You laughed at me. You never wanted to have anything to do with me. You couldn’t even remember my name when I was a scholarship student meeting your father. Now your father wants to invest in me. I have a good chance of becoming a millionaire before I’m 21 and suddenly you’re all over me?”

“So?” Jennifer asked. She stood and put her hand on him once more and gave him a passionate kiss.

Stuart Minkus’ thoughts were racing. Jennifer Bassett was beautiful, sexy, charismatic, and well connected. It would greatly benefit his standings in Mr. Bassett’s eyes to know that he was dating (maybe one day marrying) his daughter. Well he would be a fool to turn down such a woman who could indirectly lead Minkus to a life of untold wealth and success. Besides when would Stuart Minkus ever have another woman like this again, at least one that he didn’t have to pay for like Meese? There could be more than one benefit in aligning himself with the Bassetts.

Minkus shrugged. “Okay, just wanted to be clear on that.” He said as he accepted another kiss from Jennifer Bassett.
Engaging Problems (Stuart Age 19)

Chapter Summary

Stuart Minkus and Jennifer Bassett become engaged and Stuart discovers a few red flags in his new relationship.

The Lives of Genius
Chapter Five: Engaging Problems (Stuart Minkus Age 19)

The next year was a whirl for Stuart and his colleagues. Sales of the MIMS while at first sluggish began to take an upswing by the beginning of the next school semester enough that the four could see their capital increase by a very large margin. They had received orders from individual customers and from some small Philadelphia businesses as well. Things were beginning to brighten for them.
Despite the success of their company, the four were still determined to finish their education and obtain their degrees. When they weren’t working, they were studying, attending classes, and preparing term papers. Because of their busy working schedules, much of the courses were obtained online but they were able to receive the full benefits of their education and even leap frog ahead through their undergraduate courses.
Besides his education and working, Minkus also found himself in a whirlwind of social activities. After he and Jennifer Bassett began dating, they became the young social couple of the season. Minkus escorted Jennifer to various parties, charity functions, and events that featured the best and brightest in young high society. At first Minkus was very reluctant to do so, but Jennifer reminded him that he had quickly become one of the young faces: One of the 30 Under 30 To Watch For.
“You have to ride this for as long as it lasts,” she reminded him. “You won’t be this young forever. Business people will recognize you and think of how many clients that you will get if you present yourself.”
It was a time of great energy and delight between the couple as they became favorites around town, even jetting up to New York City to make their presences known on a wider scale. For Minkus, it was a real eye-opening experience to be recognized by so many people, one he could get used to. He even got some interest by other women after he finally got LASIK eye surgery and dressed in a trendier manner. Okay, there was the occasional time at the odd party where Jennifer had just a little too much to drink and sometimes Stuart often felt tired of chatting with rich people many of whom were shallow, empty-headed, and so interchangeable that he couldn’t remember their names later. But it was a part of the job to be noticed and recognized. Like Jennifer said, he was ready to ride it as long as it lasted.

Two things happened simultaneously to make the Minkus Technologies business take an immediate upswing and cause Minkus to weigh out his future with Jennifer. The first was more expected: Elliot Smackle and Ingrid Iverson, to no one’s surprise, announced their engagement. Even though Minkus made light of the couple’s romance and feigned illness at their sweetie couple talk, he was somewhat envious of their emotional closeness. What would it be like to find true love like that like Elliot and Ingrid or like Cory Matthews and Topanga Lawrence? (Who he heard had gotten married. Of course Stuart was not invited to the wedding and had only heard about it second hand through reading the engagement announcements in the Philadelphia Tribune.)
The other event was more unexpected, but just as important. Alvin Meese was the first to suggest it: With Minkus Technologies becoming successful, why retain the business in Philadelphia. Why
not take it to the big leagues and move operations to New York City?

At first Elliot and Ingrid were reluctant. “What about our degrees?” Ingrid asked.

“We are taking most of our courses online now,” Meese reminded them. “We can take those anywhere! We are getting too big for this place! We have done all that we can here in Philadelphia.”

“What about our clients?” Elliot asked. “We have some loyal ones already.”

“Well we can still work with them of course,” Meese said as if they were flies at a pleasant picnic. “But if we want to get bigger clients with deeper pockets then we have to be where they are. We could go up.”

“And we could go down just as easily,” Ingrid cautioned. “New York is not exactly the most affordable city in the world to live in the best of times.”

Elliot turned to Minkus. “Come on Stuart, tell us you aren’t listening to this.”

Minkus drummed his fingers on the table and folded his hands weighing the options in his head.

“For as much money as the Bassetts are offering us, a move can be affordable. So practical wise it is possible. Profit is the most important key element. While in New York, I have scouted possible locations for offices—“

“Scouted possible locations?” Ingrid asked. “It sounds like you’ve already decided it…without consulting us.”

Minkus and Meese exchanged glances. “We were just bouncing the idea for now,” Minkus said. Ingrid turned to Minkus. “We have spent a lot of money telling people that we care about the poor college student, the entry level worker, and the people who can’t afford technology. What happens to that?”

“We may just have to care somewhere else,” Minkus said. “There are people like that in New York and many more who could bring us into the black. We would be fools to pass up on such an opportunity.”

Minkus accompanied the Bassetts to continue scouting office locations, schmoozing potential New York clients, and of course entertaining Jennifer. He stayed at the Bassetts’ second home in Rochester, New York and he and Jennifer visited New York City. He accompanied her on a shopping spree through some of 5th Avenue’s finest stores including Saks, Prada, and Gucci. That week the two spent a great deal of time partying, shopping, and dining out at the trendiest clubs, restaurants, and night spots.

“No wonder you look like something the cat beat up, pummeled bloody, and devoured before she dragged you in,” Elliot said as Minkus explained the highlights of the trip while he rubbed his sore feet underneath his desk. Elliot clearly was still not on board with this potential move.

“Well at least I managed to study for my Statistics exam, put together my Advanced Coding and Script Building project, bring the MIMS codes up to date, and create the plans for our mobile phone idea,” Minkus said with a yawn. “In between investigating the potential offices, talking to clients, and keeping up with Jennifer’s desires. Actually, Jennifer took up most of the trip.”

“Did you fit sleep in there somewhere?” Elliot asked.

“Here and there,” Stuart answered. Not as much as he should have, he was aware. He pulled the engaged couple closer as if whispering a confidential secret. “Between the three of us, I also stopped by Tiffany’s and compared prices and styles for an engagement ring.”

Far from being happy for him both Elliot and Ingrid looked confused and wary. “For Jennifer?” Elliot asked.

Minkus rolled his eyes. “No for Mrs. Bassett, that old lady drives me wild with an unrequited longing. Yes for Jennifer!”

“Sounds like quite a week, Stuart,” Ingrid observed. “Pretty expensive, I’ll bet.”

“I suppose so,” Minkus replied cagily. “Are you trying to make a point, Ingrid?”

“Well,” Ingrid began. “Isn’t it odd that Jennifer Bassett expects you to spend so much money on her? Before she probably couldn’t spot you in a line up, now she’s your girlfriend. If she says yes,
your fiancée. Don’t you think she might be using you?”
Minkus looked at his female colleague with a long stricken pained look. “Her using me? No, get
out! Ingrid, could you tell me where babies come from?”
Ingrid held up her hands recognizing Stuart’s penchant for sarcasm. “Alright forget I said
anything.”
“No, you’re right,” Minkus said. “She probably wouldn’t pay a bit of attention to me if I wasn’t so
high in her father’s esteem. She probably is using me. She wants to be recognized and wants a
potentially successful up-and-coming man to lead her. But, my motives aren’t exactly pure myself,
I will be the first to admit. Her family’s money has been a benefit to us. I romance her, I look good
in her father’s eyes and well look at her. When would I ever get another girl like that?”
“Yeah,” Elliot nodded and gave a turned-on-guy’s laugh. Ingrid poked him on the ribs. “But of
course no one compares to my Ingie!”
“Keep it that way,” Ingrid smirked.
“Everybody uses everybody,” Minkus said. “That’s how it works.”
Elliot and Ingrid looked at each other. “We don’t.”
Minkus shrugged. “And I wish you luck with that. You’re lucky, you two have what most people
could only dream.” Somewhere in the back of his mind, Stuart Minkus could just picture himself
telling another couple that, a couple that he hadn’t seen or talked to since high school. A couple
that was never far from his mind, at least one-half of the couple was never far from his mind. “But
Jennifer and I aren’t like you, any of you.” Lucky for him, Elliot and Ingrid didn’t acknowledge the
slip of the tongue or at least didn’t say anything about it.
“Do you two even love each other?” Ingrid asked.
Minkus thought about it. “She’s a good match for me, so if such a thing exists then I suppose so.”
He stood up. “Now if you will excuse me, we all have work to do.” He left the young lovers and
walked to an opposite room.
Ingrid turned to her fiancé. “Get down on one knee and say that and Jennifer is his for life.”
Elliot smirked. “Why do I have a feeling that it won’t matter what he says as long as the diamond
is big enough?”
Minkus had been very nervous as he approached the Bassett home, the small box seemed to burn a
hole inside his pocket. He hoped that this question would go over well. It was his first major
paycheck from forming Minkus Technologies. While he would never call himself a millionaire yet,
he had made a tidy sum that the Bassetts had to be impressed.
Stuart had custom ordered the ring to fit Jennifer’s size, taste, and personal style. Between the 24k
diamond and gold binding, the total cost came to $78,000. He knew that most people would have
thought that he was crazy, but Jennifer was a rich girl and was used to rich things. He wanted to
prove that he can give her the best of what he had to offer. Elliot and Ingrid’s objections rang in his
head. Let the lovebirds be happy on their own, he thought. Let the Smackles and the Matthews of
the world find love their own way. Love isn’t all about sweet talk, kissing and hand holding, and
tender caring for each other. Sometimes it was about mutual compatibility, personal and public
advantages in each other, and a desire to meet the other person’s needs no matter how seemingly
trivial, personally exhausting, or financially difficult they may be.
He walked inside the Bassett manse surrounded by her family. “Stuart,” Edward inquired. “You’re
early. Dinner isn’t supposed to start for another hour.”
“I know, Mr. Bassett,” he said. “But there is something that I want to ask Jennifer and I want you
all to be here for it.” He turned to Jennifer. “With the move to New York becoming inevitable, I
want you to come with me. I know you would accompany your father, or come up as my girlfriend
on the occasional trip. But I want something more and I hope that you do too. I want us to be
together. I think we are good for each other and I would like us to continue being so.” He knelt
down and pulled the box from his pocket.
“Jennifer Bassett, will you marry me?”
There was a short silence. The only sound that could be heard was Eunice Bassett’s audible but
“delighted gasp of surprise. Teddy and Thomas looked at each other in disbelief. “I don’t believe this,” Teddy said.
“He can’t be serious,” Thomas answered. “Jenny, you can’t be considering marrying this-"- Plebian,” Teddy agreed. “I mean he is distinctly middle class- 
“-Definitely NOK,” Thomas replied. Minkus had traveled enough with the Bassetts lately to know that NOK stood for Not Our Kind. 
“I’m not asking to marry either of you,” Minkus snapped at the twins. Not that he was over his initial shyness and awe of the Bassetts, he and her brothers had often exchanged in volleying insults. They never tired of ridiculing Stuart Minkus as a rube social climber who somehow wandered his way into their stratosphere. While he countered back challenging their lack of intelligence swearing that the two shared half a brain between them. “I know it’s hard for you two to comprehend, but I am talking to your sister!” He turned to Jennifer. “Now Jennifer what do you say?”

Jennifer smiled with tears in her eyes. She kept her eyes on the ring almost as if hypnotized. “Yes, Stuart, of course I will marry you.”

Stuart stood up and put the ring on her finger. Jennifer gave her fiancé a deep passionate kiss. She pulled away from him. “I know that we are going to be very happy.” It didn’t occur to Stuart until later that Jennifer never took her eyes off of her ring as she said that.

Eunice kissed her daughter and offered congratulations. “I’m sure that you will be very happy sweetheart.”

“Thank you, Mother,” Jennifer said showing her mother the ring. Mother and daughter squealed with delight.

“Congratulations, Stuart,” Eunice said. “You are getting the best girl in the world!”

“Thank you Mrs. Bassett,” Minkus said.

“Please call me Eunice,” the older woman said hugging her future son-in-law.

Jennifer turned to her father showing the ring. “Isn’t it wonderful daddy?”

“Of course, Princess,” Edward said admiring the ring. He then turned to Minkus. “Now if you will excuse me, I would like to have a few words with my son-in-law.” He invited Stuart into his study.

When Minkus was inside Edward Bassett’s study, the old man poured himself a brandy in a glass. “Would you care for some son?” he said.

“Well legally, I’m too young to drink,” Minkus said dryly. “But I have broken that rule many a time with your family, sir.”

“And yet you are legally old enough to get married,” Edward invited. “So have one on me.” He offered Minkus the drink. Stuart gulped it down. It was hot, bitter, and tasted almost like he swallowed fire.

Edward Bassett continued. “That’s quite a stunt you just pulled there, Stuart. You surprised even me. I knew of course you two were dating. I think all of the East Coast knows that, but it never occurred to me how far you were going to take this. How far are you planning on taking this?”

“Well I think that would be between me and your daughter, sir,” Minkus said as he was about to stand but Bassett motioned him down with his hand.

“I wonder if you have us all played, Stuart Minkus,” Bassett suggested. “A bright kid looking for a way into the easy life. A certain Mr. Moneybags donates money to his fledgling company but that’s not enough for him. He decides to cozy up to Daddy Rich’s daughter. Does this sound at all possible to you?”

“Can I go now, Mr. Bassett?” Stuart asked.

“Because I don’t want to think that of you Stuart,” Bassett said. “I want to think that you are my daughter’s Prince Charming and Knight in Shining Armor all rolled into one. I want you to understand some things about my little girl,” Bassett said. “Now you have strong feelings for her I take it? Dare you would say you love her?”

“I do sir,” Minkus answered. “I wouldn’t have asked her to marry me otherwise.”

“She’s beautiful, charming, wealthy, and I believe some of her former boyfriends have reported of
her …behaviors much to my chagrin.” Bassett said. “But there is something you need to know about her. My daughter is how should I put this very fragile. She has funny moods. Sometimes she does things when she gets mad or sad. Of course it’s never her fault, you see. She likes to be taken care of. Now do you think that you can take care of her, Stuart?” “I believe I can, Mr. Bassett,” Stuart said. “I suppose Edward will do,” the older man said reluctantly. “She’s used to having things, getting things, getting her way at all times. She likes to be happy, do you understand? You make her happy, you will make me happy.” “I understand Mr.-uh Edward,” Minkus answered. “Because Stuart, when Jennifer isn’t happy, she lets people know,” Bassett said. “When she lets people know she lets me know. When my baby girl lets me know, I am not happy, capice?” “Capice,” Minkus replied with a gulp. “There are two things that I value in life, son my investments and my family,” Bassett said walking next to Stuart. He patted Stuart’s shoulder, but then grabbed it forcefully like he was strangling the young man. “I want you to understand something. You hurt my investments, I will kill you. If you hurt my family, particularly my daughter, you are going to wish I killed you. Is that clear?” Minkus nodded. “Crystal, Edward,” he said. Bassett let go of the young man and patted him on the shoulder once again. “Now let’s have dinner, shall we?” He said once again smiling that paternal grin as though the last few minutes haven’t happened.

Shawn Hunter investigated a trendy new restaurant in New York, Shaw’s. He wasn’t one to believe in signs, but this seemed like a sign if ever there was one, one letter off from his own name. He was reviewing this restaurant as part of an early assignment for a website, On the Road. If he got this job, he could be one of their main bloggers. He was excited. He could really use this job. It would help him get to regular writing. For now he was mostly freelance writing, articles and poetry. He had gotten some notice, but it would be nice to be a regular staffer. His career could take off.

He also wanted to get away from Cory and Topanga. While he liked being with them and still considered himself a friend, more and more he was beginning to feel like a third wheel in their lives. Eric had left, something about finding himself. He mentioned something about being close to the “squirrels,” Shawn didn’t know. It was Eric, who ever knew what he did?

So it was just the lovebirds and Shawn. He never felt more out of place and lonelier than he felt in a long time. Topanga was involved in her legal studies and was milling accepting a position at a law firm. Cory had finally settled on getting his masters in Secondary Education and History, to become a junior Feeny. The two were gone more often from the apartment studying. Now to add insult to injury, they wanted to have a baby and were constantly making plans to ovulate. It was no wonder that Shawn was beginning to feel like a separate entity from his friends.

He picked up a salad plate and headed for the bar putting lettuce, tomato, and other items on his plate when he bumped into somebody. “Watch where you are going,” a female voice demanded. “I’m sorry,” Shawn said. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see a beautiful blond woman. He was about to smile, chat her up, maybe even do his hair flip trick to attract her when he got a close up of who it was. “Jennifer?” Jennifer Bassett glanced up and down at Shawn. “Oh it’s you, Shawn,” she said annoyed. “Well you’re still pleasant,” Shawn quipped. “And how have you been doing?” Jennifer asked. “Fine,” Shawn said. “Of course I’m not afraid of boat houses anymore.” “Are you here without the other half of your brain?” Jennifer asked looking around for Cory. “No I’m here on my own,” Shawn said. “What a shame,” Jennifer taunted. She pushed her hair back over her shoulder obviously making a big show of the ring on her finger.
“Obviously you’re not,” Shawn said. “So you’re engaged. Congratulations to you, my condolences to him. You kidnap this guy?”

“No,” Jennifer said sarcastically. “He’s quite well off in fact.”

“And what lunatic would be crazy enough to marry you?” Shawn inquired.

“This lunatic would,” a male voice interrupted them.

Shawn’s eyes widened at seeing Stuart Minkus standing next to Jennifer. “Minkus!” he gasped in surprise.

“Hello, Shawn.” He said. In a pointed response he put his arm around Jennifer’s shoulder. Jennifer and Minkus then smiled at each other. Shawn couldn’t place it. When he knew Jennifer Bassett, she was one of the prettiest, richest girls in school, the type who could have any guy. Stuart Minkus was a nerd, a geek, teacher’s pet. How were they even friends let alone dating? Then again, Shawn saw the size of the rock on Jennifer’s finger and had a feeling it was more than any romantic feelings which drew the two together.

“Minkus can I talk to you alone for a minute?” Shawn called the genius closer to him.

Minkus shrugged and gave Jennifer a kiss on the lips. “I’ll be right back,” he said.

“I’ll be here,” Jennifer added as Minkus left the salad bar following Shawn.

Shawn waited until he and Minkus were out of Jennifer’s ear shot. Then he let him have it. “Are you crazy man?” Shawn said. “Jennifer Bassett?”

“Is something wrong with my selection of a fiancée?” Minkus asked needling the writer.

“Well first off she likes guys with deep pockets,” Shawn replied. “She wants everything in front of her.”

“Then she’s perfect for me,” Minkus said. He nodded at his fiancée. “That ring on her finger didn’t come cheap after all.”

“Look Minkus, it’s none of my business,” Shawn said. “But I dated Jennifer and I know what she’s like. She’s manipulative and controlling. She will mess you up and break your heart.”

Minkus nodded. When he looked at Shawn, his face had a very serious expression. “You know something, Shawn you’re absolutely right.” His voice then became sharp. “It is none of your business!”

He was about to walk away when Shawn held him back. “Look I wouldn’t consider myself a good friend, if I didn’t at least warn you.”

Minkus glared and laughed bitterly. “We’re friends? That’s news to me! You made fun of me for six years through elementary school and then ignored me for the other six through middle and high school. Friends do not do that! Jennifer Bassett and I are perfect each other. We suit one another physically, emotionally, and mentally. I am in love with her and you have nothing to say about it or do you? Are you perhaps jealous that I, the lowly nerd Stuart Minkus got her and you, the great Shawn Hunter didn’t?”

Shawn gasped. “No the only time I think of that Terminator in a skirt is usually after I wake up screaming from a nightmare! I pity anyone who ends up with her, and that includes you.”

“Well spare me your pity, I will be fine,” Minkus said. From the salad bar Jennifer waved her fiancé forward. Stuart nodded and waved back. “Now excuse me, I am going to join my fiancée and if you had any sense of class whatsoever you would make your presence known elsewhere.”

He joined Jennifer at their seat. Shawn could do no more than throw up his hands and return to his seat. Privately he hoped that he would live to see the day when Stuart Minkus would admit that he was wrong and Shawn was right because he knew that day would come.

A few nights later, Minkus talked on his cell phone as he and Jennifer walked down the street to hail a cab. They had just attended the opera with Jennifer’s parents. Minkus continued talking to a potential client from New York City that he met the previous evening at Mr. Bassett’s country club. Jennifer kissed her fiancé up and down his face and neck. “You see with Minkus Technologies, you will-“Jennifer kissed him again. “-Get the best of what we can offer-“Jennifer continued to kiss him on the lips. “-And you will get your money’s worth-“
Jennifer rubbed his shoulders. Minkus was trying to ignore her while closing the deal. While he was aroused by her, he also knew that she was somewhat intoxicated. “Stuart, Stuart,” she said softly. When he didn’t respond, Jennifer grabbed the phone from his hands and pushed the off button.

Minkus gave her a look. “Jennifer what did you do that for?”

Jennifer held the phone far from Minkus’ grasp. “Is it asking too much that you give me your undivided attention?”

Minkus scoffed. “Your undivided-? Jennifer, I have spent all of the past two weeks with you in New York and here in Philadelphia. I have paid for enough shopping trips to last you through Christmas. We have been dancing, dining out, clubbing, playing golf and tennis, and have just gotten back from the opera. I don’t mind pleasing you, but I have things that I need to do as well! I have to study for my exams and have to get my business off the ground. I just need a few minutes with him. Now I know this doesn’t have any meaning to people like you and your father who can get a million dollars just by breathing. But people like me who have to work for a living can’t afford to miss out on business.” The phone rang and Minkus grabbed it. “We can talk later.”

Jennifer glared at Minkus and punched him on the mouth. “No, Stuart now!”

Minkus drew back stunned feeling his lip bleed. “You crazy bitch,” he said softly in shock.

Jennifer responded by taking the cell from Minkus’ hands and then throwing it on the ground. She then stomped on the cell phone crushing it with her heel.

Stuart dove down to the ground and reached for the remains of the phone, ripped in two with the wiring now showing. He glared at her. “This was a prototype! We are still working on that! Do you have any idea how much this costs to build?”

“I don’t care,” Jennifer yelled. She then punched Stuart again this time closer to the eye. Since he was still on the ground, Jennifer had an unfair advantage of height and muscle. In shock, Minkus couldn’t do any more than turn away from Jennifer feeling the injury swell up. He couldn’t cry, he wouldn’t in front of her. She is drunk, Minkus told himself, she doesn’t always act this way. Inside he was shaking.

He looked up at Jennifer as she continued talking. “You want my father’s money. You get everything that comes with it! You love me don’t you?” She almost screamed the last words as she pulled his hair. “Don’t you?”

“Y-yes, I do,” he said. He would be a complete idiot to say otherwise.

“Then if you do, you will prove it by making me happy,” Jennifer said through clenched teeth. “After all, that is the best way to make Daddy happy, wouldn’t you say?”

Minkus sighed shaking in fear. “Of course it is, Jennifer.” The rain began to pelt down. Minkus felt the rain pour down all over his body and seep into his clothes as he squatted on the ground. He was too much in shock to move from this crouched position. You knew, he told himself, you knew what she was like. Her father warned him that she was “fragile,” and “did things when she was mad or sad.” All of the little signs, the excessive drinking, her mother’s criticisms of Jennifer’s bad temper, Shawn’s words, even Jennifer’s annoyance at Eunice thinking she had “emotional problems,” were there. Perhaps he just ignored it.

Jennifer held out her hand. “God, Stuart, look at you! You look pathetic, no one would take you seriously!” Minkus didn’t respond. Instead he took her hand as she helped him to stand. “I think you’d better take me home now.”

Minkus couldn’t do anything more but nod as he hailed a cab. He and Jennifer sat inside it saying nothing as the cab pulled over to Jennifer’s home. The couple stepped out.

Minkus kissed her timidly and somewhat nervously on the lips. Jennifer responded by giving him a passionate kiss. “You want more then you have to make me happy, got it?” she asked severely what Minkus was beginning to wonder if it was a threat.

“Got it,” Minkus said before he returned to the cab and commanded the driver to take him home.

“What happened to you, man?” the driver asked with a heavy patois accent.
Minkus glared at the driver. “Did I ask you to get in my business, just take me home alright?” He said irritated at the interruption.

“Alright, man, whatever you say,” the driver said. Minkus felt the blood on his lip nudge his gums and teeth. He bit the bloody area on his lip and glanced at his reflection. He could see that the area around his right eye was swollen. It would probably leave a bruise. He covered it with his hand.

What am I getting myself into? He wondered in silence.

Minkus walked into the office. “What happened to your face?” the new secretary, Jessie Goloff asked. She had been recently hired because she worked cheap, was efficient, and was willing to make the move to New York City. What more could they ask for?

Stuart rolled his eyes. He was prepared for that question. “Oh some clod tried to beat me to a cab. Looks like I lost.” He said.

Jessie laughed. “Do you want coffee?” Minkus nodded as she continued. “You have something in the mail.”

Minkus passed the packed boxes and general mess of moving. He opened the package that lay on his desk. It was small and felt hard inside. He opened it to see a small box. Inside was a brand new silver lined cell phone. He was curious about who sent it until he saw the accompanying note written in a very familiar hand:

“To err is human, to forgive divine
Don’t upset me next time.
Love,
J.”

Minkus felt his hands shake as he picked up the cell phone. Part of him recognized it as an apology, perhaps even a peace offering from the night before. He should thank Jennifer for it. Another part of him saw something almost sadistic and frightening about the gift and the accompanying note. It seemed to say, I broke this because you made me angry. Just think what more I could do. He dialed Jennifer’s number.

He could hear her low sexy voice over the phone. “Hello.”

“Hi it’s me,” Stuart said. “I got your gift and I am sorry about last night.”

“That’s all right,” Jennifer said. “I’m sorry too. So we’re still good?”

“Oh course we are,” Stuart said.

I can’t wait for our wedding,” Jennifer sighed. “I’m very happy.”

“I know me too,” Minkus agreed. “Completely happy.” Almost. Deep inside Stuart, a small part of his mind was screaming, Run for your life!

The wedding preparations went off without a hitch. After the incident with the cell phone, Jennifer had no other issues with her temper. Stuart was able to put it off as an isolated incident. True she had her “Bride-zilla” moments firing her first wedding planner and hiring another, but these were verbal and not physical and were not directed at her fiancé so Minkus didn’t pay them any mind. They were attributed to just wedding jitters.

Now the big day had arrived. Minkus stood in front of the congregation with the Archbishop of Philadelphia standing by him and Alvin Meese, his best man by his side. Teddy Bassett walked forward with Minkus’ mother, Nancy and led her to sit next to her husband. Now that their son was marrying into a wealthy Main Line family, his parents had something to brag about. They often attended social functions, bragging about Minkus’ accomplishments saying that they knew their son was a genius and about the money that was rolling in. Stuart felt like he was a bauble on display for his parents to admire.

Thomas Bassett walked forward with Eunice sitting her in the front row. It was always hard to tell what she was thinking, but she seemed to approve of her new son-in-law which was more than he could say for his future brothers-in-law. The Bassett Twins still went out of their way to be unpleasant with Stuart.

Ingrid, who was one of the bridesmaids stepped forward with her husband, Elliot who was acting
as another usher with the Bassetts. Despite their earlier warnings about Jennifer, they seemed genuinely happy for the couple. They also put their negative feelings about the move to New York aside and were actually looking forward to it even looking for an apartment.

From the back of the congregation, Stuart met the gaze of his Grandpa Ginsburg. Even surrounded by a hundred people, he could feel the older man’s presence winking at him. Stuart couldn’t resist a wink back. This was an argument, he won with his mother. She insisted that in his “state,” she didn’t think it was wise to invite his grandfather. Jennifer actually agreed concerned about what a man with “his condition could do in public.” But Stuart Minkus put his foot down. He said that his grandfather had every right to be there on one of the most important days of his life and if that wasn’t possible, then the wedding would be with one less groom. Both his mother and his bride-to-be relented.

Finally the notes to Pachelbel’s Canon played and Edward Bassett walked forward with his daughter. The congregation rose as they stepped forward. Some little flower girls, Jennifer’s cousins, draped rose petals over the carpeting. Libby Harper and Dana Pruitt, Jennifer’s maids-of-honor stepped forward in pink taffeta. Jennifer looked like a vision in a Grace Kelly style Vera Wang gown. Her hair was pulled up in a chignon that met the veil and train. Stuart felt breathless as the beautiful woman approached him.

The music stopped and the Archbishop said. “Who gives this woman to be wed to this man?” “I do,” Edward said as he put Jennifer’s hand in Stuart’s. “Take care of her, Stuart. I mean it!” the older man whispered kindly yet severely.

“I will,” Stuart whispered back as the Archbishop invited the audience to kneel as he blessed the couple.

The reception at the lobby of a nearby hotel was as grand an affair as the wedding. Stuart Minkus watched his wife talk to her friends, smiling and laughing. He was lost in the moment watching this beautiful woman not believing that she was by his side. Truly he was the luckiest man on earth.

“So you think you will be happy with the shiksa?” a familiar voice asked. Minkus turned with a laugh at his grandfather as he stuffed some of the rolls in his pocket. A nurse stood next to him putting them back out onto the table. “Mama told me to go shopping! I’m getting some food for her.”

Minkus’ face fell. His grandfather had his bad moments with Alzheimer’s. He still sometimes had trouble distinguishing the present from the past and still forgot simple things. This was heartbreaking for Stuart to watch the older man’s mind go. He was always so sharp and intelligent. Now look at him. Minkus answered his grandfather’s question. “Grandpa, I know you better than that,” he said. “I wouldn’t go dragging religion into this if I were you. You’ve hardly kept the 10 Commandments, you know.”

“Hey, I never made a graven image,” Ginsburg argued. The grandfather and grandson laughed as Ginsburg looked up at his granddaughter-in-law. “She’s a very pretty girl, the type who kill keep you on your feet or run you off them. You sure you love her, son?”

“She will make a good wife and we will be very happy together,” he said. “So yes I’m sure.” “Alright if you’re sure, I’m sure,” Ginsburg said. “I will keep my considerably large mouth to myself.”

“Grandpa, I want to show you something,” Minkus said. He reached into his pocket to take out the brochure. “When Jennifer and I move to Manhattan, I am going to let you live here.” He showed the brochure to a senior assisted living center, a good one that was near his and Jennifer’s apartment. “I will pay for it and visit you every week, every day if they will let me. You will love it. You can be more independent and get away from the home that you’re in now. I’m going to take care of you just as well as you took care of me.”

Ginsburg smiled with delight. He exchanged smiles with the nurse. Even though technically the lady would be one less patient, she seemed happy for the older man. “Well I hope you take better care of me than that, Little Man.” He said. “Though not so little anymore.”

Stuart smiled shyly. “Well I don’t mind if you still want to call me Little Man.”
Jennifer approached the grandfather and grandson. “Hello Malachi,” she said calmly. “Stuart, Daddy wants to have a toast. You know how he gets.” She took her husband’s hand and they rose. “Jennifer you are an angel,” Ginsburg said. “A complete angel.”

“Thank you, Malachi,” Jennifer said. “That is very sweet.” She was about to lead her husband forward when Ginsburg continued to talk.

“The type of angel that would abandon your father,” Ginsburg said sourly. The married couple stopped and faced the older man.

“What is he talking about?” Jennifer questioned.

“I don’t know,” Minkus said as he knelt down to face his grandfather. “Grandpa, Jennifer’s father is right over there.” He pointed to the table where Edward Bassett sat.

“Sure he is,” Ginsburg said with a spit. “You going to marry that Tom Minkus and move to the suburbs? Just to get away from me, ha! Just like your mother, Nonnie!”

Minkus held his grandfather by the shoulders and steadied him as he shook. “Grandpa, no this is Jennifer. She’s not your daughter, she’s your daughter-in-law, my wife.”

“Don’t patronize me, Tom Minkus,” Ginsburg said. “I know you don’t like me! The feeling is mutual! Just get away from me! Get away!”

“I’ll take care of this,” the nurse said as she took a needle from her bag and injected the older man. Ginsburg continued to rant until he was filled with the drug and calmed down.

Stuart stood up to face his wife. Jennifer visibly paled obviously terrified, so Stuart held onto her. “It’s alright,” Minkus said. “He’s just confused. It’ll be okay,” he whispered.

From the corner of his eye, Minkus could see his mother Nancy hold up her glass and give him a smug “He’s-your-problem-now” look as she drank her champagne.
The Young Marrieds I: The Bottle Itself (Stuart Age 20)

Chapter Summary

Stuart Minkus discovers married life isn't what he thought it would be and a surprise announcement bring matters to a head.

The Lives of Genius
A Boy Meets World/Girl Meets World Fanfic
By Auburn Red
Chapter Six: The Young Marrieds Pt. 1: The Bottle Itself (Stuart Minkus Age 20)

Author’s Note: The subtitle for this chapter came from Elizabeth Wurtzel’s book Bitch: In Praise of Difficult Women in which Wurtzel describes viewing photographs of Nicole Brown Simpson: “Not the genie in the bottle, but the bottle itself, the colorful ceramic case whose hieroglyphic surface is so compelling….beyond and beneath the surface itself there is only more surface…One who is hiding secrets and isn’t telling. Which turned out to be the case.” It is an apt description, I think of Jennifer Bassett. (of course ironically and tragically in real life, Nicole Brown Simpson was herself a victim of domestic violence, while in this case, Jennifer is the abuser.)
Oh and Mitzi and Mamie Van Houten, the Park Brothers, and Dr. Sandra Levin are original characters.

“Stuart, Stuart,” Jennifer called her husband as he worked on his laptop. He looked through the various charts for Minkus Technologies making sure that the accounts were on top, as well as scanning programs for potential issues. Everything had to be checked and rechecked. He nodded at his wife barely listening until she called him again. She poked him on the shoulder somewhat roughly.
Minkus jumped to attention. The incident with the cell phone was never far from the back of his mind. He knew that his wife had a temper that could be displayed. Just that morning, she fired their housekeeper, Maria, after the woman had slightly overcooked Jennifer’s breakfast. Jennifer yelled and swore up a storm leaving the poor woman in tears. Minkus calmed her down and promised to pay her full severance. Maria accepted it muttering under her breath, “La Diabla,” as she left the Minki’s employment. They were now in the process of hiring new housekeepers.

He turned to face Jennifer, “What is it?” he asked.
She held up a piece of cardboard paper in her hand. “Guess what, you’ll never guess,” she said. Instead of waiting for her husband to guess, she continued. “We have been invited to Mamie Van Houten’s charity gala!”

“Great,” Minkus said trying to be pleased but still confused.

Jennifer shook her head. “You don’t know who she is do you?”
“I know she’s wealthy,” Minkus said. “I think I’ve heard her name a few times.”

“Wealthy? Stuart her family is one of the oldest in New York,” she said. “They own property all over the city. Remember when we went to Club X, a couple of weeks ago?” Minkus nodded. How could he forget? He didn’t exactly have a good time in a cramped, smoke filled room with enough strobe lights to give epileptic seizures and techno music to give him ear worms for the rest of his life. Jennifer however seemed to hit it off well with some of the party goers. They were in a corner, dancing, drinking, and laughing very loudly. A couple of times Jennifer pointed at her husband causing some of her new friends to laugh louder. Minkus had a feeling that he was the topic of conversation.
He wasn’t sure in the dim light, but Minkus thought that he saw one of the other party goers pass Jennifer some white powder. Since then, he had been somewhat cautious about recognizing signs of drug use in his wife. So far, he couldn’t find any. “Well at the club, I ran into Mamie’s daughter, Mitzi.”

“So it’s Mamie and Mitzi Van Houten?” Minkus teased. Jennifer glared. “You should talk, Minkus! Well Mitzi said that she would wrangle an invitation from her mother. Sure enough she came through!”

“Did she now?” Minkus asked.

“Come on Stuart,” Jennifer said. “Do you know what this means? We have been accepted by New York society! Once we get on the Van Houten’s invitation list, all other doors are open to us! Think of what business contacts you would have and think of how many influential friends we would make!”

Stuart looked at the invitation. His wife puzzled him at times. It was almost like there were two sides to her social life. The one side was the wilder one that liked to hang with the young empty-headed socialites, supermodels, rock stars, and celebutantes by attending wild parties and raves wearing hardly any clothing, the idle rich. The other side wanted respectability to attend the more high society functions that featured power brokers, CEO’s, millionaires, and particularly their wives, women who were called “hostesses;” names that were more at home on donor lists than in celebrity scandal sheets. There was no telling which side was the more driven and at times the more ruthless.

It made sense in a way in Minkus’ mind. In Philadelphia, Jennifer’s family was well-known, a Main Line family. There was not a party or a charity event in Philadelphia that did not have a Bassett, or at least a representative of the family present. Now even though Edward Bassett was still fairly well-known in New York, his family didn’t have the same cache as in the City of Brotherly Love. Jennifer was somewhat out of place in the larger city, a sea creature on dry land. So she was always angling for a sign of recognition, a sign that she was as accepted here as she was in the city that she grew up.

Minkus smiled. “Well it does sound interesting, maybe we ought to give it a try.”

Jennifer grinned and gave her husband a deep kiss. Minkus was happy. This is what married life was all about. They had their issues mostly about Jennifer’s temper and sometimes reckless spending and partying and Stuart’s constant working and the occasional time when she felt he didn’t bring home enough money. What young married couple didn’t have problems at times? Their relationship was as good as it could be. The two went out to lavish parties and events, spent a great deal of time together, were often seen holding hands even kissing in public, and their sex life was very unpredictable but satisfactory. Stuart and Jennifer went out on private dates one night a week and they never forgot each other’s birthdays, appointments, or their first anniversary. When they fought, the arguments were verbal and reduced to voices being more snide and sarcastic rather than screaming and yelling. What more could any married couple want?

“Thank you, Stuart, you are the best,” Jennifer said. “Now I need to go buy a new dress.” She moved her hands up and down her body and looked through the mirror. “Basic black is so old fashioned! Perhaps red? No, too much like a street walker! Do you think that I should go with spaghetti straps or strapless?”

Stuart shook his head. “Tell you what why don’t you go to Sak’s or Bloomingdale’s and see what they have to say about it because I have no idea!” He took out his wallet and gave her some money. Jennifer picked up the cash, but then pouted. “Nothing for shoes?”

Minkus rolled his eyes. Sometimes he had to indulge her. He gave her the extra cash. Jennifer pouted again. “No jewelry?” Stuart rolled his eyes once more and gave her more money. His wife smiled and took the cash greedily from his hand and put it in her purse. She gave him another deep kiss as she thanked him before she left for her shopping spree.

The Van Houten’s party was in the penthouse of one of the luxury apartments. They were dressed
very well: Minkus in a black Ralph Lauren suit, black Magli shoes, and a gray Yves St. Laurent neck tie and Jennifer in a spaghetti strap off white knee length Oscar De La Rents gown with sash and white Jimmy Choos high heels. Her hair was tied in an up style with a white diamond head piece and she wore a matching De Beers diamond necklace, earrings, and bracelet set. She made damn sure that she got all of the right brand name labels for herself and Stuart for this party. She wanted to impress them in the worst way. “How do I look?” she asked her husband. It was clear that she was nervous.

“How do I look?” Minkus said as he kissed her on the temple for good luck. He removed his wife’s coat and his own and gave them to the coat check girl.

As soon as The Minkus couple entered the grand room, they were greeted by a woman dressed in a turquoise A-line gown. She had a short dark bob cut and carried a cigarette in a long cigarette handle. While the woman had to be at least in her sixties, her face certainly didn’t show it, probably due to the surgeon’s knife. She jumped over to Jennifer and greeted her with an air kiss. “Jennifer darling,” she said. “It’s good to see you. Mitzi’s told me so much about you!”

“Well be polite, but don’t embarrass me!” Jennifer whispered back as the two headed to the bar and Jennifer accepted a glass of wine. Minkus looked around weighing out the possibilities. “And stop looking like you would rather be anywhere else! At least pretend you are having a good time!”

“Fine I will,” Minkus accepted a glass of wine from the bartender as well. The two drank in silence.

A voice called out from the hallway. “Jen!” Stuart and Jennifer looked up to see a woman about their age run up to the couple. She had curly black hair that came to her waist and was dressed in a silver thigh length dress. “I knew you’d make it, as dull as Mummy’s parties are!”

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world, Mitzi,” Jennifer said. “You remember my husband Stuart?”

Mitzi nodded up and down. It was clear that she didn’t but she was making a show that she did.

“Oh of course, it’s nice to see you again, Stuart.”

“You too,” Stuart said. He vaguely remembered Mitzi from Club X, though it was hard to recognize anyone in the dim light. Mitzi laughed. “Well at least now that there are people my age at least we might be able to breathe some life into the party.” Jennifer laughed as well and Stuart offered a courtesy laugh and looked around. It was true, most of the other attendees were in their 30’s or above. The oldest appeared to be about in his 80’s and he was next to a young blond woman who Minkus had a feeling that he shouldn’t mistake for his daughter or granddaughter. He, Jennifer, and Mitzi appeared to be the only ones in their early 20’s. Perhaps it was quite a cache that a couple so young could be invited after all, he reasoned.

Jennifer drank another full glass of wine getting a little tipsy. Mitzi held onto Jennifer’s hand and pulled her aside. “Now if you will excuse me, Stuart,” she said. “I have got to get your wife alone. You know meet in the ladies’ room, girl talk?”

“Okay, sure,” Minkus replied as Jennifer and Mitzi headed for the lady’s restroom getting lost in the crowd.

A couple of older middle-aged men approached Minkus as he sipped on his wine glass. “Excuse me,” one said. “You are Stuart Minkus right?” With their graying fair hair, overweight frames, and
similar round facial structures, Stuart guessed that they were related.
Minkus nodded. “Yes, I am,” he said.
The one poked the other on the shoulder. “I knew it. I read that profile on you from Scientific
American! You were in their Up and Coming Technology Stars edition.”
Minkus nodded. “That’s right,” he said remembering the interview from two months earlier.
Shortly before that he had been interviewed by Wired Magazine as well. Even the New York
Times had cited Minkus Technologies as one of the businesses to watch for in the Millennium. His
little company was certainly riding high in publicity.
The older man handed Minkus a business card. “My name is David Park and this is my brother,
Matthew. We have been having some issues with our current software providers. How would you
be interested in putting together a whole network?”
Minkus’ mouth dropped open impressed. “Well certainly, an order like that would be most
impressive! I would love to talk this over with you!”
Matthew Park shook Minkus’ hand warmly. “Splendid, splendid. Let’s make an appointment with
our secretaries and talk it over. My brother and I are available Friday morning if that’s possible!”
“That is absolutely possible,” Minkus said. He handed the Park brothers his business card. He was
about to shake their hands again when he heard a shrill laugh coming from the far end the type of
laugh that made his hair stand on end.
Jennifer was standing in the corner with Mitzi Van Houten and a small group of people. She was
speaking rather loudly clearly the center of attention. Stuart approached his wife so he could get a
better hearing of what they were talking about. Jennifer continued to speak clearly ignoring her
husband’s presence. “Yes he would be wonderful if he could get it up once in a great while!” The
others laughed, some a bit nervous and embarrassed but others like Mitzi laughed hysterically. “I
think I fell asleep the first time!”
“Well you know what these computer geeks are like,” Mitzi said. “Their idea of sex is man on top,
woman on computer screen!” She said amidst the laughter.
Stuart pulled his wife away from the crowd and moved her aside. “Uh oh Daddy’s mad,” Jennifer
said with a giggle.
Stuart pulled her to the coat rack and faced her. “What’s the matter with you?”
“What’s the matter with me? What’s the matter with you?” She asked. “Do you have to embarrass
me like this dragging me off? Why don’t you club me and drag me by the hair?”
“I’m not the one telling personal stories at the top of my voice to total strangers,” Minkus said. He
smelled her breath. He didn’t have to investigate for very long. “And I’m not completely drunk!”
“I’m not drunk, Stuart,” Jennifer said. “I’m just fine!” She staggered away from her husband trying
to maintain her balance and return to her friends. “Just fine,” she said and giggled madly as if she
said the funniest thing in the world. Her heels turned inward and she lost her footing. Minkus
helped her stand until he saw something fall from his wife’s grasp. He picked it up. It was a small
bottle of white powder. He opened it and sprinkled a bit on the tip of his finger to look closer.
“Cocaine,” he said realizing what it was. He threw it on the ground and broke the bottle sending
the powder flying. “How long have you been doing this?”
“I don’t have to tell you that,” Jennifer said. Blood trickled down her nose and she grabbed for a
tissue on a nearby table.
“How long?” Stuart half-shouted.
“Only at Club X and just now,” Jennifer said grudgingly. “Just twice. Mitzi and I are just
experimenting with it alright?”
“Well the experiment is over,” Minkus said. “I’m taking you home!”
“The hell you are!” Jennifer shouted running towards the party when Minkus pulled her back. By
now the attendees had watched the married couple get into their fight. All eyes were turned on to
them. “You can’t tell me what to do Stuart Minkus!”
“I think I just did,” Minkus said. “We are getting out of here!” Out of the corner of his eye, Minkus
could see Mamie Van Houten nod at the coat check girl to get his and Jennifer’s coats. The genius
had a feeling that they were crossed off the Van Houten’s guest list.
“I am just trying to have fun,” Jennifer said. “You know it’s a word that you don’t hear very often! You are embarrassing me!”
“I’m embarrassing you? You’re embarrassing me,” Minkus countered.
“I was personally invited to this party not you,” Jennifer said. “You don’t even know how to act at these things! Maybe if I married someone whose family name meant something, I wouldn’t have this problem! But no I had to marry new money nothing like you!” The coat check girl handed the married couple their coats. “What are you doing?” Jennifer demanded.
“I’m sorry, Mrs. Minkus,” the woman, a timid bespectacled blond girl said. “But Mrs. Van Houten wants you and your husband to leave right now.” Jennifer laughed bitterly. “That’s ridiculous,” she turned towards Mamie Van Houten who gave a stone faced look. “Mamie tell this idiot that I don’t have to leave!” But Mamie didn’t answer.
Jennifer took that to be a sign that she and her husband had to. She turned to her husband and once again her heel turned inward. “Stuart, take me home,” she said slowly. Stuart led his wife out the door. On the way out, Stuart glanced over at David Park and returned the older man’s business card to him. Park just glared at the young computer genius and tore both his and Stuart’s cards in half.

Stuart practically dragged his wife home into their apartment. Jennifer no sooner arrived than she stumbled to the bathroom and vomited. Minkus patted his wife’s back and whispered comforting words to her. He then led her to the bedroom and set her on the bed. He removed her headpiece and undid her hair style sending her blond hair cascading down to her shoulders. He then removed her dress, shoes, and pantyhose and threw her sash on the bed. “I don’t feel so good, Stuart,” Jennifer said slowly. “My head is pounding and I feel dizzy.”
“Well I wonder why after downing that much wine and cocaine,” Minkus said tenderly but with a severe tone. He helped her into her blue teddy and bathrobe. He removed her necklace, earrings, and bracelet. The only jewelry that remained were her engagement and wedding rings. Minkus felt like his wife was a little girl that couldn’t dress herself and needed someone to help her.
He entered the bathroom and dampened a wash rag with warm water. Then he walked into the bedroom and gently wiped off his wife’s makeup. He began by removing the blush and foundation from her cheeks. She looked so lost and vulnerable sitting on the bed. “I just wanted to be accepted and fit in,” she said. “I’ve never felt out of place before. Is that so bad?”
“No not at all,” Minkus replied as he dabbed at Jennifer’s lips to remove the lipstick then at her eye lids to remove the eye shadow and mascara. “It’s perfectly understandable. We all feel out of place at times. Just don’t lose yourself to be accepted.”
“Stuart,” Jennifer said slowly. “I didn’t mean what I said about falling asleep the first time and the other things. You are a great lover. I just said those things, I don’t know I just couldn’t stop myself. What’s wrong with me?” Minkus held his wife closely. “You just become angry sometimes.” He then pulled out his pajamas and removed his own clothes.
“I sometimes feel like I can’t control myself,” Jennifer said. “Like there’s something in me that comes out. I don’t always know what I’m doing or saying. I can’t control it.” She cried as her husband sat back down. She leaned on Stuart’s shoulder.
“That’s why I’m here,” Minkus soothed his wife. “When you can’t control it, I can.” He reached over and kissed his wife slowly and lay her on the bed. “I will take care of you, Jennifer. I love you.”
“You are too good to me Stuart,” Jennifer said. “Much better than I deserve. You will always be good to me.”
“I will always be good to you,” Stuart promised. “Always.” Jennifer reached down as her husband lay next to her. He rested her head on top of his chest and wrapped his arms around her. Jennifer sat up and rubbed her husband’s crotch. “Even now?” she asked.
Stuart felt his penis harden and said, “Yes even now.” He said feeling a sexual arousal. He pulled his wife closer and the two made love.

Stuart knocked on the door of his grandfather’s apartment in Greenbriar Meadows, the retirement community in Manhattan that he and Jennifer selected. As promised, he visited at least once a week. Despite the busy schedule of being a rising CEO and filling Jennifer’s requests, Minkus made sure that he made time for Grandpa Ginsburg. He figured that the old man in a strange way still kept him grounded when the rest of his life was pushing him too high or too far.

He handed the monthly check for his grandfather’s care to the main office then headed for his grandfather’s apartment. “Come,” Stuart heard Ginsburg’s voice call. Stuart used the spare key and entered. His grandfather was busy looking for something. He had pushed off the cushions on the sofa and armchair.

“What’s wrong Grandpa?” Minkus asked. “What are you looking for?”

“Oh Stuart, I am looking for my keys,” Ginsburg replied. “You mean these keys?”

“No, son,” Ginsburg said annoyed. “The keys to the café! I’m supposed to open it! You can’t trust these kids to open it! Now where the hell are they?” He said and he began to mumble. “Joan and Bob are supposed to be entertaining and they do not like to be late. For folk singers they can be pretty tense. Between you and me, I give them six months at the most!” He began to search more frantically. “Supposed to be the best place in the Village! How can it be the best place in the Village if I can’t find the damn things?”

Knowing that his grandfather wouldn’t stop in his delusion unless he was placated or restrained, Minkus came up with a solution. He held out his own spare key to the apartment. “Is this it, Grandpa?” he asked.

Ginsburg sighed with relief. “Yes that’s it, Stuart,” he said. “You’re always good to me.” He sat back down on the sofa as his grandson readjusted the cushions.

“Would you like some green tea, Grandpa?” Stuart asked.

“Sure thing, as always,” Ginsburg said. Minkus then made green tea in their favorite mugs then offered them to himself and his grandpa. Minkus could see the Howl quote, “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,” and winced thinking how true and prophetic those words were now.

His grandfather no longer had the concentration to play farkle. He would sometimes get bored or distracted easily, but he and Minkus still continued to play brain teaser games. Minkus wrote down on a piece of paper the letters “J,” “F,” “M,” “A,” “M,” “J,” “J,” “S,” “O,” “N,” “D.” “Okay now Grandpa guess what’s the missing one,” Minkus invited.

Ginsburg looked closely. “A for August, don’t waste my time,” he said. Then he wrote down several numbers: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, __, 21, 13, 61, A, B, D,

Minkus looked closely. Ginsburg’s memory blanks and lack of concentration got the better of him. “8,” Minkus guessed. “It’s the Fibonacci Sequence.” Even though most of the numbers and letters weren’t actually in the sequence or were in the wrong order, he understood what his grandfather was trying to write.

Ginsburg looked closely. “Yes that’s it, kiddo.” He sighed. “I don’t feel like playing anymore, Stuart.” He said.

“I was thinking the same thing, Grandpa,” Minkus said as he put away the paper.

“Because I want to talk to you about something, Little Man,” Ginsburg said. “I have my faculties for now and I want to say things before I leave and never come back. You’re a good boy and you know I love you-“

Minkus winced. “Grandpa don’t do this now,” he began.

“-Let me finish,” Ginsburg said. “I know that I’m old. I know that I may not have much time left so I want you to know how I’m planning my send off,” he said. “First off I don’t want to buried. None of the nonsense in a box stuff. I want to be cremated. You writing this down?”
Minkus had already taken out his laptop and transcribed everything that his grandfather was saying. “Got it, you want to be cremated.”

“Good and I want my ashes spread around the Village. In fact I wouldn’t mind seeing them spread in Central Park. I used to love going there on the benches and just watch the people go by and just be. Not in Philadelphia. The only good thing about that place is sitting right across from me.”

Minkus smiled at the compliment. Ginsburg continued, “I don’t want a religious ceremony, no ministers, no rabbis none of that claptrap! I want people who knew me to speak of me. Is the café still open?”

Minkus shook his head. “No Grandpa, it closed down years ago in 1967 remember?”

“Oh,” Ginsburg said sadly. “Well I’m sure that there could be a good place, filled with jazz, folk music, good food, good people and good memories. In fact I want jazz and folk music to be played there. Is Miles still alive?”

Minkus shook his head. His grandfather could only be referring to Miles Davis. “No Grandpa he died in 1991.”

“What about Bob?” Ginsburg asked.

“Still alive but virtually retired,” Minkus answered. “His son, Jakob’s a musician now.”

“I don’t want the son,” Ginsburg shot back. “Janis?”

“Ian or Joplin?” Minkus asked.


“Joplin died in 1971 and Ian is still alive but mostly retired as well,” Minkus replied. Ginsburg continued to name musicians that he knew personally and Minkus replied that many were dead, retired, or playing the oldies circuit.

Ginsburg sighed. “Well I suppose anyone will do,” he said. “I always liked hearing young people sing. Nothing filled my heart more than hearing some newcomer pour their heart and pain into their words. Some of that alternative music that you kids like these days isn’t too far different than what we listened to back in the day.” Minkus nodded. Of course the music had changed over to pop boy bands and girls in spandex, but he did make a point about the alternative music of the 90s.

“I want people to remember stories about me, sad stories, funny stories, silly stories. I want them to remember the whole Ginsburg not just that he left, but what he did when he was alive,” Ginsburg said as his grandson continued to transcribe. “I want you to be my heir. Of course what is 100% of nothing?” The grandfather and grandson laughed and Ginsburg looked down at his box of photographs, his windows. He looked old and sad. “Who cares about all this? Why bother remembering anything? Who wants to remember these anyway?” He said giving the box a slight kick. “Just some old faces in a box! Who cares about them?”

“You do,” Minkus reminded his grandfather as he put his hand on the older man’s shoulder. “They showed someone doing something at sometime that to them was important. So it was important to you and it will be important to others.”

“Yeah who?” the man glowered.

“Well they’re important to me,” Minkus said. “Because they remind me of you. Maybe someone else in the future will recognize their value as well.”

Ginsburg looked closely at his grandson and smiled, his eyes filling. The two continued to talk into the late night. When Minkus left, he gave his grandfather a hug wondering if it would be the last time that Ginsburg would be aware that his grandson had hugged him.

Minkus listened as Elliot and Ingrid Iverson-Smithacke discussed their future plans to their colleague. The three sat inside Minkus’ furnished office overlooking Greenwich Village.

“We want you to buy us out of Minkus Technologies,” Ingrid said succinctly.

Elliot nodded. “We’re both willing up to give up our shares. We want to leave the company.”

Minkus started. “Well I must say, I was not expecting this. I know you two weren’t happy with the move to New York at first. But you seem to be okay with it now.”

“It’s not that,” Elliot replied. “We actually do like it here. In fact Ingie and I have accepted teaching positions at NYU.”
“Well Elliot has,” Ingrid replied. “I will only be teaching there part time because I will have to go on leave in nine months.” She said with a smile. “But it will become a full time position after that.”

Minkus smiled. So you’re pregnant congratulations! Any names picked out?”

Ingrid and Elliot held hands. “Well we’re thinking of Horatio if it’s a boy and Isadora if it’s a girl,” Ingrid answered. “We already have the little one on the waiting list for Einstein Academy.”

Minkus nodded. He had heard of Einstein Academy’s commendable reputation for enriching gifted students. It might be a good school for any future Minkus child, if he and Jennifer were going to have one that was.

Elliot grinned. “And hey who knows if you and Jennifer have one maybe they’ll go to school together, even debate with each other.”

“Well, I’ve no offense, Stuart,” Elliot said. “But it’s not much fun anymore. It was more fun when we were just four poor kids who could barely scrape together broken parts. Now it’s gotten too big for us.”

Minkus rolled his eyes. “You actually miss those days? You would give up all this?”

He waved his hand around the office to indicate the large floor rented out to Minkus Technologies. “Orders come in by the hundreds now! We have had spreads in Wired and Scientific American! We have about 50 staff members!”

“That’s it, Stuart,” Elliot said. “We don’t know most of these guys’ names! It used to be about just pleasing us, putting together something that would make us happy and our clients happy. Now, it’s about impressing everyone. The last three items that we produced ended up costing more for the public than the initial MIMS. Our last mobile phone begins at $25.00. That wasn’t what we had envisioned ourselves to be.”

Ingrid nodded. “There was a time when our slogan ‘Technology For Those Who Need It the Most’ was not just words. Can we truly say that now?”

“Well times have changed,” Minkus said stiffly. “There’s a lot more to consider.”

“I know but I don’t want to consider those things,” Ingrid said. Elliot nodded in support of his wife. He didn’t either. “Maybe I just don’t have the business mind that you and Alvin do and I don’t want to.”

“We still believe in who we were,” Elliot said. “We just don’t want to be a part of who we have become.”

“In fact if you want to you can take our names off the MIMS device,” Ingrid offered. “Write us out completely.”

“You got to admit the MM device has a nice ring to it,” Elliot said. “You can even get the guy from the Crash Test Dummies to record a jingle!” He went into an impression of Brad Robert’s distinctive bass singing voice but sounded more like Weird Al Yankovic doing the parody, ‘Headline News’. Elliot sang, “Once there were these geeks that created a device that you could hold in your hand palm…”

Minkus held up his hand. “Do me a favor Elliot don’t get into advertising.” He said with a laugh, but then became serious. “No it will keep your names. You helped create it, you should still be a part of it. We’ll get the legal team together to make sure that you still get your cut of the trademark fees.”

Elliot and Ingrid smiled and shook Minkus’ hand. “Thank you Stuart,” Ingrid said. “We’ll still
keep in touch.”
“I’ll hold you two up to it,” Minkus replied. Now that he was on the verge of losing them, Minkus had to admit he did feel something like friendship towards the Iverson-Smackles.
“Good luck, Stuart,” Elliot said. He and Ingrid were about to leave when Elliot continued singing his version of the jingle to get a laugh out of Minkus: “And when they finally made it they found that no other device was better….”
Minkus waved his hand in a shooing manner. “Get going you two!”
Ingrid and Elliot passed by Alvin Meese on the way out. “Hi Alvin, Bye Alvin,” Ingrid said.
“We’re leaving the company for good.”
“Alright then, bye,” Meese said keeping his eye on the financial reports clearly not paying attention. The door shut behind the remaining two members of Minkus Technologies.

Meese placed the report on Minkus’ desk. “I don’t know whether you are aware of this or not, but there is a bit of a problem when money leaves a company faster than when it comes in.” He showed a line chart featuring two amounts: one for outgoing amounts and one for incoming. Sure enough there was a large margin of difference in the amount that was leaving than entering. Minkus put down the graph. “So we’re in a slow season. It happens. Things usually pick up by the next quarter anyway. You know that.”

Meese rolled his eyes. “Minkus, we are still considered the New Kids on the Block. If things don’t pick up soon, we will be the New Kids on Chapter Eleven. New businesses do not recover if they have to file for bankruptcy within their first year. It’s not just a slow season. It has been an ongoing trend for the past few quarters.” Meese showed Minkus similar charts with the same data. “For some reason the money that disappears the fastest seems to be from the CEO’s earnings, care to elaborate?”

Minkus ran his fingers through his hair frustrated. “Well there have been expenses for the business. We have had to spend more than we anticipated. Surely we have enough to cover it.”
“I don’t think chief among those expenses should be to pay for your wife’s shopping trips,” Meese said sarcastically. He then threw down some envelopes. Minkus looked through the addresses, Visa, Master Card, and Discover. Some from stores like Bloomingdales, Macy’s, and others. A lot of them were suspiciously stamped: Final Notice. “Now why were they sent here do you wonder?” Meese asked.

“We have a joint account,” Minkus replied. “They probably couldn’t reach Jennifer, so they sent them to me at work.”

“Minkus have you been juggling accounts or keeping separate books?” Meese asked. “Because as your head of accounts I would sort of like to know that.”
“No,” Minkus answered truthfully. “I haven’t been doing anything illegal to support Jennifer’s… habits. She’s just been taking money out. She gets bored and when she gets bored, she shops.”
“Make sure that she doesn’t shop us to filing for unemployment,” Meese said. “For now it’s just out of your earnings, so the only one who gets affected so far is you. But if it spreads to the company, I won’t cover for you.”
“I’ll talk to her, Meese,” Minkus replied.
“Make sure you do,” Meese answered. “Because if you don’t talk to the bitch, I will and I won’t have the loving concern of a husband to choose my words carefully.”
Minkus rolled his eyes. It’s no wonder that the closest that Meese had ever been with a woman was one that he had to pay for. “Meese, I said that I will talk to her.”

From his laptop computer, Minkus could see an icon appear. He pressed on it to see Jessie look at the screen. “Mr. Minkus you have a call from Greenbriar Meadows on line 2.”
“Thank you, Jessie,” Minkus answered. He picked up the phone and pressed the line. Meese stepped out figuring that he made his point. “This is Stuart Minkus,” he said to the representative of the senior assisted living quarters that Grandpa Ginsburg was staying in.
“Mr. Minkus my name is Sandra Levin,” she said. “We’ve spoken a few times.”
“Yes of course, Dr. Levin,” Minkus answered. “Is there something wrong with my grandfather?”
“Nothing more than usual,” Dr. Levin replied. “But I have to talk to you about your grandfather’s placement here. I’m afraid that we can no longer keep him living at this facility.”
Minkus started. “Why is that? He hasn’t become too disoriented or violent has he?”
“Well he has,” Dr. Levin said. “But he is able to be restrained. No, that’s not the main reason. Mr. Minkus, we agreed to house and care for your grandfather contingent on whether you could afford to pay for his care. Unfortunately, your last check bounced.”
“What?” Minkus asked. “I don’t believe it. I had enough in my accounts. I checked it myself.” He had a separate bank account for Ginsburg’s care from his and Jennifer’s joint account. He wasn’t a complete fool. Jennifer hadn’t gotten to that had she?
“Well you may wish to speak to your bank about this, but in the meantime your mother has come to pick up your grandfather,” Dr. Levin continued.
Minkus rose from behind the desk. “My who has come to pick up my what!?” He hung up the phone and mumbled for Jessie to cancel all future appointments for the day and leaped into a cab to head for the retirement center.

There was a large traffic jam keeping Stuart from arriving at the quarters earlier than he expected. He told the receptionist his name and the woman led him to Ginsburg’s apartment. There was already quite a commotion by the time he arrived. Dr. Levin had already been in attendance and two orderlies and a nurse also surrounded the elderly man. Unfortunately, Nancy Minkus was also there. She glared at her son. “Well you’ve done a splendid job,” she said sarcastically.
Minkus ignored his mother’s snide remark and approached his grandfather. The senior had thrown a glass at the people around him and threw another one. Minkus ducked to avoid it. “Who are these people, Stuart,” Ginsburg said. “I’m not going with them!”
Minkus held onto his grandfather by the arm. “Grandpa, Grandpa, it’s alright. They are just here to take care of you.”
“But I don’t trust any of them, especially her,” Ginsburg pointed at Nancy. “I don’t know who she is but she’s a liar, a devil! She only brings trouble, I can tell by looking at her!”
Minkus turned towards his grandfather. “No, Grandpa, that’s your daughter, my mother. Remember you always called her Nonnie?”
“But that’s not my Nonnie,” Ginsburg objected. “She doesn’t look like my Nonnie. She doesn’t act like my Nonnie! She acts like someone else. She acts like Essie!” He threw another glass. Stuart nodded, Essie. Esther. Ginsburg’s former wife, Nancy’s mother, a woman that he could never live with because in his words they wanted “different things.”
Ginsburg looked to Stuart as if he had calmed down. “Stuart, I can’t be like this you know. I have to go open the café.” He looked around. “Now where are the keys?” He looked up and down throwing cushions and sheets. “How can I open the café without the goddamn keys to unlock it?”
Minkus walked behind his grandfather and held him by the shoulders. He pulled him closer in a quick embrace while he sobbed that he couldn’t find his keys.
Dr. Levin stepped behind Minkus. “Because of your financial situation, we had to notify your mother as the second emergency contact person. She will be taking your grandfather to a nursing home in Philadelphia.”
“I hope you appreciate me coming up here to fix your mess, Stuart, because I won’t do it again,” Nancy said sourly.
“Thank you, Nancy,” Stuart glared at her through clenched teeth. “I appreciate you helping me.”
“I’m not doing it for you,” Nancy countered. “I’m doing it for my father.” She turned to her father. “Pop, you’re going to go home to Philadelphia. There’s a nice place there that you will live.”
Minkus rolled his eyes. Nice place in Nancy Minkus’ definition was probably somewhere that hadn’t yet been investigated by the local news team. Stuart silently cursed his mother, but also cursed himself realizing if it weren’t for him and Jennifer living above their means, this wouldn’t have happened. He felt equal parts guilt and shame at himself and anger and frustration at Jennifer. Ginsburg looked up. “Philadelphia, I’m not going there not unless I can see my Little Man!”
“You’re Little Man’s right here, Grandpa,” Minkus said softly. He turned to the doctor. “Will he be well enough to make the journey?”

Dr. Levin nodded. “He will be sedated through most of the trip.”

Minkus rocked his grandfather back and forth like a small child as the old man sobbed. “Don’t let them take me, Stuart,” he said. “I come back you know I always come back.”

Minkus felt tears coming to his own eyes. “I know Grandpa, but they will look after you until you do.”

“Did I do something bad, son?” Ginsburg asked almost like a small child. “This isn’t a farkle.”

“No, Grandpa,” Minkus said kissing the old man on the top of the forehead. “You didn’t do anything bad. I did.” It wasn’t a happy surprise or a joyous occasion. Not a farkle at all.

By the time that Minkus arrived at home, he was furious. Even more so when he saw the shopping bags and jewelry cases on the coffee table. “Jennifer,” he commanded.

“What?” Jennifer said appearing through the bedroom door. Minkus smelled his wife’s breath and investigated her eyes. No she wasn’t drunk or high well not yet anyway.

He threw the bills on the table. “Care to explain these?” He asked. “Or explain to me how my last check for my Grandfather bounced?” He crossed his arms as Jennifer looked at the bills as if she didn’t know what they were. “My mother is taking him to Philadelphia right now as we speak.”

“So he’ll go to a home, big deal,” Jennifer said. “The old man is senile anyway! Who cares!”

“Dammit, I care,” Minkus shouted. “Did you get into my private account?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” the blond woman said but she smiled in a way that implied that she had.

“Jennifer that is earmarked for emergencies and my grandfather’s care, as well as most of my earnings from Minkus Technologies,” he said feeling like he was talking to a child. “Not for your extravagance! How did you find out my PIN number anyway?”

“Because I know you Stuart,” Jennifer said. “Believe it or not, sometimes I do listen when you go off on your Math Nerd tangents. I guessed they were all prime numbers. Turns out I was right!”

Minkus glared. It was time to change his PIN.

“Why did you do it Jennifer,” Minkus said wearily. “You not only hurt me, but you hurt my business and you hurt my grandfather. Are your new clothes, new jewelry, and all your other new things that important to you?” He tossed one of her bags to the ground.

Jennifer laughed bitterly. “Well what else can I do around here? You have your job to go to and all of your precious clients and coworkers! What do I have to do during the day besides sleep, eat, and watch TV? Do you realize how boring it is around here when you’re not home?”

“I have to work,” Minkus insisted. “Even more so now since you decided to singlehandedly support every store in New York City! Here’s a crazy thought: If you are so bored, maybe you could find a job!”

“A job,” Jennifer laughed like it was the most ludicrous suggestion that she ever heard. “I’m not the one who is going to work! You are just going to have to work harder!”

“Work harder?” Minkus said. “I work 60 hours a week! How much harder can I possibly work?”

Out of frustration, Minkus kicked some of her shopping bags to the ground.

“Goddamit, I am tired of everything being on my shoulders! If we want to continue as we are, you are going to have to find a job!”

“And what pray tell would I have to do,” Jennifer said as she picked up her things that Stuart threw on the ground. “You forget, I dropped out of college after we got married!”

“I never asked you to do that and you could have gone back anytime!,” Minkus said. “I took most of my courses online and so did my coworkers! You could even go back to school here! There are plenty of schools you could enroll in, NYU, Columbia even take some courses at The New School!”

“And if I did, Stuart,” Jennifer said. “I would have to quit in a few months anyway!”

“What are you talking about?” Minkus asked his wife.

Jennifer then held out an official letter that lay on the coffee table and threw it at her husband.
“Dammit Stuart, I’m pregnant! What’s the matter with you?” She ran towards her room starting to cry.

Stuart was stunned. “Jennifer, what? I thought–We’ve been using birth control!”
Jennifer halted in running. “I forgot to put in my diaphragm the night of the Van Houten’s party! When we came back well, you know I wasn’t in any condition to remember anything! It was an accident, alright!” She ran to her room and slammed the door.

Stuart picked up the letter. It was an official one from Mt. Sinai’s OB-GYN clinic to confirm test results that Jennifer Bassett-Minkus was indeed pregnant! Apart from feeling excited or joyous about the news, Stuart Minkus suddenly felt very exhausted. What were he and Jennifer going to do now?

Minkus knocked on the bedroom door. “Jennifer are you alright?” he asked.
“No,” his wife called through her room. He could tell she was still crying.
“Jennifer there are alternatives,” Minkus suggested.
The door opened and his wife faced him. “What do you mean alternatives?”
“Well if you want to have an abortion there are some clinics nearby,” Minkus suggested.
This news only made Jennifer cry harder. “You don’t want this baby?” She slammed the door again.
Minkus knocked on the door. “Jennifer, no, I just don’t know if we are ready to take care of a baby right now!”
“Go away and leave me alone!” Jennifer shouted through the door.
“Jennifer,” Minkus pleaded. “I didn’t mean that I didn’t want the baby. I just said that we have options.”
“And I said for you to leave me alone!” Jennifer screamed through the door. Minkus then turned from the door knowing that he was going to sleep alone in the study tonight.

Minkus went through the pile of bills and bank statements feeling more and more depressed. The Visa bills were past due. Discover had already been declined. At least two credit card companies had already contacted collection agencies. Not to mention, the Con Ed bill was already two months past due, their cell phone bills had three pages each, and rent had been skipped for a month.
Several stores were demanding that Jennifer pay the credit that she promised. On and on.
He called the bank to get an accurate statement of his earnings. His heart sank when he heard that even put together their joint account and his personal one would never be able to pay off the large debts.

He rubbed the bridge of his nose. Now to top it all off, his wife was pregnant. How could he even think about looking forward to fatherhood when a pile of debt was staring at him in the face? How much more pressure could a baby put upon their finances? How much more pressure could a baby put upon him? Jennifer was already draining him. Would a baby take what was left?
Minkus rubbed his forehead. He had to think this through logically. He could recruit some more clients. What about the Parks? They seemed somewhat interested at the Van Houten’s party. But no that was about a month ago, the night he and Jennifer conceived. Surely the brothers would have found someone else by now. And sometimes clients took their time in sending money, after negotiating fees and issues. He had some money coming in from the mobile phone and the MIMS, but after they got through the percentages, Stuart would not end up with very much. Right now his wages would be garnished to pay all of these debts, so they would be left with very little to survive off of.

He had two options neither of which he liked:
1) He could file for bankruptcy. Of course he knew that it was difficult to get out of. Plus Meese was right. Businesses that had to file for bankruptcy within their first year almost never bounced back. He would have a hard time pulling out of bankruptcy after that. He had just headed his own
company. He would be overqualified for the average computer programmer job. How long would Jennifer stick around after he was unemployed and unlikely to find another job?

2) He could get some wealthy benefactor to pay off his debts and who was the wealthiest benefactor that he knew? Well who else, his father-in-law, Edward Bassett. Edward would do anything to make sure that his “Princess” was taken care of. However, Stuart had too much pride to go on his hands and knees begging for money. He recalled Bassett approached him to finance his company not the other way around. He had a feeling that Edward Bassett would never let Minkus forget the time that he had to save his son-in-law’s ass. Minkus sighed, well what other choice did he have? Logically, asking Mr. Bassett to pay off the debts, even for a loan was a much better option than going bankrupt or not doing anything and becoming broke and homeless. Minkus quickly dialed the number for his in-law’s Philadelphia home. One of the maids answered. “I’m sorry Mr. Minkus but Mr. and Mrs. Bassett are not here,” she said briskly. “They are at their Rochester home.”

“Are you sure?” Minkus asked relieved at the coincidence. “Yes sir,” the maid replied. “Thank you,” Minkus answered as he hung up then dialed the number for the Bassett’s Rochester home.

Minkus entered Edward Bassett’s study feeling every bit as nervous as he did when he first met the man. Mr. Bassett sat behind the desk his hands folded. Teddy and Thomas sat in opposite chairs looking at their brother-in-law with barely concealed glee and contempt. Across from Mr. Bassett also sat Hathorne, his aide and another man in his 30’s that Minkus recognized to be Eugene Bassett, Jennifer’s cousin and the family attorney. “Well Stuart,” Edward said evenly. “It looks like you’re in a bit of a bind.”

Minkus nodded. “Yes Edward, I am,” he said. He explained the basics of the situation that they had overspent and were now on the verge of bankruptcy. He omitted the fact that much of it was caused by Jennifer’s splurges or that she was pregnant. “And I assume that you are here because you want me to help you,” Edward said. “Yes sir, I hoped that you would,” Minkus said slowly.

Edward smirked and laughed at the young man, his sons, nephew, and assistant joined him. He then stopped. “Stuart, remember what I said would happen if you hurt my family especially my daughter? What did I say?”

“That I would wish that you killed me, sir,” Minkus said sadly. “Edward please if you won’t give me the money then we can make it a loan. I will work it off. I don’t care what you do to me but you don’t want your daughter to suffer do you?”

Bassett grinned thinly. “Why all the urgency, Stuart? Is there some new development that I’m supposed to know about?”

Minkus blinked. “Nothing.” “Oh and I thought it was because of my grandchild,” Bassett said matter-of-factly. “My mistake.” “Jennifer told you,” Minkus reasoned. He could see Teddy and Thomas exchange an amused grin at Stuart’s humiliation.

“Yes, she told me,” Bassett said. “She even implied that you suggested that the child could be….taken care of.” “I simply said that there were alternatives,” Minkus said. “I didn’t think that we are financially ready to take care of a baby.” “Of course that would be a suggestion from the evolutionist anti-Christian husband of my daughter,” Bassett said. “Understand this, my daughter is not going to any Baby Butcher no matter how legal the process is!” “Edward, religious and political views had nothing to do with this!,” Minkus said. “I just want to make things easier for Jennifer! I simply suggested it as a possibility. I am not going to rush her out to a clinic and certainly not against her will! She wants to have the baby, so we are going to period!
I just need help for both of them. I know you don’t want to see your daughter and grandchild go broke do you?"

Bassett was silent for a long time, then put up his hands. “Well against my better judgment, I will help you Stuart.” He said. “I will gladly pay all of your debts. You won’t go bankrupt.”

Minkus breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank you, sir. If you like we can work out a repayment schedule right now!”

Bassett held up his hand. “No, it won’t be a loan.”

Minkus smiled. “That’s even better!”

“I’m not finished,” Bassett continued. “This will be a payment. You will get your debts paid off and I get something in return.”

“What is it?” Minkus asked.

Edward Bassett looked at his family members and smiled. “We want part ownership in Minkus Technologies!”

“What?” Minkus gasped.

“There is a vacancy in the ownership since Mr. and Mrs. Smackle left,” Bassett suggested. “I think my sons and I will fill the void nicely.”

“But what about what you said that you would be silent and invisible?” Minkus asked. “You said that you would not interfere with the technologies and the ideas would be ours!”

“Well times have changed,” Bassett answered. “There’s a lot more to consider.”

Minkus felt like he had been pierced with an arrow. Those words echoed back haunting him as he recalled saying the same thing to Elliot and Ingrid.

Bassett motioned for Eugene to step forward. Eugene reached into his briefcase and pulled out a contract form. “50% of Minkus Technologies will go to Bassett Investment, in the care of Edward Bassett Sr., Edward Bassett Jr., and Thomas Bassett. All subsidies and patented technologies rights will be split among the shareholders, meaning yourself, Mr. Meese, and the Messers Bassetts. Clients will also be recommended from both sides. Of course, if you decide to dissolve the partnership for any future reason, the Messers Bassett will have the rights to withdraw any current and future monies and clientele.”

“Look at it this way, Stuart,” Bassett said. “We have plenty of clients, even international ones. Minkus Technologies can go global. It will be a much wider spectrum than you would have envisioned on your own. Your dream of being a millionaire will finally come true! Of course if things don’t go well between you and my Princess well not only your marriage will suffer, but your company will become the small business that you started with.”

Minkus considered that possibility. Part of him was fascinated with the idea of taking his company to an international market. He knew that Japan and China would be fascinated by such technologies. Some interesting things were happening in the Central Asian and European markets as well. This company might grow bigger. Too big, a voice in his head seemed to say.

That part was disgusted with the idea. The company was his. He built it, he created it. It was the one thing in Minkus’ life that he could say belonged to him. When he and the others put together the technologies, he felt like he had created something wonderful, something tangible, something independent, and something that was his personal gift to the world. Now Minkus Technologies would be forever tied in with the Bassetts. He could see himself being strangled within the confines of Jennifer’s family and being threatened with a grim future if he decided to leave it.

What it amounted to was that Edward Bassett was willing to pay off his daughter and son-in-law’s debts and all he wanted in exchange was a lifetime of service from Stuart Minkus. How high a price was that?

Stuart could see no other logical solution to this. All other options were gone to him and would prove disastrous for his wife and future child. He made a choice that to him was no choice when it came right down to it.

“Alright, I’ll sign it,” Minkus said.
“Good,” Bassett replied. “Of course we will need Mr. Meese’s signature as well to make it formal.”

Minkus winced. Meese would sign it, the second Bassett would mention the possibility of going global and becoming a millionaire and he would do it without so much as a quiver. Like Minkus was feeling now. Minkus held the pen to his hand as he signed his name. He felt like he was losing a part of him that would forever disappear.

“Thank you, Stuart,” Edward replied. “The money for your debts will be transferred into your account within the next business day. That wasn’t so painful was it?” He asked as he shook his son-in-law’s hand.

Minkus sighed. “No Edward,” he said ironically. “Not painful at all.” Like a stab in the heart would not be considered painful.

Minkus came home from his encounter with his father-in-law, his feet felt like lead. By the time he got home, it was night. Jennifer was in bed reading What to Expect When You’re Expecting. “Well did you sign it?” she asked.

Minkus changed his clothes and crawled into bed next to his wife. He didn’t have to ask how his wife knew. He had a feeling her father told her everything about the deal. “I signed it,” he said forcing himself to be numb.

“That’s my darling husband,” Jennifer said putting the book away and running her fingers through his hair.

Minkus could do nothing more than lie in bed feeling his wife’s hand on his head and sigh wearily already feeling the weight of Jennifer and her family on him.
Stuart loses someone very dear to him and questions his marriage and life with the help of an old friend and a long-lost relative.

Minkus Technologies became Minkus International rather quickly. Minkus faced his latest clients, the representatives from Ishimura Technologies from Japan. He held open the flow charts, and power point presentation in full view of the clients. He had just finished showing the latest commercials that the advertising department created for the merger. Minkus faced the two businessmen, an older man and a younger man and their translator, a young woman. Minkus knew some conversational Japanese and he was starting to pick up a few more words, but he felt more confident with the translator there.

“Well what do you think?” Minkus asked after the translator, Kumiko Ishikawa spoke for him. “I think if we work together, Minkus and Ishimura could create a future for both of our companies.” The older man, Tojiro Ishimura spoke first. “Mr. Minkus,” Kumiko began. “Mr. Ishimura believes that your company and ours will benefit each other greatly. It makes a lot of business sense for us to represent your technologies in our country. In this tragic time for your country, it is important that we work together in many capacities.”

“I agree, Mr. Ishimura,” Minkus said somberly to the Japanese businessman.

The younger man, Ishimura’s son Yuki spoke afterward. Kumiko spoke again. “Mr. Ishimura thinks that you gave a fine presentation and we look forward to working with you.”

Minkus and Meese exchanged thin, but pleased smiles. They knew not to look too overly eager.

“Thank you, sir,” Minkus and Meese said in unison. “We’ll look forward to a good partnership,” Minkus said. The business people stood up knowing that the deal was officially closed. The Ishimura representatives shook the American men’s hands then Minkus and Meese bowed in reverent respect which the Ishimuras and their translator returned.

Minkus and Meese waited until the Japanese representatives left before they celebrated! The two went into a little happy dance as Minkus uncorked a bottle of champagne and poured it into two glasses. Meese checked the figures and projected earnings of Minkus International and weighed how much this merger was going to add to the company’s net worth.

“So give it to me straight,” Minkus said excitedly.

“Okay,” Meese said pausing for suspense. “With this merger, the sales of MIMS and MIMS02, the new software packages, and the Minkus phones. After we pay operating costs, salaries, Uncle Sam gets his cut, legal cut, and the Bassetts get their share—“
“-Okay continue come on,” Minkus urged.
Meese looked up with a pained look on his face. “Oh Minkus, I’m sorry-“ he looked down trying to look upset. “Do you think that we can live off of 4 million each?”
The two geniuses broke into a smile and leapt up into a hug. “We are now officially millionaires!”
Minkus said “Congratulations Mr. Meese!” He shook Meese’s hand.
“Congratulations Mr. Minkus,” Meese said also shaking his colleague’s hand. Minkus offered a glass to Meese who accepted. “To Minkus International.”
“To Minkus International,” Minkus said as they toasted and drank.
“To millionaires,” Meese said.
“To millionaires,” Minkus agreed as they toasted and drank again.
“To when people ask ‘who wants to be a millionaire,’ we can gladly say, ‘we do!’, Meese said.
“To that,” Minkus agreed as they toasted again and drank.
“Do you know what the first thing I am going to do with that money,” Minkus said feeling exhilarated and a little tipsy. He didn’t usually indulge in frequent drinking but this was a celebration. “I am going to rent a plane and have it fly over John Adams High and skywrite ‘Losers!’ over the school particularly on that crummy other Stratford side!”
Meese and Minkus laughed hysterically. “That’s a healthy way of getting in touch with your inner child!” Meese slapped the desk. “Minkus, we’re living proof that the geeks and weirdoes will rule the world!”
Minkus held up his glass again. “To the real revenge of the nerds and the jocks and bullies that are working minimum wage that hated them!”
“To that,” Meese said as the two again toasted and drank.
“And you objected to the raised cost of the MIMS02,” Meese wagged his finger at his partner. Minkus nodded. The second version of the MIMS device began at a retail cost of $18.00 twice as much as the original. Minkus at first felt a little guilty since the original point of the first device was to provide technology for those who couldn’t afford it. But he silenced that guilt and went forward knowing how much the profit margin would be.
“And you were also worried about the Bassetts becoming part owners,” Meese said. “Nothing can go wrong my friend! We have more money and more clients than we know what to do with! We could be in the record books as the World’s Youngest Millionaires-“
“-No that Farrah Gray kid beat us,” Minkus glowered. “We’re oldsters compared to him!”
“Oh damn,” Meese said. “Okay close enough! Anyway, no shame in riding on someone’s coattails if said coattails can take us this far up!”
Minkus nodded preferring now to keep any misgivings about his in-laws owning part of Minkus International to himself. Meese said. “I’m going to go straight to your father-in-law’s place and kiss him on the head! In fact, I’m going to go kiss your wife, too while I am at it for being his daughter!”
He was about to stand and leave the office when Minkus held him back. “Hold on, Romeo!” He said half-teasing but also half-serious. “Jennifer is my wife! The only one that will be doing any kissing on her will be me!” Minkus looked at his watch. “In fact I probably ought to get home to her!”
“True family man,” Meese said. “You do that and I think I will go do some celebrating with my favorite ladies!” He counted off his fingers. “Now should I call Lana or Roxy?” he asked. “Maybe, Angelica!” He gave a leer. “Yeah Angelica, she has this trick with her legs-“
Minkus held up his hand. “Fine you do that. I’ll celebrate my way and you celebrate yours!” He said as he finished the champagne and left.

Minkus unlocked the door to his and Jennifer’s apartment. “Jennifer, I’m back,” he said. He saw his wife sitting on the couch, dressed in gray sweats and her hair tied in a messy ponytail. She was watching TV huddled in a corner with a blanket wrapped around her.
“Oh Mr. Minkus, it is good to see you,” said Inez, the Minki’s housekeeper in a heavily Mexican accented voice as she looked up from dusting the shelves. She spoke loudly in a voice of over
enthusiasm. “Look Mrs. Minkus, it is your husband.” Jennifer barely looked up to acknowledge Stuart’s presence. He could tell from his wife’s face that she had been crying.

“How is she today?” Minkus whispered to Inez. He had initially hired Inez to do the cooking and cleaning for the house and other errands. But lately she had been acting as Jennifer’s minder looking after Jennifer’s changeable moods when her husband wasn’t around.

“She was alright and then she started watching the television about 3:00,” Inez said. “She’s been like this ever since.”

“She can hear you,” Jennifer interrupted.

“Thank you, Inez,” Minkus said. He handed her a check. “You will notice there are a few more digits in there.”

Inez smiled at the raise in pay. “Thank you, Mr. Minkus. You are very kind!” She gave her employer a hug which he gladly returned.

“I try to be,” he said. “We’ll see you tomorrow.” Inez promised and left the married couple to themselves.

Minkus sat next to his wife on the couch and wrapped his arms around her in a loving embrace. Jennifer cuddled up next to him still crying as he patted her lower abdomen. The television showed scenes of war and carnage in the Middle East. Minkus sighed. “Jennifer, I told you before you shouldn’t keep watching the news,” he said as he turned off the TV with his remote. “It only upsets you.”

“I know, I can’t help it,” she said. “The world is becoming more dangerous and awful.”

“I know, but things turn around they always do,” Minkus said. “You can’t keep focusing on it. It was terrible, but I wasn’t there and I made it home.”

He held his wife tightly. While he could never say that Jennifer was the most altruistic sensitive soul, he knew that the terrorist attacks on September 11 still upset her. Even the most hard-hearted cold-blooded person couldn’t help but be affected when something happened almost in front of them. By some odd coincidence, perhaps some sort of fate, Minkus had just missed being a victim of the attacks himself. The appointment of the morning dragged on longer than it should have and Minkus had to miss his 10:00 appointment in the North Tower. It was a good thing that he did, because after he left the first appointment he received a phone call from Jessie telling him to be careful, because “The news was saying something about smoke coming from the Trade Center. They think a plane hit it,” and well the rest was history as they say.

“They are going to catch that Bin Ladin guy right?” Jennifer asked. “Tell me that they will catch him!”

Minkus kissed his wife on the lips. “They’re going to catch him. If they have to search every cave in Afghanistan and Pakistan to find him and they will make that son of a bitch pay for every life he took.” Privately Minkus didn’t think it was necessary to go to Iraq like they were planning and wasn’t sure whether a whole army was necessary to go to Afghanistan when a special operatives force would do, but he wanted to placate his wife not discuss political controversies. “I will personally make him pay for making me walk across the Triborough Bridge and nearly kill myself trying to get home to the Village and my pregnant wife!” Jennifer smiled at her husband’s teasing and laughed at his joke. On that day, Minkus was so far away trying to get home. Jennifer was frantic trying to get in touch with him but cell phones were blocked, traffic was backed, and people were in hysterics. Jennifer had locked herself in the apartment and didn’t open it until 8:00 that evening when her husband finally returned after having walked several miles after he told the cab driver to let him out on the bridge. She didn’t know until he came through that door where he was and that he had missed his appointment at the World Trade Center.

Jennifer sighed. “I just keep thinking with the world as terrible as it is, what business do we have bringing a child into it?” She looked down at her abdomen. “I remember what you mentioned about our ‘options.’ I’m not so sure that you didn’t have the right idea.”

She buried her face in her husband’s chest as Minkus held her tightly and kissed her on the top of
“Jennifer we’ll be okay,” he said. “This little guy will be okay. This will pass and when he becomes President you are going to be so glad that we had him and raised him.”

“He?” Jennifer asked.

“Or she,” Minkus shrugged. Jennifer was in her third month still too early to tell the sex of the baby.

Jennifer smiled. “Really you think the baby’ll be President?”

Minkus smirked. “Are you kidding? He’ll have your appearance and my brain. If he has even a drop of our egos put together, I’m thinking Future Dictator of the World!” The husband and wife laughed and Minkus became serious. “Jennifer, are you okay?” he asked. “You haven’t been drinking have you?”

Jennifer shook her head. “No, Stuart, I haven’t touched a drop since I’ve been pregnant.”

“No smoking?” Minkus asked. “You haven’t been taking any drugs?”

Jennifer rolled her eyes at her husband’s questions. “Please Stuart give me a little credit!” She said. “I’m just asking,” Minkus said. “You sleeping and eating alright?” His wife nodded. “And your moods are alright. You’re not thinking about hurting yourself?” He said. “Right now, what you said are just words and we can forget about it. But Jennifer I have to know. If you are suicidal, we have to get you professional help.”

“Sometimes I think about it,” Jennifer admitted. “But it passes. Really Stuart, I’m okay. I have no real intention of killing myself or the baby.”

“I hope you don’t,” Stuart said seriously, but then he smiled. “Because I don’t know who else would wear this,” Minkus said as he held up a red box from Cartier. He handed the box to Jennifer who clapped her hands delighted.

She held up the diamond and sapphire bracelet. “Oh Stuart, you are too good for me,” she said as he put it around his wife’s wrist. “It’s beautiful!”

“Well it belongs on your wrist then,” he said as his wife gave him another kiss.

“It must have cost a fortune,” Jennifer said. “How much was it?”

“Oh somewhere in the neighborhood of $1500,” Minkus said. “But I can afford it. Good news, we landed the Ishimura account! You are looking at a millionaire!”

Jennifer leaped up delighted. All earlier depression was gone. “Oh Stuart, I knew it would happen,” she said, “I am so proud of you!” She kissed her husband warmly and passionately and then pulled away. “Is that why Maria hugged you?”

“You mean Inez?” Minkus asked. They had been through so many servants, no wonder Jennifer couldn’t keep track of their names. “I gave her a raise and she thanked me, that’s all!”

“She’s very beautiful,” Jennifer said suddenly feeling very tense as she moved far from her husband.

“I never really noticed,” Minkus said. He shook his head. “Come on Jennifer. Inez is 40 years old, happily married, with children. Her oldest daughter is close to our age! She is not exactly my idea of the perfect woman.”

“Well you know how it is with maids and secretaries,” Jennifer said suddenly feeling very tense as she moved far from her husband.

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“Well you know how it is with maids and secretaries,” Jennifer said suddenly feeling very tense as she moved far from her husband.

“Her brother is a priest and her sister is a nun,” Minkus said. “That would be an awful lot of answering to God. Jennifer, you are being silly!”

Jennifer stood up. “So, I’m being silly now am I?”

“Well you can’t be suspicious every time I talk to another woman,” Minkus said. “Where would
Jennifer crossed her arms. “I know, I’m sorry that you’re taking it that way,” she said. “I mean I’m fat and getting fatter and there are probably more beautiful women than me running around. Plus, you’re a millionaire and well, you are a lot more handsome than you used to be.” Minkus smiled at the roundabout compliment. “What would you want with me?”

Minkus held his wife closely. “Jennifer, I am completely happy. My career is going great and I have a beautiful loving wife! I have everything with you. I don’t want anything else well except for our little Bassett-Minkus Jr. to come out.”

Jennifer smiled and took her husband’s hand in his and led him to the room which was now being converted into a nursery. “Speaking of which, look what I’ve done!” She flipped on the lights and held out her hand. “Ta da!”

Minkus looked around and saw a white room with various characters painted on the walls and others in printed frames. Minkus looked closer at the characters. “At first I wanted to paint the walls blue,” Jennifer said. “But I thought what if the baby turns out to be a girl? I couldn’t decide what color, so I thought the Hell with it. I could just leave the walls white and we could focus on putting things on the walls instead.”

The walls featured such well known figures as Peter Rabbit, Winnie the Pooh (both Disney and A.A. Milne’s version), Humpty Dumpty, the Cat in the Hat, Harry Potter, and Cinderella and her Fairy Godmother. “It looks great, Jennifer,” Minkus said. He fingered the Cinderella print. Jennifer smiled. “I figured if the baby is even half like you, he will like to read. So, I decided to make the theme storybook characters.” She looked around at the other items. “I went a little crazy with the toys, I know.” A crib lay in one corner with Little Golden Book Land character bed sheets. The book shelves contained various children’s books. Minkus glanced in his future child’s bed and saw a stuffed horse, Tyrannosaurus Rex, and teddy bear. Baby blocks, chew toys, and other objects were inside a Clifford the Big Red Dog toy chest. Some clothes already were seated inside a dresser drawer waiting for the day when their owner would wear them.

Minkus smiled and approached his wife. “The baby’ll love it as much as he will love his mother!” He asked with a lecherous smile.

“Well we could always christen it,” Jennifer teased as she leaned towards her husband and the two ended up on the floor in an embrace.

Two months later, Stuart and Jennifer Minkus lay next to each other intertwined when his cell phone rang. “What?” Minkus asked looking at his watch. 6:00 a.m. Too early for business clients. Jennifer who was closer picked up the phone and accepted the call. “I got it,” she said. “Hello?..Yes, he’s right here.” She handed him the phone. “It’s your mother.”

Minkus was confused. “Yes, what is it?” he asked. Nothing would have enticed his mother to call him unless it was bad news. Even before she said it, he knew. “Yes, of course I’ll be there.” He hung up the phone and mechanically rose to get dressed. “I have to go to Philadelphia. My Grandpa Ginsburg died.”

Jennifer rose from her bed. “Do you really have to go, now?” He sat up and walked into the bathroom, brushed his teeth, and swallowed mouth wash as Jennifer talked. “Come on, it’s not like the old man was conscious for the past five months,” Jennifer said. “He wouldn’t have known if you were there or not.”

“I would,” Minkus countered. After Ginsburg had been sent to the nursing home in Philadelphia, he slipped into a stroke and a coma. Minkus wanted to visit, tried to, but his mother had put an order keeping him from seeing him. She also managed to get power of attorney over his remaining affairs. Minkus was actually surprised his mother even called to tell him that he died, but maybe she had some maternal instincts and wouldn’t forgive herself if her son didn’t say good-bye to her father. “He was my grandfather. He helped raise me for 11 years and was there for me when no one else was! I want to pay my last respects!”
Jennifer shot back, “Stuart, you can’t go now! We have to attend that opera with the Van Houtens on Friday and we have dinner with my parents coming up! These are among the last times that I will get to wear decent clothes before I can’t fit into them!”

Minkus looked at his wife incredulously. “I’m sorry that my grandfather’s death was at such an inconvenient time for you!” He quickly dressed in a pair of black slacks and turtleneck. He peered through the closet looking for his favorite blue blazer. He then pulled out a small suitcase/carry-on bag from the closet and began packing. He carefully selected a black suit for the funeral. “I’m going; you don’t have to!”

“Well what am I supposed to tell them,” Jennifer asked. “Do you know how long it took for the Van Houtens to put us back on their guest list after the way you acted at their party!”

“You mean after the way you acted at the party,” Minkus shot back. “I don’t know. Tell them there’s a death in the family. It would be the truth after all!” He snapped the suitcase shut then reached for his cell phone.

“Stuart, you are not going!” Jennifer commanded as she grabbed the suitcase by the handles. Minkus grabbed them from her and picked it up. “I am going and that’s final!”

Jennifer picked up a glass vase from the vanity and threw it at her husband’s direction. “No you’re not!” Minkus ducked and barely missed the vase as it shattered against the wall missing the top of his head by an inch.

“I can’t believe you just did that,” Minkus gasped. Jennifer leapt up from the bed and punched her husband in the shoulder hard. Minkus winced in pain and then she shoved him to the ground.

“Jennifer, stop this,” he said. “Behave yourself. This can’t be good for you or the baby!” He held his wife by the wrists to restrain her. “Now calm down.” He continued to hold onto her as she struggled, her screams becoming less and less. “I know you’re still worried about what happened to me on 9/11. But I came back then and I will come back now. I will be there for you. I will come back after the funeral. You’ll be alright. I’ll be alright and we will have our son shortly thereafter. Everything will be fine! We’ll be a happy loving family.”

“That’s what you think,” Jennifer shot back. “You want this baby or not?”

“Jennifer, what a question you know that I do,” Minkus said.

“You didn’t at first,” Jennifer countered.

Minkus rolled his eyes. “Jennifer, I can’t believe you’re still bringing this up. I was just surprised that’s all and our finances weren’t what they are now. I was concerned whether we were ready to take care of him. But I’m looking forward to his birth. I can’t wait. It wasn’t planned but it’s a nice surprise, a nice wonderful surprise.”

Jennifer threw back her head and laughed. She stood up. Right then to Stuart, she looked like a goddess, a dark vengeance seeking goddess. “You think it was a surprise, an accident that I got pregnant?”

Minkus reasoned. “Well it was the night of the party. You were drunk and high and you forgot to put in your diaphragm. That’s what you told me.”

Jennifer shook her head. “You don’t know me at all do you? I did have a few at the party and Mitzi and I did have fun frolicking in the snow, if you will. But do you really think that I would forget to do something like that when I did it every night? Recall that even after I had a few, I always remembered before.”

Minkus stood up and looked at his wife squarely. “What are you saying, Jennifer? You planned to get pregnant?”

“I knew eventually you would leave me,” Jennifer said. “You would get tired of coming home to your little wifie especially one who is so high above you reminding you of all your shortcomings. Oh given time, we probably would get tired of each other and eventually separate. Yes sir, you might leave me but you would never leave your wife and child now would you? Of course Daddy had a hand in it! Actually, it was his idea!”

Minkus held his hands to his face. “Your father wanted to be a partner in the company,” he
guessed. “He put you up to getting pregnant because he knew that I wouldn’t ask for help otherwise.” It made sense now, particularly how quickly that Edward knew that his daughter was pregnant and how quickly Jennifer knew the terms of Edward’s assistance.

“Are all of you geniuses this astute or did I just get lucky,” Jennifer asked dryly. Minkus waved his hands. “But the spending and the possible bankruptcy, you couldn’t have planned that. There would have been no guarantees that I would have asked for his help!”

“Well we got lucky then didn’t we,” Jennifer asked. “I had things that I really wanted okay more than I should have wanted, I will admit. We could have waited around because we knew eventually you would have come to your senses. It was just bad luck, I suppose that it happened that way when it did.”

“Don’t you care at all what you did to me,” Minkus said as he slammed his hand on the desk. “Dammit Jennifer, you and your father turned me into a kept man!”

Jennifer looked her husband up and down. “Stuart, you married a wealthy woman for her money, don’t deny it! My father gave you the money to start your little company. You always were a kept man. You just never realized it before now.”

Upon Minkus’ stricken face, Jennifer laughed. “Oh come on, Stuart, quit complaining. Daddy pulled your stupid little company out from the ground, you got your beautiful rich wife, and we’re going to have a baby! You are going to get everything you ever wanted! You just wouldn’t have been able to do it without us!”

Minkus shook his head and stood up with his hands on the suitcase. “You know Jennifer, I think I’m really seeing you for the first time,” he said. He then grabbed his suitcase and reached for the phone to make travel arrangements.

“Where are you going?” Jennifer demanded.

“I’m going to Philadelphia,” Stuart said severely. “You do whatever you want.”

“You won’t leave me now,” Jennifer said determined as her husband opened the bedroom door. Minkus looked at his wife and offered an icy smirk. “You don’t know me at all, do you?” he said as he slammed the door on her.

The plane touched down in Philadelphia. Stuart rushed to a cab and told him to take it to his hotel. He opted not to stay with his parents. He had a feeling that he wouldn’t be welcome. Jennifer’s words came to haunt him. How could he have been so blind, so stupid? He thought that he had the advantage knowing that he and Jennifer both had ulterior motives for their marriage. Everybody uses everybody, that was what he said. He finally let his guard down thinking that he had come to a place where he was happy, in love, and loved and it turned out to be all a lie! Edward and Jennifer Bassett had manipulated him. There was no mistake about it. But what could he do about it?

Could he leave and file for divorce? He could cite irreconcilable differences, but what would it mean for Jennifer and their child? Jennifer was not in any condition to look after herself. She got depressed and angry easily. Minkus considered himself her protector, keeping her from harming herself or anyone else. Who would protect her now? Was it his job to do so? What about his job? Could he start over without the Bassets financial support now that he had no other recourse? What about the child? Was it right to leave him without a father because he didn’t get along with his mother? As much as Minkus loved Ginsburg, he knew that he had virtually abandoned his wife and child. His daughter grew up to be a bitter woman unable to show any love for anyone particularly her own son. Could Minkus put his son through that and have him later hating him as much as Nancy did her father? While the scientific mind of Minkus was aware that his son right now was nothing but a little fetus inside his mother incapable of any emotional connection just yet, he also wondered if the little guy was waiting for the day when he could come out and see his parents. Shouldn’t both his mother and his father be there to greet him when he met the world?

Stuart flipped on his laptop and looked at various resources for domestic abuse. He looked up websites that mentioned the signs and symptoms of a person in an abusive relationship. He
checked them off one by one in his head. His shoulder still hurt from the fight and his lower back still hurt from when he fell. This wasn’t the first time that she attacked him physically. The incident with the cell phone when they were engaged sprang to mind. If she didn’t hit or punch him in between the times it was because he was constantly afraid that she would. He walked on eggshells so she wouldn’t strike him again.

Jennifer had verbally attacked him both in private and in public, his sex drive, his personality, and called him names like “nothing.” She made him feel useless with her words and would often take them back in apologies that usually began with “I’m sorry that you’re so mad, but…” She didn’t really apologize, she just further shifted the blame towards her husband. She tried to isolate him from his family. That was probably why she didn’t want him to go to Grandpa Ginsburg’s funeral because she didn’t want him to talk to them.

Of course there were the financial signs too, taking money from him to spend for herself and demanding material possessions in place of love. Last but not least there was the latest manipulation: purposely becoming pregnant without his knowledge or consent, so he wouldn’t leave her. As Minkus checked the list off one by one, he came to the inescapable conclusion: He was an abused husband.

He continued to search for any assistance for battered husbands, but came up short. Occasionally, a few websites offered lip service to “abuse could happen to anyone, even men” and threw out the occasional statistic of unreported cases. But he saw only shelters, hotlines, and legal representation for battered women. There were no helpful resources for battered men.

He felt alone and ashamed. He was a man! He should be able to take this, why couldn’t he? Who could he tell that his wife was hurting him anyway? What would he do walk up to a police officer and say, “My wife is beating me. Could you please get a restraining order on her?” Chances are the officer would just tell him to be a man and toughen up. He may even ask what he did to deserve it.

He had heard enough people in school call him a nerd and a wimp who couldn’t fight anyone back, the type who would get hit by a girl. Ironically, this was what was happening to him now. All he would do was prove that they were right. Maybe he was the only abused husband out there who wanted to come forward. He flipped off his laptop knowing that whatever problems that he had, he was going to have to face them the way he always did, alone.

Stuart entered the funeral home to hear organ music playing. It sounded like some sort of religious hymn, “Nearer My God to Thee,” he guessed. He shook his head, this wasn’t the type of music that Grandpa Ginsburg wanted played. Where were the jazz and folk music?

He gently pushed past the party offering his humble apologies. They all looked somber, steady, and impersonal. He recognized some of his relatives, his Great Uncle Morty Ginsburg and his son Morty Jr. and Aunt Barbara Minkus, but most were people that he didn’t know. Minkus wondered how many of them actually knew his grandfather or just decided to be there to support his daughter and son-in-law in their difficult time.

Minkus looked at the far end separate from the other participants at a man seated in the back. He was an elderly man with a mop of curly gray hair. He sat next to the window in a wheelchair. He was tied to an oxygen tank and occasionally gave a hacking cough. The old man peered closely at Stuart as if studying him. His posture was hunched over and Stuart could tell that he had been crying. Perhaps he and Stuart were the only ones who truly felt Ginsburg’s loss.

Minkus walked up to his mother and gave her a hug then hugged his father. “Stuart, I’m glad you came,” Nancy said.

“I am too, N-uh Mother,” he said and he hugged her again. Through her tears, Nancy offered a sad smile. It was not the time nor the place for them to drag up old arguments or resentments. At the very least in Ginsburg’s memory they should at least act like they functioned as a family. “Hello, Father,” Stuart said.
“Stuart,” Tom said. “It’s good to see you again.”
Stuart held up a sheet of paper. “I don’t know if you want me to say anything.” He said. “But I
jotted down a few things about Grandpa and what he meant to us, you know just in case you
wanted me to give the eulogy.”
Nancy and Tom exchanged glances and shook their heads. “No, Stuart,” Nancy said. “That won’t
be necessary,” Nancy said. She took the paper from her son’s hand and threw it in the trash. “But
thank you all the same.” She motioned for a man in clergy robes to approach and shake Stuart’s
hand. “Stuart this is Rev. Walker. He was the clergyman at the nursing home your grandfather was
staying in. He will be conducting the ceremony.”
Minkus’ eyes widened in surprise, but he tried to maintain politeness. “Reverend, it’s a pleasure.”
“Thank you Stuart,” the reverend said. “I am heartily sorry for your loss. Your mother and father
told me quite a bit about you.”
“I’m sure,” Minkus said. He tapped his mother on the shoulder. “Mother, can I speak to you alone
for a minute?"

He pulled his mother aside to the foyer and away from prying ears and eyes. “Mother, what are
you doing?”
Nancy looked at her son like he was a complete idiot. “I believe I am having a funeral service for
my father. What are you doing?”
“But in a funeral home? The music. You know that Grandpa’s favorite genres were jazz and folk
music! Who are all of these people? Did Grandpa even know most of them and what about the
minister? You know Grandpa hated religion!” He said. “Not even the right one! Couldn’t you have
at least called a rabbi? Did you even make plans for his cremation?” His mother’s blank look told
him what he knew. “He isn’t even being cremated?”
“He’s being buried outside the funeral home over there,” Nancy pointed. “The grave will be simple
just his name and dates, nothing ostentatious.”
You mean nothing with any real character about who he was or what he did, Minkus thought but
didn’t want to say anything Also as compared to the grand headstones that your mother and
stepfather had!
“None of this was how he wanted it to be. Did you even talk about this?”
“No we didn’t exactly talk about it before he fell into a coma,” Nancy snapped. “I had to make
some quick decisions about it, Stuart. I wanted to keep it as simple and convenient as possible.”
“None of this is who he was and you know it,” Stuart said. “Grandpa told me exactly how he
wanted things to be. I could have helped you with putting the funeral together if you wanted me
to—“
Nancy pushed her son’s hand off her shoulder roughly. “Stuart, you waived your right to make any
decisions on your grandfather. Because of you, he had to come back here and because of you he
went in that coma! I visited him at the end and I saw to his affairs not you! It’s too late for you to
say anything now!”
She was about to walk away when Stuart shot back, “Why are you doing this? Because he left you,
Nonnie?”
Nancy turned towards her son fixing him with a furious look. “Believe it or not, Stuart, not every
decision I ever make towards my father has to deal with my childhood. I’m just here to pay my
final respects to him. What are you doing here?” She walked back into the altar and sat back down
on a pew.
Stuart was about to follow her and be seated himself when he heard a hacking cough. As he walked
through the glass double doors of the funeral home, he could see the elderly man with the oxygen
tank standing behind the wall. When Stuart met his gaze, the man looked downward at his lap but
the expression wasn’t fast enough. Stuart could tell that he heard every word.

The service was short, simple, and to the point. The reverend spoke about Ginsburg as though he
never even knew the man. He spoke that he was a quiet man who was deeply loved and missed
and was probably in Heaven. Okay Minkus would give him the “deeply loved and missed” part.
But there was no feeling, no memories to it, nothing personal to say that Malachi Ginsburg was a
man who should be remembered. The reverend could have said that about anybody but he said it
about someone who was the greatest influence of Stuart Minkus’ life and that Minkus could never
forgive.
After the burial, Stuart decided to be alone with the grave for a few minutes. He looked at the
tombstone. As his mother said it was just his name and dates, as impersonal and cold as the
service. Stuart knelt down and spoke. “It’s silly to be doing this, I know,” he said. “I mean we’re
geniuses, aren’t we? Geniuses rely on logic. You’re not really there. You’re just a corpse rotting
away and soon you will just be bones inside a box. You’re not listening on some cloud or off in
some Cosmic Waiting Room looking forward to your next appointment. Of course, you always did
have an open mind, more so than I ever did. You always did believe that this was a universe that
looked out for us and took care of us. So, I don’t know maybe you are listening.”
Minkus felt tears come to his eyes. “I don’t know if you ever knew how much you meant to me but
I miss you. You were the one person that I could talk to and feel like you knew me. You always
helped me by encouraging me to fill my potential. You saw potential in everybody. You always
made me feel safe, protected, and like I was loved. I’m lost without you and I don’t know what I’m
doing here. I don’t have you to guide me anymore,” He began to cry harder. “I am so sorry that I
messed up in the end. I promised you that I would take care of you and I couldn’t. The check
bounced and they couldn’t keep you at your apartment. Mother had to send you back here. I failed
you instead. You should be spread around the Village and Central Park and here you are shut up in
a box in a place that you hated and it’s my fault.” His tears fell on the grave. “I am so sorry,
Grandpa and I love you so much.” He stood up on shaking legs and left the gravesite. He could see
the old man in the wheelchair face him with a sorrowful look on his face. Minkus hung his head
down and brushed past him. “He’s all yours now,” he said hoarsely.
At the reception, Minkus sat and stirred his tea thoughtfully. He was barely engaging in
conversation when he heard his mother speak loud enough for him to hear, “Yes I thought that he
should come to his grandfather’s funeral at least! He’s such a rich big shot now, thinks he’s too
good for us!” Minkus got up and left the room so he wouldn’t have to hear anymore.
Minkus then sat on the couch next to a few men including his father. He overheard one man ask
his father how business was.
Tom Minkus sighed. “Terrible, you know they built a Lowes and a Home Depot less than 15
minutes from my store? Who’s going to come to Minkus’ Hardware now when they have those big
chains next to me?”
“Is there already a dip in customers?” one man asked.
“Getting less and less of them every day,” he said. “You know how these big businesses are! They
don’t care about people like us, the little working man! They’re just made up of a bunch of rich
snobs who only care about getting richer!” In his own passive-aggressive way, Stuart knew that his
father was making his comments directly towards his own Big Business now rich son. Minkus rose
and left his father and the other men. He wanted to be by himself.
Minkus didn’t know what to do. He felt cut off from his birth family and was now cut off from the
family he married into. Maybe he was one of those types who had to live for no one or nothing
else. Maybe he was incapable and undeserving of such concepts as love and family. He walked
towards the dining room when he saw a couple of people from Goodwill moving some boxes.
“What are you doing?” he asked.
“Mrs. Minkus wants us to move her father’s junk,” one of the men said. “She said it’s cluttering up
her house.” Minkus stood feeling frozen as the men took box after box out of the house, testaments
to his grandfather’s life now being carted away and sold to people who would never know him.
Out of the corner of his eye, Minkus saw a box marked “Old Photographs.” He held up one hand:
“Wait,” he said. He then reached over and picked it up glancing inside. The box contained all of
his grandfather’s “windows,” his pictures from Café Hey. “Can I keep this one at least?” he asked. The man rolled his eyes. “Fine, she just said that she wanted to get rid of them.”

“Thank you,” Stuart answered as he picked up the box. On the china cabinet, Minkus saw six pairs of dice. He cupped his hand and put the dice in his pocket and walked outside.

Minkus sat on one of the lawn chairs on the back porch. He just had to get out of the house and be alone with his thoughts. He tried to cheer himself up by tossing the dice on the outdoor table and counting the numbers. He heard the squeak of some wheels and a hoarse voice say, “I remember those dice.” Minkus looked up to see the older man facing him. Now that he saw him closer, Minkus could see a red mark on his forehead. The man continued to talk in a vague far away voice as though he were trying to recall certain things, “I remember my buddy Stan tried to beat him. It took him all night and he couldn’t beat Uncle Mal not once! Eventually he gave up and we went home!”

Minkus smiled and look through the box and pulled out the picture of Michael Ginsberg, Stan Rizzo, and Peggy Olsen that his grandfather showed all those years ago. “You must be my second cousin, Michael,” Minkus said.

“I must be,” Michael answered as he shook Stuart’s hand. He looked at the picture and laughed. “I had the curly hair and Mr. Kotter mustache before Gabe Kaplan made it famous, didn’t I? Would you look at me then?” He then glanced towards his expression through the front window and said in a self-deprecating tone. “Would you look at me now?” He looked Minkus up and down as he put the picture away. “And you must be Mal’s grandson, Stuart.”

“Grandpa talked about me?” Minkus asked.

Michael laughed and slapped his knee. “Talked about you? He never shut up about you! ‘My grandson, Stuart played Hamlet.’ ‘My grandson Stuart is a genius.’ ‘My grandson Stuart makes electronics.’ ‘My grandson Stuart won the 6th Grade Geography Bee.’”

Stuart held up one finger. “Actually I conceded the Geography Bee to another student and he lost anyway.”

“Yeah well knowing Mal, he wanted to make his version better,” Michael said. “Yeah you were his whole world, I could tell, kid. I mean sometimes even on the phone when he was here in Philly, you know before, he you know went, he would still talk my ear off about what a terrific grandson he had.”

Minkus hung his head in shame. “Even before his stroke? Even after he was sent back here?”

“Even then,” Michael said. “Of course he wasn’t always lucid, but when he was oh yeah, I knew what he felt about you.”

Minkus winced keeping the tears inside. “I didn’t deserve for him to say those things about me. In the end I couldn’t keep my obligation to him and he had to leave. I failed him.”

The older man held the younger man’s hand in his. Because of his ill health, Michael’s hand was shaking. “Nonsense! I heard what you said at his grave. He made you feel safe, protected, and loved. Did it ever occur that you did the same for him?”

“I suppose but-” Minkus said.

“But nothing,” Michael answered. “I don’t know what happened to you, but it wasn’t done out of malice or hatred was it?” He asked. Minkus shook his head. “Whatever you did for him you did out of love, and Mal never forgot that. Even when he couldn’t remember names and faces, he never forgot that you loved him.”

Minkus had tears in his eyes. “Thank you, you have no idea how much it means to hear you say that.”

“You have no idea how much it means to finally come face to face with the famous Stuart Minkus,” Michael Ginsberg said with a laugh. “It makes me envious how much you and Mal cared for each other at times.”

“How so?” Stuart asked.

Michael gently touched the mark on his forehead. Stuart remembering his grandfather saying that
Michael had a lobotomy and ECT. “You’re never the same after you come back. You don’t hear the voices or think things like that anymore, but you’re never the same. I didn’t like being in crowds, around people. I still don’t always. That’s why I’m out here. I sometimes forget things and trail off. I couldn’t hold a steady job and bounced around quite a few times. Nobody wanted to hire an ex-copywriter who heard voices inside his head coming from a large computer and cut his nipple off to silence them. I left behind two marriages both short lived. If I have any children, I’ve never seen them. My father died while I was in the hospital about the third time I think,” he looked at the picture. “Peggy and Stan were together for a long time up until the 70’s and they parted ways but they still had each other. It’s Hell not having anyone to be there for you. It makes you want to grab hold of anything just so you don’t feel alone,” Michael sighed and coughed.

Minkus patted him on the back. “Are you alright?” he asked. “Can I get some water?”

Michael waved his hand in a “no” manner and ceased coughing. “No it passes.” He laughed again. “I’m the sole survivor from Sterling Cooper & Partners well the ones that I know for sure. I’m barely surviving, but I outlived them all,” he said with triumph, “That at least I can say.” “You have emphysema,” Minkus guessed.

Michael looked at the young man incredulously. “What are you, Doogie Howser?” Minkus laughed. “No, the wheelchair, the oxygen tank, the cough,” Minkus said. “You don’t have very long do you?”

“Doctors say six months at the most,” Michael answered. “That’s what a lifetime of telling people that smoking is good for you will do to you. Never start, kid, that’s my tip for the day. I don’t mind really. I’m in a good home in Staten Island. They’ll take care of me and then I can put up my feet and say my good-byes. Not that there’s anyone to say good-bye to anymore.” He smiled. “Oh well, at least I said them to Uncle Mal.” He fingered the photograph particularly the face of Peggy Olsen. “What might have been if I hadn’t lost it? What might have been if things were different, eh?” Minkus nodded. He understood those words all too well.

“Would you like to keep that picture, Michael?” Minkus asked. “It means more to you.” Michael Ginsberg shook his head. “What would it do? Sit on a shelf and after I’m gone be burned? No, it should go to you.” He handed the picture to him. “It means that Peggy, Stan, and I will be remembered. It might be worth something to somebody someday. It means we’ll live on.” He looked at the box. “It means we’ll all be remembered. That’s got to be worth something ain’t it, Stuart? That the people in there are not just pictures in a box?”

Minkus nodded. “Yes it is,” he said as he lay the picture down.

Michael looked at the next picture inside the box, the one of Merlin Scoggins, Rosie McGee, and May Clutterbucket. “What beautiful girls,” he said.

“Did you know them?” Stuart asked.

Michael shook his head. “No, but they look like the type of girls that would have changed the world.”

“I don’t think that they got the chance,” Minkus said laying the photo of Michael, Peggy, and Stan on top of the other one. He still thought that Rosie McGee looked familiar but he never could figure out from where. It seemed sort of half remembered like a dream.

The screen door opened and a man in a nurse’s uniform appeared, “Michael it’s getting late. We’re going to have to take you back to your hotel.”

Michael sighed. “Alright,” he leaned forward towards Stuart. “I hadn’t had a curfew since my Pop gave me one when I was 17! I got to go, kid!”

“It was nice meeting you, Michael,” Stuart said.

“You too, Stuart,” he said. “You grew into a good man. Mal liked that.”

“Thank you,” Minkus answered. “You know if you like, I can call you; maybe even visit you at the home.”

Michael nodded and grinned. “Yeah, I would like that very much.” He said as the nurse rolled him off the porch and onto the sidewalk towards the car.

Minkus left the house shortly after Michael did. He felt crowded and isolated, so he decided to go
for a walk to clear his head. The winter chill froze him, but he didn’t care. At least it was flurrying. He held the box of photographs in his hand as he walked. Without meaning to, he walked towards two white houses that were all too familiar to him. He stood by the fence just watching as Michael Ginsberg’s words came back to him: What might have been if things were different, eh?

Through the back of the kitchen window, Minkus could see quite a commotion going on. Cory and Topanga Lawrence-Matthews were standing around friends and family happy and excited. The small bundle covered in a pink blanket gave the reasons for the celebration away. Through the window, Minkus could hear Eric squeal something about having a “niche.” Cory gave his older brother a playful flick on the forehead and correct him by saying, “It’s niece, you maroon!” Shawn Hunter made peek-a-boo faces at the baby girl until she laughed. Topanga teased saying, “You’ll be a good babysitter, Uncle Shawn.”

“Yeah right,” Shawn said. Minkus could tell there was something guarded on Shawn’s face that instantly dropped. But instead he smiled and clapped his best friend by the shoulder. “How you doing, Pops?”

“You might have been,” Topanga teased. Minkus then carried her yawning little daughter to another room, perhaps for a nap. She returned alone.

Alan and Amy Matthews, older looking but still as kind as ever, poured drinks for the entire crowd. They passed them around including juice for Topanga and the two younger children, a blond teenage girl that Minkus gasped when he realized that she was Morgan Matthews and a small child that Minkus assumed was Cory’s youngest brother, Joshua. Alan held up his cup and said, “To my granddaughter and her first visit to Philadelphia,” he said. “To Riley Ann Matthews.”

“To Riley Ann Matthews,” everyone else agreed and toasted.

The scene made Minkus misty-eyed. The Matthews looked so happy and loving together. That might have been me, he thought sadly keeping his eyes on Topanga. The screen door opened and Minkus was about to step back to avoid being seen, but George Feeny’s voice called him, “Mr. Minkus,” he said emerging from the Matthews’ home.

“Oh hello Mr. Feeny,” Minkus saidSadly.

“Enjoying this pleasant winter weather?” Feeny asked.

“No exactly no,” Minkus said. “I just wanted to clear my head and think about things.”

He looked once again sadly at the house next door closely at Topanga. She and Cory were engaged in an impromptu dance.

“Contemplating roads not traveled, Mr. Minkus?”

“No,” Minkus said stunned. “Not at all.” He looked once again at Topanga and motioned towards the house. “Suppose if I were thinking about choices I made and what might have been-“ He sighed and fingered the box. “I know I shouldn’t be.”

“We all contemplate those roads, Mr., Minkus,” Feeny answered. He nodded at the couple inside the other house who were locked in each other’s loving embrace. Cory leaned over and kissed his wife. “Provided we know which roads were ours to take.” Feeny sat down on his bench and patted the area next to them. “Would you like to have a seat and talk?”

Minkus hesitated. “You know as much as I have always respected you as a teacher and considered you a fine educator, I never came to you with my problems as often as they did.” He nodded towards Cory, Topanga, Shawn, and Eric.

“I am here for my students whether they visit me once or one hundred times,” Feeny said. “And when someone is walking outside a cold winter afternoon with his hands on a cardboard box standing outside the former home of his elementary school crush’s current husband, it’s time to talk.”

Minkus warily sat down and lay the box on his lap. Feeny began. “May I offer my condolences over the loss of your Grandfather. I saw his name in the obituaries in the paper. I remember him as a very strange individual, but a very kind man.”
“Yes he was,” Minkus said. “I miss him.”
“I imagine so,” Feeny said. “And I must also offer my congratulations to your latest successes particularly your marriage to the former Miss Bassett and your own upcoming birth.”
“How did you know that?” Minkus inquired.
Feeny smiled. “Young man do not think that my reading solely consists of the classics. It’s not all Shakespeare and Sophocles. Occasionally, I peruse the gossip columns especially when my former students are featured in them.”
“Oh,” Minkus said.
“I take it you are as excited about your upcoming bundle of joy as the Matthews are about theirs,” Feeny said.
Minkus smiled. “Oh absolutely, I can’t wait. Jennifer and I are very happy together.”
He spoke in a flat tone of voice.
“Forgive me for mentioning this Mr. Minkus,” Feeny said concerned. “But you don’t sound like a happy newlywed looking forward to the adventure of impending fatherhood.”
“I don’t?” Minkus asked.
“No,” Mr. Feeny observed. “You sound more like a tired old man approaching his 30th year of a loveless marriage and looking forward to early retirement and death.”
Minkus winced. “You know Mr. Feeny, you and my Grandfather had a great deal in common. You both could see right through me.” He sighed. “Did you ever want and hope for something? You worked for it and when you got everything that you thought you wanted, somehow it wasn’t at all what you expected? Somehow it didn’t make you as happy as you thought it would?”
“I don’t think anyone is a stranger to those feelings, Mr. Minkus,” Feeny said.
“The worst part is I thought that I was above that,” Minkus said. “I thought that I was too smart to see it and I walked right into it. I thought that as long as I was thinking clearly, then I was too smart for them.”
“Maybe that was it, Mr. Minkus,” Feeny suggested. “Maybe you were thinking with your head and not your heart.”
“You have no idea who I’ve become Mr. Feeny,” Minkus said. “The things I’ve done to get here. I don’t even know myself anymore.”
“Mr. Minkus, if you find that your life doesn’t satisfy you,” Mr. Feeny suggested. “Then you must pick apart the aspects of your life that do and hold onto them. No matter what it took to get to this point, find a way to move forward. That is where you will find the end of your path.”

The screen door opened as Cory’s head poked out the window. “Hey Mr. Feeny we were wondering what happened to you,” he looked up surprised to see the other person seated next to him. “Minkus?” He asked but then he smiled. “Come on in! We’re having a good time, you should join us!”
Minkus stood up in a jerky manner. “Uh no thanks, Cory! I have to go really!” He turned to Mr. Feeny and picked up the box. “Thank you for the talk, Mr. Feeny I really appreciate it! It was nice seeing you again and you Cory. I really have to go, good-bye!” He then walked briskly out of the yard and left the two houses not letting either his former teacher or fellow classmate see the emotion on his face.
“What’s wrong with him?” Cory asked.
“I think he’s come face to face with the road less traveled by,” Feeny said remembering the Robert Frost poem.
“Do you think it made all the difference?” Cory asked also quoting the poem.
“I hope in his case it does,” Feeny said. He then joined his former student inside the Matthews’ home for more celebrating.

The plane touched down in La Guardia airfield. Minkus looked at his ringing cell phone. The I.D. read: Marilla, Inez. He answered the phone confused. “Inez, what’s going on?” he asked the housekeeper.
“Mr. Minkus, I tried calling you for the past 15 minutes,” Inez said. She sounded frightened and worried.

Minkus picked up his carry-on bag and his grandfather’s box in one hand and whistled for a cab. “There was air turbulence. We had to turn off our cell phones. What’s the matter? Is something wrong with Jennifer?” His heart leapt in his throat. “She’s not in the hospital is she?” A cab appeared at the sidewalk and Minkus impatiently told the man his home address.

“No, Mr. Minkus,” Inez said. “She’s fine as far as I know. But she’s inside her bedroom and locked the door and will not come out!”

“I’ll be there as soon as I can,” Minkus promised as he hung up the phone.

He entered the apartment facing a very frantic and terrified Inez. “I thought of calling the police,” she said. “I probably should have! Madre dios, what if she harms herself or the baby?” She then started crossing herself and praying in Spanish.

Minkus held the housekeeper by the shoulders to calm her down. “It’s alright, Inez. She’ll be alright. I’ll take care of it.” He knocked on the door. “Jennifer, it’s Stuart.”

“Go away,” Jennifer called through the door. He could tell that she was crying.

Minkus put his hand on the doorknob and tried to open it, but it was locked. “Come on Jennifer, open the door.” He said. He then turned to Inez. “Did something happen to set her off?”

Inez shook her head. “I do not know. After you left, she took to her bed most of the time and was crying. I gave her breakfast in bed. Today, she started mumbling that she didn’t deserve to have your baby and that you would never know that what she said before you left wasn’t true. I do not understand what she meant.”

“I think I do,” Minkus said. He then knocked on the door. “Jennifer, please open the door. If you don’t, I will have to call the police. I just want to be sure that you’re okay and our baby is okay.”

“That’s all you care about,” Jennifer said with a sob. “You just want the baby! You don’t want me!”

“Jennifer I want you both,” Minkus said. “I want both you and the baby. Even if you weren’t pregnant, I would still want you. Jennifer do you have anything that could hurt you?”

“No,” Jennifer said. Minkus couldn’t be sure whether his wife was lying or not.

“Jennifer please,” Stuart begged. “Let me inside. Don’t do this to yourself.” He then knelt down and leaned against the door. “Jennifer, I am going to stay out here until you unlock the door. I mean it. I could stay here all day. It’s pretty comfortable. I could even have our next board meetings right here on the floor. You could stay in there as long as you want and I will still be here. You can even give birth in there for all I care. We’ll have to get Dr. Gilman here. Do you know how much they charge for delivery by proxy through a locked door?” He waited for a laugh but heard none.

Minkus continued and leaned his head on the door. “Jennifer, Inez told me that you told her. I don’t know if you lied now to save face or you lied to me then in an attempt to push me away.”

“I said such awful things to you,” Jennifer sobbed. “They weren’t true.”

“I don’t care whether they were or they weren’t,” Stuart said. When he said that he realized that he didn’t. “I don’t care what it took for us to get here to this point. But we are here now and the only thing that I care about is that you unlock this door and come out. Please Jennifer, let me in. I need you. I love you.”

He could hear the lock of a door turning. Minkus stood up as the door opened and he faced his wife. Her blond hair was in disarray and she was dressed in a white maternity shirt and blue pants. Her face was tear stained. “I didn’t hurt myself or our son.” She said. “I thought about it, but I thought, ‘I painted those walls. Stuart would just have to paint over them.’” She began to cry harder. “All that work would be for nothing. So, I just went in here to think and I couldn’t stop thinking.” She sobbed again as Stuart held her closer. “It doesn’t matter does it?”

“No, no,” Stuart said. “Nothing matters now except that you’re alright.” He kissed his wife, held her close, and let her cry on his shoulder. He knew that he would never leave his wife or his son. Jennifer needed him too much. Whether she had manipulated him into getting pregnant, whether
she hurt him didn’t matter. What mattered was that she needed to be cared for and their son would need his father.

Stuart Minkus promised himself that he would be happy in his marriage and his career, no matter what the personal cost was to himself. No matter what the Bassetts took from him and no matter how Jennifer would hurt him. No matter what it took, he would act happy even when he wasn’t. He would hide any disappointments behind a smirk, a smug grin of satisfaction, and a delight in the gains behind his life. If the smile ever dropped, he would will it back to his face. He would no longer worry about regrets and things that might have been. He would only move forward. If he tried really hard to act happy, he would get really good at it. Maybe he finally might be.

When his cousin Michael died six month later, Stuart attended the funeral. It was a simple service with only a few of the nursing home attendants present, no friends or relatives. He had been cremated. Minkus had prepared a small eulogy describing Michael as someone with a gift for words, who had become overwhelmed by his own brilliance remembering how his grandfather described him and of the man that he come to know in the past few months. He spoke what he could of a man that he only had begun to befriend but still greatly missed as the final loving link to his past. He then whispered to him, “I will remember you Michael,” he swore. He then thought of the faces inside the box, Ginsburg’s windows, people who once lived and loved and for brief moments had their pictures taken at Café Hey and of his Grandpa Ginsburg, the man who had meant so much to him. “I will remember all of you.”
Chapter Summary

Where we welcome the birth of the Little Prince, Farkle J. Minkus. :D

The Joyous Occasion (Stuart Minkus Age 21; Farkle Minkus Age: Newborn)

Jennifer was about to rise slowly to the sound of the intercom. She held onto her aching back and legs. The baby would be due in a couple of weeks and she for one couldn’t wait. “I’ll get it Mrs. Minkus,” the soft Irish lilt of the Minki’s latest housekeeper, Enid Brown interrupted as she appeared at the door. She was a gray haired woman in her sixties who treated the young couple like the son and daughter she never had. She had been hired after Jennifer, still suspicious that Inez was in love with her husband, had engaged in a screaming match with the housekeeper. At least it was unlikely that Stuart would ever have an affair with Mrs. Brown unless he was into “Sweating to the Oldies.” Mrs. Brown pressed the call button. “Yes?” she said.

“We have deliveries for Mrs. Minkus,” the voice of the night desk clerk called.

Jennifer sighed with relief. “Okay, send them up.” She waited until she could hear the doorbell ring. Mrs. Brown looked through the hole and let the men inside including the desk clerk. Jennifer pointed to where she wanted the items to be placed around the living room. The deliverers dropped the boxes. “Be careful, some of them are delicate,” Jennifer snapped.

“We’ll be very careful ma’am,” one of the men said. Jennifer glowered. Did she really look like a ma’am already? Was she already looking that old, as old as Mrs. Brown? She looked through the boxes delighted that her orders arrived. Since she was put on bed rest, she couldn’t go out and shop as much as she would like, so she did all of her shopping online.

“Is your husband away, Mrs. Minkus?” the voice of the night desk clerk asked. Jennifer sighed with relief. “He’s in Chicago,” Jennifer rolled her eyes. “But he’s supposed to be back tomorrow.”

“Well he should not leave you in this state,” the clerk said. “I would not for the world.” Jennifer could hear the faint traces of an Italian accent in him, Northern Italian she would guess, probably Venice or Milan. She smiled at the man’s concern for her well being.

“Well he has to work,” Jennifer said bored. “One of us has to be working. The baby’s not due for another two weeks anyway.”

“How are you doing Mrs. Minkus,” the desk clerk asked. Jennifer looked down at him. She towered over him by almost a head.

“Awful, I must look hideous,” Jennifer rolled her eyes.

“Well I think that you still look radiant, Mrs. Minkus,” the man said.

Jennifer smiled. The clerk looked her up and down. “Thank you-“ she waited for his name.

“Tony, madam,” he said.

“Well Tony Madam,” Jennifer teased. “You are very sweet but definitely a liar. No one looks radiant when they are soon about to push something out of them.”

“Well I can still recognize the beautiful woman,” Tony said as he held Jennifer’s hand. Jennifer smiled. She could see that the clerk was attracted to her. She heard a voice interrupt. “Mrs. Minkus?” Irritated Jennifer turned to see her housekeeper glancing at her very suspiciously. “The deliverymen wish you to sign their forms.” Jennifer rolled her eyes and then signed the computer.
screen with the stylus.

“Inez,” Jennifer said. “Would you go help these men bring up my things and Tony why don’t you go join them?” She asked. “I will promise you a very big tip.”

“It will be my pleasure Mrs. Minkus,” Tony said as he followed the deliverers and the housekeeper out the door. Tony turned to the housekeeper. “I thought your name was Enid?”

Mrs. Brown held up her hand. “No don’t bother,” she said as she and the others entered the service elevator.

Jennifer had sat back on the couch and was reading the latest issue of Vogue while she waited for the rest of her deliveries. She felt a sharp kick inside. She held onto her stomach and screamed at the convulsions. She looked downward at where she had been seated and saw the water emerge through her pants. “Oh shit,” she cursed as Mrs. Brown, Tony, and the deliverymen returned to the apartment.

“Inez,” Jennifer said trying to catch her breath. “Call Emergency, I’m having my baby right now!” Enid reached for her cell phone and dialed 911. She gave the announcement that her employer was going into labor. Tony and the deliverymen helped her to relax by laying her flat on the couch. Enid hung up and got Jennifer water. “Is there anything else that I can do Mrs. Minkus?” the older woman asked.

“Call my parents,” Jennifer said through panted breaths. “They’re in Rochester and call my husband on his cell. Please hurry!” She clutched her stomach and tried to practice her Lamaze breathing, but it didn’t soothe her. This was not the most convenient time for this! If he had been born on schedule, Stuart had already allotted taking that time off for vacation. They would have been packed and ready to go. Hell she would have even had them induce labor if they wanted to. Now here she was giving birth early and her husband was in another city. She vowed that when she saw Stuart Minkus again, she was going to let him have it!

Stuart walked outside of the convention center with several of the other speakers laughing and speaking about the events. There was pouring rain and thunder and lightning, not good weather for a technology convention that was for sure. “Well I look forward to hearing your plans about our network,” one of the sponsors said.

“I look forward to receiving your check,” Minkus returned with a grin of satisfaction. He waved and was about to call a cab to take him to a nearby restaurant when he felt his cell phone vibrate. He saw Enid Brown’s name appear on the caller I.D. Even before he said hello, Mrs. Brown spoke.

“Mr. Minkus, I am with Mrs. Minkus at Mt. Sinai Hospital. She’s having her baby!”

“Now?” Minkus said in surprise. “But he’s not supposed to be born yet!”

“I know, sir,” Enid said. “But wee ones can be quite persistent and stubborn. They are born whenever they want to be. Please hurry!”

“I’ll get a flight out as soon as I can,” he called. He whistled for a cab and told the driver to take him to O’Hare Airport. He then picked up his cell phone and dialed Alvin Meese’s work number.

Meese answered the phone after Jessie told him that Minkus was on the other line. “Minkus how did the convention go?”

“Meese, I’m going to O’Hare,” Minkus said frantically. “Jennifer’s having her baby!”

“Kudos?” Meese inquired wondering why he had to call him about it.

“Could you get over there and tell Jennifer I’m on my way,” Minkus said. “Maybe I don’t know get some pictures or something!”

“Yeah I’m on top of that,” Meese said sarcastically.

“No Meese,” Minkus said. “I told Jennifer that I would film the delivery. But he’s early and I’m not there. I want someone to be there for her.”

“You’re nuts, Minkus you do know that,” Meese replied.

“Please it’s important,” Minkus objected.

“I don’t think recording your wife’s delivery is in my job description,” Meese said.
From the other line, Meese could hear the driver tell Minkus that they were at O’Hare. He heard the sounds of scuffling and muffled voices before Minkus came back on the line. Meese had a feeling that Minkus had just left the cab. “No, as Vice President in charge of Business Accounts, your job description is to do whatever the CEO namely me tells you to,” Minkus said playing tough boss. “Now please get over to the hospital or send a damn suitable replacement so my wife doesn’t have to go through this alone! Please Meese, as an old friend, think of it as a favor.” Meese sighed. He was going to regret this. “Alright, I’ll do it, but you owe me one.”

“Thank you Meese,” Minkus said “I won’t ask for anything like this again.” He hung up.

“I hope not,” Meese said. He felt ill about the idea of having to go to the delivery room and record Minkus’ son’s delivery. He felt even more nauseous about having to be the one to calm Jennifer Bassett-Minkus down, not the kindest of souls even in the best of times. He was going to have to find a way out of this.

He walked outside his office when he saw a young short dark-haired kid in a dark business suit.

“You there, New Guy, what’s your name?”

“Eddie Giatti, Mr. Meese?” the man said very nervously.

“That’s right you work in accounts under me. Well Eddie, I have a special task for you,” Meese said. “How would you like to go above and beyond the call of duty for your boss?”

Eddie nodded. “Umm sure what do I have to do?”

Meese pulled Eddie aside. “Well you know our new digital cameras that we have been working on,” Meese said as he led the subordinate through the hallway. “Now would be a good time to test one…”

Stuart waited at the ticket booth and asked to bump him up to a flight to JFK or La Guardia on the same day rather than the next. The clerk made the exchange, but told him. “I’m sorry sir, but you will have to wait. All flights are being delayed because of the weather.”

Stuart sighed and accepted the ticket. He vowed that his very own private airplane or helicopter was going to be his next big get.

Jennifer continued to breathe as Dr. Gilman encouraged her to push. She had been put on drugs, but she still felt the pain. “You’re doing alright, Jenny,” Eunice Bassett said to her daughter as she held her hand. She had arrived as soon as possible and entered the delivery room to be with her daughter. Mrs. Brown stood outside with Edward Bassett waiting for Stuart to appear. “This is supposed to happen.”

The door opened wide and a man appeared dressed in surgical garb holding up a digital camera.

“Are you the father?” one of the nurses asked.

“No, I’m here on his behalf sort of,” the man said.

“Who the hell are you?” Jennifer shouted as she breathed and pushed.

“Relax Sweetheart,” Eunice said. “You’re doing fine.”

“I’m Eddie Giatti,” Eddie said looking closely at the delivery and feeling queasy as he saw the doctor’s work. “Your um husband sent me. His flight was delayed because of uh bad weather. He wants me to record this!”

“Well you tell that son of a bitch when I see him again; I AM GOING TO FUCKING KILL HIMM!!!” She yelled directly into the camera. “You did this to me, Stuart! If I were you, I wouldn’t sleep well tonight!!”

“It’s alright, Jenny,” Eunice encouraged calming her sobbing daughter. “Just let it out. I said the same thing to your father when you kids were born.”

In what seemed like forever, the flight attendant finally called passengers to come on the flight to New York. Minkus practically threw his ticket to the attendant and sprinted onto the plane. He felt his hands and feet shake as he contemplated the thought: even now his son was going to be born.

“Alright Jennifer,” Dr. Gilman said. “I can see the head, keep pushing.” The OB-GYN continued to put her hands inside the mother.
“Uh the head is coming out,” Eddie said gamely narrating the event. “There’s a lot of blood and I guess it’s placenta. It’s kind of gross actually like a being from another world.” The other people in the delivery room, Jennifer, Eunice, Dr. Gilman, and the nurses glared at him. “I’ll get back to you,” Eddie said to the digital camera with a gulp.

Minkus dashed off the plane and onto the street with his suitcase in hand. He jumped right into a waiting taxi amid another passenger yelling and swearing at him for stealing his cab. “Thank you,” Minkus called back.

“Where to man?” the driver asked in a Pakistani accent.

“Mt. Sinai and hurry,” Minkus said.

“It is an emergency?” the driver inquired.

“You could say so; my wife is having a baby!” Minkus said excited.

“I’ll get there as soon as I can,” the driver said as he revved the car. The taxi pulled into rush hour traffic blocked by several cars.

“Great,” Minkus cursed.

“May as well listen to some music while we wait,” the driver said trying to keep up good spirits. He turned on the radio. A familiar tune began playing as the singer sang, “My child arrived just the other day/He came to the world in the usual way…”

“Are you freaking kidding me?!” Minkus swore as the radio continued playing “Cat’s in the Cradle” by Harry Chapin.

“Alright Jennifer,” Dr. Gilman said. “We’re going to need just one more push. Just one more.” Jennifer tried her best to push but she couldn’t. “I can’t,” she said. “I can’t do this.”

“Jennifer we almost have him out,” Dr. Gilman answered trying to soothe the mother. “The rest is up to you.”

“She just needs to do one more push,” Eddie said. Amidst the glares, he amended. “Okay shutting up now.”

“Just one more,” Dr. Gilman said.

“I don’t think I can,” Jennifer said feeling very tired.

“Come on, honey you have to,” Eunice said severely. Jennifer looked up at her mother. She wasn’t used to her normally placid milquetoast mother speak to her in such a tone. “For your baby, you have to.”

Jennifer nodded. “Okay,” she said. “Here it comes.” She pushed for the last time with all her might and screamed.

Dr. Gilman then pulled the baby entirely out. She smacked the little one’s bottom and he screamed and cried. The doctor and a nurse cut his umbilical cord, wrapped him up in a blanket, and gave him to his mother.

“It’s a boy,” Eddie said to the camera in delight. “Now, if you’ll excuse me. I’ll be in the bathroom for at least an hour. I feel lunch coming back.” He turned off the camera and ran outside the delivery room still in the hospital scrubs.

Jennifer held her little red crying son next to her. He was so tiny. All this trouble for something so small. Jennifer looked up at her mother. She could only think of one thing to say, “He is so hideous,” she said crying tears of joy as she kissed the top of her son’s head.

Minkus ran into Eddie Giatti in the hallway as he left the men’s room. “Eddie,” he said. “Meese told me that he sent you. How is she and how’s the baby?”

Eddie shuddered and gave a far-off look like someone who had just come through battle. “They’re fine, but man I’ve seen things that were beyond your wildest imagination. I have seen blood and sweat. I have seen the lower depths of humanity.” He then reverted from his shell shock. “And I got it all on video.” He said with a joyous smile holding up the digital camera.

Minkus shook the accounts executive’s hand. “Thanks Eddie. You have no idea how much this means to me. Don’t be surprised if there are a few more zeros in your paycheck and you get a new
“Thank you Mr. Minkus,” Eddie said.
“After what you’ve been through call me Stuart,” Minkus answered.
“Thank you Stuart,” Eddie said as he entered the elevator.

Stuart then ran towards the Neonatal unit as Edward and Eunice Bassett appeared. He knew that Teddy and Thomas Bassett were in Europe, which Stuart was grateful for. Edward Bassett had been semi-retired from the company and his sons ran the day-to-day operations now. They spent most of their time in the Rochester home these days. “How are they?” Minkus asked his in-laws.
“They’re just fine, Stuart,” Eunice said. “Jennifer’s resting now and the little one is getting looked after. He’s a fine healthy baby boy.”

Minkus sighed. “That’s great. Thank you for being there, Eunice.”
“ Anything for my baby girl and my son-in-law,” Eunice replied giving Stuart a warm hug.
“Yes thank you for showing up, Stuart,” Edward Bassett said icy.
“I’m sorry, I got out as soon as I could,” Minkus stammered still trying to catch his breath.
“No matter,” Edward said as if Stuart Minkus wasn’t worth arguing with. “It’s been a long eventful day. Come now, Eunice, let’s leave Stuart alone with his wife and child.”

Eunice nodded and followed her husband to the elevator.

Stuart ran breathlessly towards Mrs. Brown. He thanked her for being there for his wife and son and sent her home. He then ran up to the window of the Neonatal unit scanning each bed for the one that held his son.

He could see an empty bed marked “Baby Boy Minkus.” He tapped on the window to get the nurse’s attention and pointed at the bed. The nurse checked his records and held up three fingers. He then joined his thumb and index finger to indicate a zero then he held up five fingers. Stuart understood, his wife and son were in room 305. He mouthed thank you to the nurse and left for the room in search of Jennifer and the baby.

Stuart gently opened the door to Jennifer’s room. His wife was lying asleep on her bed. She still looked somewhat askew from her delivery and completely out of it, but Stuart didn’t care. Right then she was the most beautiful woman in the world. He smiled about to kiss her to wake her up like Sleeping Beauty’s prince when the door opened from behind him. A female nurse appeared holding a squirming bundle wrapped in a blue blanket. He nametag read, “Tammy.”
“I’m sorry,” Tammy apologized for the interruption.
“No,” Stuart whispered. “I’m the one who should be sorry. We were stuck in bad weather so the plane couldn’t take off and traffic was terrible.”
“That’s okay,” the nurse whispered back. “You’re here now. I take it you’re the father.” Minkus nodded. “Your son just had his first bath.” Tammy then cooed to the little one. “Didn’t you, Sweetheart?”

Minkus felt happy tears fill his eyes. He couldn’t believe it. This squirming red newborn was his son! He looked closely at him. He could see the brown hair already forming and he had his blue eyes. There was no doubt that this was his child. In fact he only shared a few characteristics with Jennifer, such as the shape of his face and her original nose. He idly thought that he looked so much like his father that people would mistake him for his clone. “Would you like to hold him?” the nurse asked.
“Yes,” Minkus said. He held his hands out as Tammy lay the child in his arms. Minkus cupped his hand to make sure that his son’s head was propped up. He was so small and delicate. His son opened his eyes and looked straight at his father. He didn’t cry, he just made a happy sound.
“He likes you,” the nurse said. “I’ll leave you three alone.” She then left the room.

Minkus held his son feeling a tremendous wave of love emerge for the little one and could feel the love emerge back. He wished Grandpa Ginsburg could have been here to see his great-grandchild. He knew what the old man would have said, “You got yourself a Farkle there, son!” He had to agree. It was indeed a joyous occasion.

Minkus kissed the top of his son’s forehead and just smiled. “Hello there Farkle,” he said knowing
that he had selected his son’s name. “I’m your daddy. I want you to know something. I love you,” he said as he kissed him again. “More than anything, I love you.”

Jennifer woke up to hear her husband’s voice. She came to seeing him cradling their son and kissing him. She heard him say that he loved the boy. He had such a wide happy smile, the happiest she had ever seen him in fact.

Jennifer suddenly felt envious and competitive towards her son. She had never seen Stuart act like that towards her. He had always been analytical before weighing and calculating the options before he admitted that yes, he did love his wife. Now here this baby comes out and Stuart Minkus professes his love instantly? She realized that soon she would have to compete for her husband’s attention and affections with someone who would barely be able to reach the table. “Stuart,” she called sharper than she intended.

Stuart turned towards Jennifer, his son still in his arms. “Oh you’re awake,” he said. “I’m sorry I’m late.” He then reached towards his wife and kissed her full on the lips. “You did very well.” “I look terrible and feel worse,” Jennifer said.

“I look wonderful,” Minkus said and kissed her again. He then kissed his son. “So does Farkle.”

Jennifer’s eyes narrowed. “Farkle?” She asked.

“Yes, it was the first name that came to me. For my grandfather and me, it meant a joyous occasion and a happy surprise. I think he fits both don’t you?” “If you want to stick with that name and you don’t mind him getting beaten up in a schoolyard,” Jennifer said sourly.

“Well Jennifer we can discuss this further,” Minkus said. “After all we never settled on a name for him.”

Jennifer leaned back in bed. “I don’t care. Call him whatever you want. I’m really tired.” She then started to close her eyes.

“Don’t you want to hold him?” Minkus asked.

“Dammit Stuart,” Jennifer shot back. “I carried him for nine months. I gave birth when you weren’t there. I already held him. Now, I want to go back to sleep.”

Stuart nodded. “Oh okay, you’ve been through a lot. You just lie back now and I’ll look after him.” “You do that,” she offered a thin smile. “Stuart, he is lovely.” Stuart nodded and kissed his wife again. Through the corner of her eye, Jennifer could see Stuart sit back down and hold his son, Farkle, he wanted to call him she thought with a shudder. He spoke to the son in a sweet quiet voice and held onto him as if they were the only two beings in the entire world unaware of their wife and mother’s presence.

Stuart filled out the birth certificate putting together his son’s full name, Farkle J. Minkus. After he settled on Farkle for his first name, he decided to put Jennifer’s name as well and selected “J.”, his mother’s first initial. Minkus then wrote down his wife’s name and his name and all other pertinent information. He then handed the certificate over to become official. It was now on record, he had a son. He knew that both Mr. Feeny and Michael Ginsberg were right. He had found the aspect of his life that satisfied him the most and he was ready to hold onto him. Neither he nor Farkle were ever going to feel alone again. Minkus knew right away that Farkle had become the center of his whole existence and he would do anything to ensure that his little boy would be safe, protected, and loved.

Author’s Note: I decided to leave out the affair with Tony, the Desk Clerk since that was greatly alluded to in “Unhappy In Its Own Way” so I felt that I didn’t have to refer to it again. (For those that don’t know, read chapter one of my other Minkus fanfic for details). As you can see though, the affair will begin very shortly. :D
What Daddies Do (Stuart Age 24; Farkle Age 3)

Chapter Summary

It's Take Your Adorable Mascot to Work Day. Farkle accompanies his daddy to work and the two bond while the relationship between Stuart Minkus and Alvin Meese becomes irreparably severed.

The Lives of Genius
A Boy/Girl Meets World Fanfic
By Auburn Red

Chapter Nine: What Daddies Do (Stuart Minkus Age 24; Farkle Minkus Age 3)

“Stuart I am tired of arguing with you about this,” Jennifer moaned. “I don’t feel well. I can barely get out of bed and I have a splitting headache.” She lay on the bed facing the pillow, her hair clumped around the pillowcase.

Minkus put his hand on his chin pretending to be in deep thought. “Let’s see you went out clubbing and drinking all this past weekend and stumbled in this morning at about 4 AM. Now you have a headache. Could there be a correlation to this?” He also knew that some of Jennifer’s fellow party-goers weren’t always women. Ever since they had that argument when he caught his wife in bed with Tony, the Desk Clerk, Stuart had become aware of his wife’s wandering eye and hands. Of course she told him that if he challenged it, he could lose everything particularly custody of Farkle. That was a price he was unwilling to pay.

He was beginning to learn to hide his growing anger, frustration, and fear towards his wife behind a veil of sarcastic wit and bitter humor. He learned that in school: As long as he had something to say to his enemies, he can never be defeated by them. It was only when he had nothing to say then he would concede defeat.

“Do you really want to do this now?” Jennifer asked glaring at him. Her eyes were bloodshot and her face was drawn. She had quite a few to drink over the weekend, anyone could see that. She was no longer taking any cocaine or hard drugs, at least none that Stuart could tell but was still doing great harm to herself and to her family. “You are just going to have to take him!”

“Jennifer, this is not the best time for this,” Minkus argued. “I have three major meetings today. There is something going on in our figures. I have to do some investigation into them. I will be too busy to look after Farkle today.” He opened the door and looked at his watch. “Isn’t Mrs. Phillips supposed to come in soon? It’s about time.” He referred to Farkle’s latest nanny.

“Yeah about her,” Jennifer said. “I had to let her go.”

Minkus rolled his eyes. “Why this time?” He asked.

“Yeah about her,” Jennifer said. “I had to let her go.”

Minkus rolled his eyes. “Why this time?” He asked.

“Well that black woman should know better than to criticize how many glasses of wine that I had before I picked up my son and set him on my lap,” Jennifer countered.

“Yes some people are so unreasonable about that,” Minkus said sarcastically. He was annoyed with Jennifer constantly referring to Mrs. Phillips as “that black woman,” or “the girl” (especially since she was older than they were), but at least she didn’t call her “colored,” or “nigra,” or worse. “Looks like I’ll call the agency tomorrow to get another Defense Against the Dark Arts Housekeeper/Nanny.” Minkus said annoyed. He was in the middle of reading Farkle Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince along with Oliver Twist. He liked to read his son a classic story and a modern story so Farkle could already gain an appreciation for good literature. He considered the revolving door of Minkus servants analogous to the constant transitions of DADA professors in the popular series. “But that isn’t going to help our situation now. It’s too late to call a babysitter.”
“Well take him to his daycare then,” Jennifer said growing bored with this conversation. “He’s off for vacation remember?” Minkus said. Was she really that self-involved that she wasn’t aware that her son had been home for the past week? He knew better than to ask her that. “Well you know what to do then,” Jennifer prompted. She then sank back into bed and closed her eyes as if this conversation was over.

Farkle Minkus lay in bed with his arms wrapped around Rexy, the stuffed green Tyrannosaurus Rex that he had ever since he was a baby. He had a dream that Lord Voldemort was attacking him with a magic spell. The little boy managed to counterattack with a magic number spell that his daddy taught him. He magiced several squares to appear and told the bad wizard to put the numbers 1 through 9 in them without repeating. Of course Farkle beat him and Voldemort disappeared forever. The people at Hogwarts were about to cheer for him and name him the Smartest Sorcerer in the World when he felt one shake him and call him by name. Funny that sorcerer looked and sounded an awful lot like Daddy.

“Farkle wake up,” he heard his daddy’s voice again and opened his eyes. His daddy was sitting on the bed and had shaken him awake. The little boy tried to close his eyes again and bury his head in the pillow and cover up with the blanket, but his father wasn’t convinced. “Oh no, you’re getting up.” He put his hands on his son’s neck and tickled him.

Farkle giggled. “Ha!” he laughed once but continued to laugh. “Okay, Daddy I’m up stop!” The little boy then rose from his bed. “Daddy I did the So Cool trick against Voldemort like you told me to and he went away.” He had been having nightmares about Lord Voldemort and his father had suggested that he used one of the lessons that he had been taught during the day to fight him. Minkus smiled. “Now son it’s pronounced Sudoku,” he said sounding each syllable as he had Farkle repeat it. “But I am very proud of you. You are my hero!” He said. “I have some news. Your mother isn’t feeling well today, so guess what?”

“What?” Farkle asked. He knew sometimes Mommy got sick especially after she drank her happy drinks.

“You are going to work with me,” Minkus said as he playfully tweaked his son’s nose.

Farkle smiled and jumped on the bed. “Really? I get to see where you work? I get to be the boss?” Minkus laughed. “Well we’ll see about that. But yes you will see where I work and you will see how we make all of that neat software and other electronics!”

“Okay,” Farkle said. He leaped off the bed as if it were Christmas morning. He loved spending time with his Daddy. He knew that his Daddy couldn’t always be around because he went on trips or was at his work. But whenever his father was around, they played games, watched TV (mostly educational stuff) and read together. His father taught him things like chess, and number and word games like So Cool (or Su Do Ku as Daddy called it). Sometimes they watched Baby Einstein or played Funearn, the learning software that Daddy’s company created. His Daddy said that the title was a “Port Manto” of the words “Fun” and “Learn.” He didn’t know where Port Manto was. Was it near the docks like Port Authority? Wherever it was, people said a lot of funny big words there. Farkle’s father said that he taught him these games to test his son’s “development.” Farkle didn’t know what that meant either. He guessed it had something to do with pictures since they always had to be developed. As far as Farkle was concerned, it was just Fun Time with Daddy.

Minkus went through his son’s dresser and pulled out a pair of red Corduroy pants and a blue sweater and red turtleneck. He handed the clothes to Farkle as the little boy managed to dress himself. “Look Daddy,” Farkle said. “I look just like you!”

Minkus looked down at his own brown turtleneck and slacks and deep brown blazer. “Yes you do. All of us handsome men look alike!”

Farkle giggled as he put on his socks and tennis shoes. He tried to tie them himself but made a mess with joining the laces. “Look I’m done!” He said convinced that he tied his shoes.

“Not quite Son,” Minkus said. “Let me show you.” He knelt down and did the over, under, around and through on his right shoe. “Now you try it on the other one.”
Farkle watched and then copied his father making an accurate knot. “Aces, Farkle. You are pure genius to learn things so fast,” Minkus said glad that he could pass his grandfather’s praise towards him to his own son. He looked around Farkle’s room before he could become too sentimental. “Why don’t we get some stuff together so you can bring them to work?” “Okay, like what?” Farkle asked as Minkus picked up his son’s leather satchel.

Minkus thought looking around. He picked up his son’s portable computer. “Here why don’t we bring this so you can play your games? You know what? Since some of the people who created them are going to be there, you can tell them personally how much you love playing the games! They’ll love that!” He put the Arithmetic, Reading, Science, History, and Social Studies programs inside his son’s bag.


“Sure,” Minkus replied “You can color some nice pictures for me.” He gently nudged his son on the cheek and glanced at his bookshelf. “We’ll take some books too. How about bringing your book on space, the one on insects, and this one on dinosaurs?” He lay out three non-fiction children’s books that Farkle liked, some of Farkle’s favorites in fact. He put them inside the satchel. “Remember the names of the planets?” Minkus asked.

Farkle thought for a minute. “Mercery, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jup’ter, Saturn, Ur-um-Uranus, Naptime, and Pluto!”


Minkus laughed again. The mind of a child was wonderful making those connections. “No that just means that it’s not a planet because it’s small but it’s not a moon because it’s doesn’t turn around a planet. It’s sort of like a little planet.”

“Does it grow into a big planet?” Farkle said. “You say that I’m always growing. Will it grow too?”

“Not quite,” Minkus said. “It stays the same size.” He looked around the room knowing that if they didn’t get a move on, they were going to be late. “What else do you want to bring?”

“Can I bring my dinosaurs?” Farkle asked referring to his plastic toy dinosaurs.

“I don’t see why not. We wouldn’t want them going extinct on us,” Minkus teased as Farkle opened the plastic tub that contained them.

“Daddy,” Farkle corrected his son. “You know that dinosaurs became stinked when a meatier hit the Earth!”

Minkus held up his hands in mock surrender. “My mistake,” he said. He would correct his son’s pronunciation later. Sometimes it was fun to hear how Farkle referred to certain things. It almost hearkened back to his and Grandpa Ginsburg’s secret language.

“If you like we can take the Half Blood Prince and Oliver with us,” Minkus suggested.

Farkle held up a finger. “No those are for bed time only!” The two of them loved their reading time before Farkle went to bed. It was their favorite time of the day. Farkle loved hearing the stories and picturing in his head the worlds that his daddy described. Even when Daddy was far away, he would read to him via video conference on the computer. Sometimes the words got confusing and he had to ask Daddy what they meant, but he always explained and never got tired of telling him. Farkle’s father believed that the more words, his “voca-bilary” Daddy called it, that Farkle learned the smarter he would become. Farkle’s Daddy was always saying things like that. To Farkle, he was the Smartest Man in the Universe!

Minkus held up Rexy. “Do you want to take Rexy?” he asked. He knew that if Farkle was going to stay too long at work, he would eventually lie down for his nap. It was a good idea to bring his favorite stuffed animal just in case.

Farkle rolled his eyes. “Daddy, Rexy’s for babies,” he said. “I’m not a baby!” He was a big boy!
All those grownups Daddy worked with would laugh if they knew that he still slept with a toy! He never even told the others at daycare. He had a reputation to uphold!

“Oh okay,” Minkus said putting down the stuffed dinosaur. “You don’t want to take him that’s fine. I take it you don’t want him at all then!”

“No,” Farkle said turning his back on the dinosaur. Who wanted a mangy old dinosaur, alright one that slept on his bed every night, comforted him when Mommy yelled or when he missed Daddy that listened when Farkle read out loud…? He glanced over towards his stuffed friend not wanting to blink. Oh no was Rexy watching?

Minkus sighed. “Oh well, I guess I can always give him to some other little boy, oh I’m sorry little baby that will want him!” He pretended to put the dinosaur under the bed.

“Nooo,” Farkle whined picking up the toy. He hugged him tightly but then looked at him. “I mean, I guess he can come. It’s okay with me, if it’s okay with you.”

“It’s alright with me,” Minkus smiled as he put Rexy inside the bag with all of the other gear. He stood up and led his son into the kitchen. “Come on, let’s see what we can find for lunch alright?” he invited as he took his son’s hand and led him into the kitchen.

Farkle held his Daddy’s hand and skipped up the large steps as they walked into the big glass doors. He heard some people greet him with “Good Morning Mr. Minkus.” His daddy smiled and greeted each person by name. It made Farkle feel proud that his father was the boss of so many people. Maybe someday he’ll be the boss.

The father and son reached the elevator and Minkus picked up his son. “Now Farkle look right at the screen and say, ‘up.’”

Farkle could see his face through the flat screen. “Up!” he said. The doors opened. “There’s no button, Daddy!”

“It’s a new kind of elevator Farkle,” Minkus said. “It doesn’t need buttons. It only needs your voice.” He then perched his son on his hip and carried his satchel bringing him inside the elevator.

“Now Farkle say 30 right to the screen.”

“30,” Farkle said. The elevator moved upward. Minkus pointed through the glass window at the people that were lower than them. Farkle waved hello and Minkus gave his son a tight hug.

When they landed at their floor Minkus stepped inside and lay Farkle down to walk next to him. A red-haired lady greeted him. “Hello Mr. Minkus,” she said.

“Good Morning Jessie,” Minkus said. He pointed downward. “There’s a bit of a situation today.”

Jessie smiled and knelt down. “Why hello there, you must be Farkle,” she said. “Your Daddy has your pictures in his office and his screensaver.” She then stood up next to her boss. “Is Mrs. Minkus okay?”

“She’s a bit ‘under the weather’ so I decided to bring Farkle to work with me,” Minkus said.

“The kind of ‘under the weather’ that comes with a hangover no doubt,” Jessie mumbled hoping that her boss didn’t hear her. Minkus looked down at Farkle. “Farkle son could you just stand right over there by the wall and don’t move okay.” Oops obviously he did.

Farkle obeyed his father as he motioned Jessie forward his hand on her arm.

“Jessie you are a good secretary, a commendable worker, and I appreciate everything you have done here,” Minkus began. “I would hate to have to let you go for saying such things about my wife! There is nothing wrong with her; she’s just not feeling well.”

Jessie got the hint. She had worked for Minkus International since their starter days in Philadelphia and she was a witness to the troubled marriage of Stuart and Jennifer Minkus. She had seen how her boss practically twisted himself into knots to make his wife happy and how she continued to hurt him almost delighting in her cruelty. Jessie Goloff was not by any means in love with Stuart Minkus for obvious reasons, but she had come to think of him as a surrogate younger brother one who was in a troubled situation that she couldn’t help but see. However, she was a professional and she knew that this wasn’t the time or place to air such grievances.

“I know sir,” Jessie said. “I am very sorry. I hope she feels better.”
“Thank you,” Minkus said. He then took out his wallet and gave her a 20. “You know that CVS down the corner? Could you get Farkle some chocolate milk and a snack, maybe a box of animal cookies or something?”
“I can do that,” Jessie agreed. She picked up the money. “I will be right back,” she promised as she left.

Eddie Giatti and Alvin Meese entered Stuart Minkus’ office. Instead of the CEO seated at his swivel chair behind his desk, they saw a small child sitting and facing the desk and holding a plastic dinosaur. “Well they say that the new executives get younger each year,” Eddie joked to Meese.

“What is that?” Meese asked pointing at the little boy as if he were a virus invading his clean space.
“I think that’s Farkle,” Eddie answered. “You know Stuart’s son?”
Farkle looked at the floor and held up a plastic Stegosaurus. “You will never eat me!” He said taunting another figure. He pretended that the dinosaur was giving a raspberry.
From underneath the desk came a growl, “That’s what you think,” a voice said as Stuart Minkus appeared from underneath the desk holding a Tyrannosaurus Rex. “They don’t call me the King Lizard for nothing,” he said as he growled and pretended that the dinosaur was biting the Stegosaurus. “Oh no he got him!” Minkus said in mock horror. “Oh no it’s awful! Oh the human, or rather the dinosaur-anity! It’s like that scene in Fantasia!” The Tyrannosaurus pounded on the Stegosaurus pretending to devour him whole. Minkus put the Stegosaurus down on the floor and patted the T-Rex’s mouth with a tissue as if it finished a tasty meal. “Ah yum yum, Stegosaurus Meat. It tastes like Velociraptor!” Minkus imitated an evil laugh. Farkle laughed with his daddy. Meese cleared his throat and Minkus finally turned to face his visitors. “Well I think the tests for the dinosaur software packages are going over rather well,” he said. He turned to Farkle. “This is exactly how I want the program for the first level to go. Well done, young man.” He shook Farkle’s hand.

“Well done Daddy,” Farkle answered back.
“Well if we can get away from the Land Before Time and discuss our current issues we can begin this accounts meeting,” Meese said dryly.

“Alright, Farkle could you go and color while Daddy works?” Minkus said. He pointed at the couch. “You can sit on the couch.”

“Okay,” Farkle said. He then picked up his crayons and coloring book and began to color.

“Is there a particular reason that the Little Prince is here,” Meese nodded in Farkle’s direction. “Jennifer isn’t feeling well today,” Stuart answered. “I decided to bring him to work.”

“That’s cool,” Eddie said. “He could be like Minkus International’s unofficial mascot!” He waved at Farkle who waved back.

“Yeah real cool,” Meese said sarcastically then turned to Minkus. “You know I’m not sure but I think the Yellow Pages or Yahoo Directory list some services. Now what are they under? Oh yeah ‘N’ for ‘Nanny.’ They are not listed under ‘B’ for ‘Business.’
“I couldn’t get someone so quickly,” Minkus insisted. “I wasn’t going to leave Farkle alone with Jennifer in her condition. We’re just going to have to make do for the day.”
Meese rolled his eyes. “Fine whatever. As long as he doesn’t turn this place into a daycare. Is it asking too much that we retain some decorum and professionalism here, Mr. Dinosaur?”
Minkus glared at his Vice-President. Lately he and Meese had been at loggerheads more and more, particularly since Farkle had been born. “Meese, I know how to act. This is just a hiccup. Trust me, I am the CEO and I understand that title comes with a sense of detachment, ruthless efficiency, and utter professionalism.”

The door to his office opened and Jessie appeared with a small bag in hand. “Here are the chocolate milk and Animal Cookies, Mr. Minkus.”
Minkus winced and nodded. “Impeccable timing as ever, Jessie.”

“You were saying something about ruthless efficiency?” Meese asked dryly as Minkus accepted the return change from Jessie.

Jessie reached into the shopping bag, “I also saw this in the store and just had to get it for him. I bought it with my own money.” She held up a small stuffed Bassett Hound and then handed it to Farkle. “These are for you, Sweetheart.” She handed the chocolate milk, Animal Cookies, and stuffed dog to Farkle. Farkle accepted the gifts happily.

Minkus prompted, “What do you say, son?”

“Thank you Miss Jessie,” Farkle said.

“You’re welcome Farkle,” Jessie said.

“Thank you Jessie,” Minkus said. “You will be compensated for your time. You may go now.”

“Thank you Mr. Minkus,” Jessie said as she left.

Farkle looked at his new toy. “I’m going to call you Jennifer, just like Mommy, because Mommy’s name before she married Daddy was Bassett. So you’re like my cousin!” Farkle said.

Minkus wanted to say something like Yeah she looks like the women your uncles married doesn’t she. Instead, he shook his head. “Son, people don’t always like when other people name dogs after them.”

“Okay can I call her Jenny then?” Farkle asked. “It sounds like Mommy’s name.”

Minkus was about to object but Meese gave him a dirty impatient look. “Sure whatever.” He then turned to his colleagues. “Okay on with the meeting.”

Minkus listened as the two accounts executives described the projected incomes earned for the next quarter as well as the earnings from the previous quarter. “This doesn’t add up,” Minkus said looking at the figures. “There’s something wrong here. The figures don’t match.” He had been investigating this issue for some time. Some of the money was slowly being siphoned from the accounts. It wasn’t a whole lot at a time, but Minkus recognized a specific trend of amounts not adding up to their totals at the end of each month. He wondered if someone at Minkus International was practicing the Salami Technique, in which criminals would steal small amounts of money at a time, so they would go unnoticed. Plus there were some concerns from at least three clients that he knew that they were overcharging for their services. It was time to mention it to his colleagues.

“Has your wife been shopping again?” Meese sneered.

Minkus fixed his colleague a dirty look. “No, I changed my banking information,” he informed him. “Three of our clients, Statewide Bank, Brown & Hofnagle Publishing, and New York University have called. They said that our commission fees were much higher than we had estimated. They were not happy, even threatened to pull their businesses out. Do you know anything about it, fellas?”

Meese and Eddie shook their heads. “No,” they said in unison. “I checked the figures personally,” Meese said. “They seem right on the nose.”

“I’m not accusing,” Minkus said. “I just want to be sure that there isn’t any mismanagement going on. If there are, it would be from accounts. I thought that you should be the first to know it.”

“Thank you,” Meese said. “But I do know what I’m doing in my department. I don’t need you looking over my shoulder.”

“Don’t take it that way, Meese,” Minkus offered. “I’m just giving you some ideas.”

Jessie’s icon appeared on the computer. “Mr. Minkus, there is a man from the Securities & Exchanges Commission here to see you.”

Minkus looked at his employees quizzically. “Alright, I’ll be right out,” he said. He turned to his colleagues. “We’ll discuss this later.” He then turned to Farkle. “I have to talk to somebody, Farkle. I’ll be back soon.”

“Okay Daddy,” Farkle said not looking up from his coloring book.
Minkus turned towards Jessie’s desk and saw a small bearded man in a business suit. “Mr. Minkus, I am Terrence Gillard,” he said in a high pompous voice. “I am from the Securities & Exchanges Commission.”

“It’s nice to meet you,” Minkus said. “Am I in some sort of trouble?” He played the market and ever since Minkus International went public, he was doing pretty well in the stocks.

Mr. Gillard opened his briefcase and pulled out a report. “Mr. Minkus we have received reports that some of the stocks in your company have been recently sold.”

“That’s strange,” Minkus said. “They are going pretty well. I mean as well as can be expected right now with the economy as shaky as it is. It’s not uncommon though.”

Mr. Gillard also added another report. “We have also received information from Sullivan Brokerage that information of your recent software productions have been leaked and that has caused a dip in your stock numbers.”

“Now that’s ridiculous,” Minkus said. “That information is not supposed to go public for another two months! We like to keep our competitors guessing!”

“Mr. Minkus it is our belief that someone in your company leaked that information,” Gillard said. “We may have to investigate for insider trading.”

“Well you can end with me because I have nothing to do with it,” Minkus answered. “My information is right here.” He showed his stock reportings, account records, and other pertinent information. “I have never even done business with Sullivan Brokerage. My business is with a different house.” He showed the investigator the figures.

Gillard examined the reports. “Well it appears that you are clean, but someone in your company did this. It has to be someone from a high position that has access to new information and the stocks.”

Minkus paled. “There has been some accounts mismanagement in my company as well. I think I know who’s responsible.” He had his suspicions for some time, but he wanted to be sure that he got enough information before he could accuse him.

Meese and Eddie drank coffee in the break room. They heard a bit of laughter and saw a whirlwind in the shape of a three year old boy run inside the break room followed by Jessie. “Tag,” Farkle said touching the counter.

“Ah you beat me,” Jessie said snapping her fingers in defeat. Since Minkus was still in conference with the man from SEC, Jessie decided to take Farkle on a tour of the company. He enjoyed meeting all of the employees particularly the software developers. Like his Daddy suggested, he thanked them for the Funearn games. Many smiled and accepted his words. One lady even called him sweet for stopping by.

After they left the programming department, Farkle said that he felt embarrassed about bringing Rexy to work because he didn’t want to admit that he still slept with a toy.

Jessie smiled and said that she still had a teddy bear from when she was a little girl. “I call him Barry Bearington,” Jessie said. “And he still sits on my bed. You’re never too old to have a good friend.”


“I’m sure Rexy likes that,” Jessie said.

After the tour, Jessie challenged him to a race to the break room. Eddie smiled at the two. Meese just rolled his eyes, snorted, and continued drinking his coffee.

“How’s it hanging Junior?” Eddie asked. “You having fun going to your old man’s work.”

“Uh huh,” Farkle replied.

“Well watch someday you’ll be the boss and tell us to get back to work,” Eddie teased.

Farkle giggled. “Get back to work,” he demanded.

Eddie held up his hands in mock surrender. “Uh oh, it’s already happened.” He tipped an imaginary hat. “Yes boss.”

Farkle laughed and stepped backwards, but tripped into the table causing Meese’s and Eddie’s
“Hey,” Meese commanded. Eddie picked up a sponge and wiped off the counter throwing the cups away.

Meese grabbed Farkle roughly by the arm and slapped him across the face. “Didn’t your father ever teach you not to run in a building?”

“Ouch,” Farkle said. “I’m sorry,” he said frightened.

“Hey,” Eddie said. “Don’t slap someone else’s kid!”

“Well someone’s got to discipline him,” Meese commanded. “He’s turned this place upside down!”

“Really it’s not that bad,” Jessie objected in a very loud voice.

“Not that bad, Jessie, he’s systematic of what’s wrong with this place and what’s been happening to Minkus,” he said. “He’s not the same person that he was! Ever since he’s had that brat, he’s gone soft! He used to be a businessman and now look at him! No wonder his wife can’t stand him!”

“Really Mr. Meese, he’s not that bad,” Jessie prompted and nodding her head in a “look behind you” manner.

Meese rolled his eyes and turned to see Minkus standing behind him. Minkus smirked, “Meese, I have a special assignment for you! You’re going to love this! I think that there are some issues with the severance packages.”

Meese smiled smugly at Jessie and Eddie. “Yeah sounds intriguing. What do you want me to do about it?”

“I need you to go down there and select one,” Minkus said as if he were confiding a secret. “Then I want you to go cash in your 401K. Afterwards, you’re going to love this part: I want you to get a cardboard box, put all your stuff in it, and get the hell out of my office!”

Meese snorted disbelieving. “You’re firing me because I slapped your kid and called him a brat?”

“No,” Minkus said. “I’m firing you for other reasons. How you behaved towards my son simply made my decision a lot easier.”

“What other reasons?” Meese challenged.

Minkus pointed inside the break room. “Do you want to have this conversation here?” he asked. Meese glared at Minkus and headed towards the office. “I didn’t think so,”

Minkus said as he led Meese back inside his office then nodded at the man who entered with them. “This is Terrence Gillard with the SEC. He would like to have a few words with you.”

“I have nothing to say to him,” Meese said proudly.

“Do the words ‘insider trading’ and ‘accounts mismanagement,’ maybe ‘fraud and embezzlement’ mean anything to you?” Minkus prompted.

“Do the words ‘innocent until proven guilty,’ and ‘talk to my attorney’ mean anything to you?” Meese shot back. “You have no proof.”

“I think I do actually,” Minkus said. He then showed the records of their accounts. “You see it puzzled me for a while that there had been some cash that had been siphoned. Oh not much that anyone would notice, a hundred here, maybe a couple hundred during the next pay period. Sort of like a large salami technique, take enough to fill your personal income but not enough that people would make a big issue of it. However, I always like to take a second look. Now while we have many accounts executives, only one has complete access to all of the funds for the company. Now who could that be?

I also wondered about those clients. Now when I read the contracts that we gave them, I remember how much the comm. fees were, because being the CEO my signature is on the contracts. I remember reading them clearly. But when I received the invoices from our angry customers, they seemed to tell a slightly different story. Now who had business lunches with them, why I couldn’t remember but that executive looked and sounded an awful lot like you.

Now our latest issue, that self-same familiar looking executive is a prominent client for Sullivan Brokerage, I remember that because he told me so himself. Also as my Vice-President he has
knowledge of when the software should be going into production, so he would be able to sell stocks just when he needed to pull out in case of an emergency. For example in case the SEC was getting wise to his dealings and he had to get rid of the evidence. Now does that all sound familiar to you, Alvin?” Minkus asked.

Meese glared at his soon-to-be former colleague. “Well there’s not much for me to say. You aren’t going to cover for me? I did for you when your wife took most of your earnings and practically bled this company dry!”

“Alvin as you mentioned, that only affected me,” Minkus reminded him. “That was taken out of the monies that had already been allotted towards my bank accounts and separated for my personal use. The only person that Jennifer stole from was her own husband. This however is different. You stole from the company, you stole our client’s trust in us, and you betrayed mine. I won’t cover for you after that.”

Meese smiled icy. “Well congratulations, Stuart. It looks like Mick Jagger has finally gone solo. Good luck finding someone to replace me!”

Minkus held up one finger and opened his office door. He saw Eddie Giatti waiting outside making a poor show of pretending that he hadn’t heard what was going on. “Eddie how would you like to be Vice-President in charge of Business Accounts?” He asked.

Eddie smiled wide. “Would I ever!” He answered. Minkus nodded and closed the door. “That wasn’t such a challenge now was it?” He asked Meese.

Meese glared. “Years ago, you would have done the same thing I did! It was all about profit then!”

“Maybe I would have,” Minkus shot back. “But as you told them, I’m not the same person I was. I have a son now someone who depends on me. Maybe you should try that sometime!”

A few minutes later, a security guard and Mr. Gillard led Alvin Meese outside of the building with his box in hand. He didn’t look at any of his former colleagues or at Stuart Minkus. He only looked forward as he left the building.

Now that the accounts trouble had been completed, the rest of the day moved rather smoothly for Minkus International. Farkle was working on his Reading Funearn CD-ROM on his computer. He occasionally read the answers out loud to Rexy and Jenny. Minkus smiled and shook his head as he typed some recent sales reports and the CEO’s monthly statement for the company’s website.

“Daddy,” Farkle asked. “Why did that mean man get put on fire?”

Minkus chuckled. “He got fired, Farkle because he stole money from the company and ended up hurting a lot of people,” He said.

“So he was like a robber?” Farkle asked.

“Exactly,” Minkus remarked. “Just like when robbers steal from banks and other people like in the movies. Well he ended up stealing a lot of money that people had given us and he also lied to the people who buy our software, so they could give him more money for himself.”

“Was it also because he hit me?” Farkle asked as he walked closer to his father.

Minkus nodded as he set Farkle on his lap.

“Absolutely, that’s another reason. No one hits you and gets away with it! Think about this, I have known Mr. Meese for years. I started the company with him in fact and after he hit you, I did not want to see him again. That’s how much I would protect you.” He gave his son a hug and kissed him on top of his head.

“Does that mean you’re going to fire Mommy because she hit me?” Farkle asked.

Minkus looked at his son stunned. “When does Mommy hit you?”

Farkle lowered his head. “When I was watching Sesame Street, I tripped into Mommy and stepped on her foot. She said that I scratched her shoe, but I didn’t see a scratch! She said that they cost a lot of money and she hit me! She said that she was awful sorry so she said that I didn’t have to tell you.” He started crying. “I wasn’t supposed to tell you was I?”

Minkus’ heart sank as he held his son tight. “Of course you were supposed to tell me. I want to
know when you get hurt, even if it is by Mommy. That’s what Daddies do; they take care of their children.”

“Do you love me Daddy?” Farkle asked.

“More than anything,” Minkus said as he kissed his son again.

“Does Mommy love me?” Farkle asked.

Minkus didn’t know how to answer that. He couldn’t very well say No son your mother doesn’t love you. “She loves you very much, Farkle. She just doesn’t always show it.”

“Well I love Mommy too,” Farkle said crying. “That’s why I don’t want you to fire Mommy because she hits me!” He cried on his father’s shoulder.

“Don’t worry son,” Minkus said. “I am not going to fire Mommy. You and I have to take care of her right?”

“Right,” Farkle agreed.

“And if I div- uh fired her we wouldn’t be able to do that right?” Minkus said. He also knew that he wouldn’t be able to take care of Farkle and protect him from his mother’s rages if he lost custody of his son. Jennifer made it clear on that point.

“Right,” Farkle agreed.

“So don’t worry,” Minkus said. “No one else is getting fired okay?” He asked as he looked at his watch. “Uh oh, Daddy has to go to the board meeting you want to come?” He then stood up and invited his son to come with him.

The board meeting finished rather quickly. The top news was of course Alvin’s dismissal and arrest and Eddie’s promotion to his place. The rest of the reports were less exciting, mostly discussions of the financial reports, sales, and production lines. Minkus faced Eddie, Jessie, and the other representatives. “Well if there isn’t any more business,” Minkus said. “This meeting is adjourned.” The participants rose from their seats. Some ambled out of the conference room. Eddie, Jessie, and Minkus were the last to remain. Minkus had gathered up his paperwork. Eddie looked towards the couch and motioned towards Jessie who laughed. “Hey Stuart,” Eddie said. Minkus looked up from his paperwork and looked at where Eddie was pointing. “We aren’t the only ones who had a ‘Bored Meeting.’”

Minkus looked at the couch to see Farkle lying fast asleep holding onto Rexy and Jenny. Minkus smiled. “Do you need us to stick around, Mr. Minkus?” Jessie asked. Minkus shook his head. “No, it’s about his naptime anyway,” Minkus answered. “I’ll just stay here until he wakes up.”

“Okay good-night,” Jessie said.

“Good-night, Jessie,” Minkus said sitting next to his small son and smoothing back his brown hair. “Good-night Stuart,” Eddie said. “Thank you for the promotion and I promise I will do my best.”

“I like your enthusiasm, Eddie,” Stuart said. “You’re welcome and good-night.”

Jessie Goloff and Eddie Giatti moved towards the hallway. Jessie commanded the elevator to move up. “He is such a great father,” Jessie said.

“Yeah they are pretty close aren’t they?” Eddie said nodding at the father and son as the elevator opened. The two co-workers stepped inside. “Hey Jessie, I don’t know if you are interested but I was going to stop off for a quick drink to celebrate. Would you like to come along?”

Jessie eyed him warily after she told the elevator to take them to the lobby. “Eddie you know that you aren’t exactly my type, right?”

Eddie waved his hands. “No nothing like that. I mean just as friends. You know it’s kind of like how gay men are sometimes best friends with straight women? We could have a straight man being friends with a gay woman! Sort of a Willow and Gray if you will. Hey we can even look for women together.”

Jessie laughed and nodded. “Okay you’re on,” she said. As a joke Eddie held out his elbow and Jessie accepted as the two made plans for the evening.

Later that night, Minkus had just finished reading Oliver Twist and Harry Potter and the Half-
Blood Prince to Farkle for the night. He had gotten to the parts where Snape and Dumbledore were battling and also where Bill Sikes had killed Nancy. Farkle was dressed in red and blue pajamas with number patterns. He rubbed his eyes trying hard to fight sleep, but unable to. He held onto Rexy and Jenny tightly.


Minkus tucked his son into bed and kissed him on the temple. “Good-night Daddy, I love you,” Farkle said. “Good-night Farkle,” Minkus answered. “I love you too.” He then whispered. “More than anything.” Minkus waited until his son was fast asleep before he left the room and joined his wife.

This time Farkle was ready to battle Lord Voldemort in his dream. Voldemort even invited Bellatrix Lestrange to battle him. He once again used the Sudoku trick and both bad guys disappeared. The next morning when Farkle tried to recall the dream he remembered that in his dream, Lord Voldemort looked and sounded like that mean man that Daddy fired and Bellatrix Lestrange looked and sounded an awful lot like Mommy.
The Minkus family goes on a Hawaiian vacation that proves to be anything but relaxing.

The Lives of Genius
By Auburn Red
Chapter Ten: A Hawaiian Venture (Stuart Minkus Age 25; Farkle Minkus Age 4)

Author’s Note: Sophia Andreas is an original character. Rusty Venture, Dean and Hank Venture, Jonas Venture, Brock Sampson, and Mike Suriyama are part of the cast of the animated series the Venture Bros. They belong to Jackson Publick, Doc Hammer, and Cartoon Network. A big shout-out and thank you to my Venture Bros. fan girl sister, Starfire, whom this newly inserted chapter is dedicated. She was a big help with the characterization of the Venture gang and the dialogue and suggested the initial idea for this chapter of furthering the links between the Minkus and Venture family that were mentioned in the final chapters in Lives of Genius.
Thanks sis!

Any hopes Stuart Minkus had of this business/pleasure trip to Hawaii being anything but stressful dashed as soon as he, Jennifer, Farkle, and Farkle’s latest nanny, Sophia Andreas emerged from the plane.
Minkus could tell from the tone of her voice that Jennifer was jet-lagged and already in a foul mood. He knew that he had to do whatever he could to keep Her Majesty happy.
“Remind me again why even though you spent money on that helicopter specifically so we wouldn’t have to ride in a jet liner with other people, we have to ride in a jet liner with other people!,” Jennifer said through clenched teeth.
Minkus sighed. Oh let’s please discuss this for the 900th time, he thought testily. “I told you, the helicopter got hit with hail. It’s being repaired.”
“And you trust that boy’s word?” Jennifer sneered.
Minkus decided to ignore his wife’s obviously racist comment about Minkus International’s African-American helicopter pilot, Harvey Adams. “I’ve seen the damage myself. Harvey’s working on it. He hasn’t let me down before,” Stuart said. “He’s a good pilot and equally as good a mechanic.”
“Well at least we traveled first class. What do you expect from a helicopter,” Jennifer said. “Of course Tommy not only knows how to fly his own private plane but he owns his own airfield to practice it on.” She gave her husband a smirk. “You have to make do with whatever-what are they called-helipad you can find.”
“I’m impressed,” Minkus said as the family approached the rental car. Privately Minkus wondered how Tommy Bassett, Jennifer’s brother could manage to get anywhere, especially in the air without the other half of his brain, his twin brother Teddy. Of course Teddy was more interested in yacht racing. Apparently Wealthy Idiots travel by sea and by air, Minkus thought. They’re like the military that way.
Jennifer ignored Minkus as he placed his suitcase and briefcase and Jennifer’s five suitcases and make-up kit in the trunk. Jennifer looked behind her and called. “Farkle, keep up and Gabriela, don’t encourage him to dawdle.”
“I’m sorry Mommy,” Farkle said.
It was my fault, Mrs. Minkus,” Sophia, a dark-haired 30-year-old Greek woman apologized. She did not acknowledge Jennifer’s deliberate slip of her name. Gabriela was the name of Farkle’s previous nanny. She didn’t even last an afternoon before she was fired by Jennifer. Sophia had been hired shortly before the Minkuses took off for their trip. So far, she seemed to pass muster in Jennifer’s eyes. Of course Minkus was aware that could change at any time. Sophia continued.

“Farkle was looking at the flowers and I told them some of their names.”

“Then I told her the scientific names, classifications, genus, and families,” Farkle said proudly. Sophia laughed and nodded.

“Good job, son,” Minkus smiled with pride as he put Farkle and Sophia’s suitcases in the trunk and locked it.

“Good job son,” Jennifer mocked under her breath. “Yes because most 4-year-olds give a damn about that stuff.”

“He does,” Minkus insisted.

“Because you program it in him,” Jennifer said snidely. She entered the passenger seat while Farkle and Sophia sat in the back and Minkus started the car. “Flowers,” Jennifer muttered under her breath then she glanced at her son through the rearview mirror. “Farkle take off that thing around your neck immediately!” She indicated the lei around her son’s neck. Farkle and the rest of the family had been given leis to wear as soon as they exited the plane.

“But Miss Sophia and Daddy said it’s tra-dit-ion for people to wear flowers in Hawaii,” Farkle objected remembering what his father and nanny told him on the plane about the traditional greeting. “And Daddy, Miss Sophia and you are wearing them.”

“Well take it off,” Jennifer commanded. “You look like a faggot!”

“Jennifer really,” Minkus corrected. “You don’t have to talk to him like that!”

“Oh I’m sorry,” Jennifer mocked as she removed her own lei. “Do you want our son to grow up liking other boys? Perhaps you wouldn’t mind if he was the prey of any pedos that come around?” Minkus shook his head. “Jennifer I think you’re going-“ He was about to continue when he saw his wife’s death look. Minkus sighed and took his lei off his neck. “Farkle, do what your Mother says alright?” It was such a minor argument. One not worth fighting about.

“Okay,” Farkle said as he took the lei off of his neck and threw it on the car floor. “I’m sorry, Mommy.”

The next day Minkus gathered his papers as he spoke to Sophia, Jennifer, and Farkle over breakfast. He mentally went over the speech that he had prepared for Technologists’ Convention. Quite a few of the big names in technology were expected to be there. Among them was Rusty Venture, son of the late Super Scientist, Jonas Venture! While Minkus had only known of the Venture family by reputation, he was somewhat familiar with the Rusty Venture, Boy Adventurer series. He was more amazed by the technological achievements made by Rusty’ father, Jonas, a great super scientist, the super scientist that any lonely nerdy kid would have hoped to be like. Even though Dr. Jonas Venture had died a long time ago, Stuart was amazed that among those famous names that would be listening to him would be Jonas’ son, Rusty!

He still couldn’t believe that he was hobnobbing with the most famous intellectual minds, that he was accepted as one of them! Nerdy little Stuart Minkus, the problem child/”Strat Freak,” the former scholarship kid, the one his wife’s family still criticized as “New Money.” All eyes would be on him. Even after five years of his company being established as a multi-million dollar industry that was rapidly climbing the Forbes and Fortune lists, he was still overwhelmed by being recognized, his products being household names, and that he rubbed elbows with the A-Listers of the science and business world. Overwhelmed and nervous too. He felt intimidated being surrounded by these people. Could he really make them hear him? Was he really cut out to breathe the same air as them? There was always a small part of himself that wondered if he deserved any of this.

“Are you nervous, Daddy?” Farkle asked his father with an almost precocious sixth sense that the two shared through their mutual genius.
“Nervous why Farkle what makes you think that I would be nervous?” He asked pretending to bite his nails.

Farkle laughed. “Daddy you’re going to do great!” Farkle said determined.

“You think I’m going to impress all of those geniuses?” He asked.

“Of course, Daddy,” Farkle said. “Because you’re the Smartest Genius in the Whole Universe!”

Farkle held out his tiny arms wide as if to show the universe.

Minkus laughed and hugged his son. “Oh I am, am I?” He then picked him up “I don’t know about that,” he said teasing his son as he swung Farkle high in the air.

The two laughed while Sophia smiled and Jennifer looked up from the tourist magazine and offered a thin smirk.

“Well you are very biased, Farkle, “Minkus said as he put his son down. “There are a lot of people smarter than I am. But I am very glad that you think so.” He looked at his watch. “Now I have to go set up and go to the early half of the convention. But I will take you to the beach afterward and we can go swimming.”

Jennifer looked up. “But Stuart,” She insisted. “I thought you were going to spend the day with me!”

Minkus looked up at his wife. “But we are going out dancing tonight and dinner remember? Besides you told me that you wanted to go shopping today.”

Jennifer pouted. “But surely you would want to spend some time on this romantic island with your wife!”

“Well we are,” Minkus reminded her. “But I thought we would want to have some time with Farkle as well.”

“That’s what nannies are for,” Jennifer said through clenched teeth as she pointed at Sophia.

“I will take him swimming Mr. Minkus,” Sophia offered weakly. She motioned for Farkle to get up and leave the room and tense situation. Farkle followed his nanny into their hotel room which joined Stuart and Jennifer’s.

“I think that Farkle would like to spend some time with his parents as well. I wanted to help him swim and maybe take him sailing,” Minkus reminded her. “Remember our son is on this trip too not just us!”

“Oh Farkle, Farkle Farkle!” Jennifer raised her voice. “You drop whatever you’re doing to be with him!”

“Jennifer that is not true,” Minkus insisted. “I spend time with you as well!”

“Tell me whose family paid for your stupid company?” Jennifer shouted. “Whose father helped finance your stupid technologies so you can be here and talk with all of these rich nerds in the first place?!”

“Yours did,” Minkus said.

“Alright then, who does what I say?” Jennifer warned.

“Everybody,” Minkus sighed. “Alright you and I will do whatever you want. I still have to go to the Convention and give my speech and the lectures, is that alright?” Do I have your permission, Minkus wanted to sarcastically add wondering if his wife was so possessive that she would make him miss going to the convention the reason that they were in Hawaii in the first place.

Jennifer snorted. “Well of course how else are you going to earn money? It’s the only thing that you’re good for anyway!” She sat back down on the kitchen table and continued to read the magazine as if the last argument had not occurred. Rather than make his wife even angrier Minkus left their room muttering that he would be back around 1:00 to be with Jennifer.

Farkle jumped with fear as he put on his swimming trunks and flip flops when he heard the knock on the door. Sophia was in the bathroom dressing in her swimsuit. “It’s okay, Farkle, it’s just me,” Minkus called.

Farkle timidly opened the door. “I’m sorry, son,” he sighed. “I’ll take you swimming and the other things tomorrow.”

“That’s okay Daddy,” Farkle said looking down at his feet. He knew that his mother eventually got
her way. Sophia reemerged from the bathroom wearing a loose white skirt and shirt tied in front covering her pink one piece suit. She too wore flip flops. “Are you ready to go, Farkle?” she asked.

“I’m sorry Sophia,” Minkus said. “I know this is an imposition.” He remembered that she mentioned something about wanting to go on a tour in the afternoon after Minkus returned. Generously, Minkus wanted to allow his nanny some alone time for a vacation for herself while they were in Hawaii.

“It’s alright Mr. Minkus,” Sophia answered. “It’s what I am here for.” Minkus nodded and held up his hand giving the nanny instructions. “Now remember he doesn’t swim very well yet, so keep him only in shallow water and make sure he has his flotation devices around him.”

“Of course Mr. Minkus,” Sophia replied. “Farkle, I don’t care if the other kids are doing it, I don’t want you to go too far in the deep water,” he said.

“Okay Daddy I won’t.” Farkle said already getting impatient with his father’s instructions and wanting to go to the beach before Mommy yelled again.

“Sophia if the water gets too rough or if he gets too tired make sure he leaves it,” Minkus said.

“I know Mr. Minkus,” Sophia said mentally rolling her eyes. Her employer had a tendency to get rather overprotective towards his son.

“And make sure he wears plenty of sunblock,” Minkus said putting his hand on Farkle’s chin. “I don’t want him to get sunburned.”

“I will Daddy,” Farkle insisted. “I’m not a little kid!” He said with a pout.

Minkus smiled and shook his head in a parental grin. “Of course not,” He knelt down to be eye level with his son. “You are very mature and developed beyond your age. I just want to make sure that you will be safe and healthy.”

“I know,” Farkle said. Minkus then picked up his son and gave him a hug and a quick peck on the cheek.

“I have to go, wish me luck,” He said.

“Good luck Daddy,” Farkle said.

Minkus set his son down as Sophia said “Good luck Mr. Minkus,”

“Thank you Farkle, thank you Sophia,” Minkus said as he left the room. In the hallway, he knocked on his and Jennifer’s room. “Jennifer, I’ll be at the Convention. Wish me luck.”

“What?” Jennifer said. “Oh sure, yeah whatever.” Minkus could tell from her slurred voice that Jennifer had begun to sample the honor bar. “Stuart I love you. Don’t you love me?”

Minkus sighed. “I love you and I would be nothing without you.” He said repeating the familiar phrase between them.

Rusty Venture and his bodyguard, Brock Sampson watched as Stuart Minkus finished his speech. He spoke a great deal about innovation in the 21st century and the creations that his company was planning including the Farkle Phone, an improvement over the current cell phone technology.

Rusty rolled his eyes. Who names a cell phone after their kid? He thought. Then again what idiot names their kid, Farkle, in the first place?

There was a round of applause that to Rusty sounded overblown. The balding superscientist glared at the younger genius on the podium. “Looks like the kid is hot tonight,” Rusty said sarcastically indicating Minkus.

Brock leaned against the wall one leg propped behind him. Stuart left the podium speaking to many of the other technologists answering as many questions as he could. He smiled and laughed with them, shaking hands, and clearly schmoozing. To Brock he acted more like a politician or a rock star than a business CEO. “Yeah,” Brock agreed. “But where will he be tomorrow?”

Rusty did a double take at that comment. “What the-are you quoting Loverboy?” The doctor asked his bodyguard referring to the 80’s rock group. “Are you going to start wearing headbands now?”

“People like him come and go, Doc,” Brock pointed out ignoring Doctor Venture’s sarcasm as he
always did. “He’ll be either arrested or his stocks will go down, or he’ll be all over the tabloids.”
“The idiot doesn’t even have an archnemesis,” Rusty pointed out. He checked. The Guild of
Calamitous Intent barely knew about Stuart Minkus let alone considered him important enough to
have an archnemesis.
“People like him don’t need one,” Brock dourly predicted. “He’ll be his own archnemesis soon
enough.”
“Uh oh, here comes the Boy Wonder now,” Rusty said sarcastically. Minkus walked up to Rusty
Venture with a wide grin that Rusty recognized all too well. The older scientist rolled his eyes
knowing what was going to come next.
Minkus stuck out his hand and smiled. “Rusty Venture, it’s nice to finally meet you,” he said
delighted.
“Great,” Rusty said shaking Minkus’ hand. “Let me guess you watched the show when you were a
kid and always dreamed of being an adventurer like me blah blah.”
Minkus blinked taken aback. “No, not really. I mean I saw an episode or two growing up, but really
I was more fascinated by the science established by your father, Dr. Jonas Venture.”
Brock whistled and pursed his lips. He knew this wasn’t going to be good. Open mouth insert foot
kid, he thought.
“Really,” Rusty practically spat the word.
“Really,” Minkus said gushing. “I was impressed by Dr. Venture’s work on genetic engineering
and astrophysics. I mean Gargantua 2 was truly a brilliant achievement of a space station long
before the ISS was even conceived.” The more scientific achievements that Minkus mentioned, the
more Rusty’s face fell. “Not to mention the strides your father made in cloning. We truly owe Dr.
Venture a debt of gratitude!”
“You don’t need to remind me what he did, he was my father, “Rusty shot back wanting to get
away from this Flash in the Pan Fan Boy.
“I know, “Minkus said. “It must have been wonderful growing up with a father like that one that
encouraged your intellectual prowess and allowed you to discover the world.”
Rusty’s face reddened as he glared directly at Minkus. Brock shook his head. “Yes it was heaven,”
he said deadpan.
Brock shook his head. “If I were you, I’d run,” he said getting ready in case he needed to interfere
in the middle of the “Scientist Bitch Slapping.”
“I hope that I bring up my son—I have a four year old son—half as well as your father reared you,”
Minkus said.
Brock took a step back. “Seriously, kid, run,” he said still amused but anticipating trouble.
“No, Brock” Rusty said holding up his hand. “If he wants to raise his son like my dad brought me
up he is free to do it. If he wants his kid to get kidnapped by pirates, jewel thieves, arch enemies,
and only after the brat has been traumatized that he will even think to rescue him. If he wants his
boy watch him banging the entire Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders and Charlie’s Angels cast including
Tanya Roberts and Shelley Hack then rock on! If he wants to use his son as a guinea pig for any
scientific experiment and cause him to not have any friends because he’s a freak, then it’s a free
country!”
“I’m sorry,” Minkus said. “I had no idea—“
“Of course you didn’t,” Rusty said. “You couldn’t hear anything over the applause and your name
being called! You probably have your face on the cover of every magazine, probably still count
how many hits your name gets on the Internet. You probably go to all the right parties, meet all the
right people. Even regular people, who aren’t science geeks who spend most of the time in a lab
like you and me, know your name! I bet it’s so great to be you right now!”
“It is pretty good, really good,” Minkus said wondering what Rusty Venture was getting at.
Rusty scoffed. “You’re just a kid, what are you 21, 22?”
“25,” Minkus answered.
“Yeah, enjoy it while it lasts,” Rusty said. “Your science is good! Your technologies are
interesting and could be the future. But wait until someone else comes with something newer or
wait until your personal life gets splashed all over the tabloids and suddenly people who lined up to buy them line up just as quickly to return them! Soon people will know the real you and they won’t like it! You won’t like it either! Maybe someone will come up to you and ask who you used to be!” Rusty was about to turn away when he faced Minkus again. “A little advice from me to you, be ready for when that time comes. See you around Minkus?” Rusty walked off, giving Minkus a sarcastic wink, with Brock close behind. “I’m going to the bar,” Brock said. Rusty waved him off. “Okay,” Rusty said. “But don’t forget to be with those two little tax deductions of mine!” Brock nodded knowing that Rusty Venture could be really sarcastic when referring to his sons, Hank and Dean, and put on a big front like he didn’t care about them, but some people like Brock knew his true feelings.

Jennifer made eyes at the large muscular blond man at the bar as she ordered a Mai Tai from the bartender. The man had long curly blond hair. He was calmly smoking a cigarette and drinking a beer in a glass bottle. Jennifer smiled and slowly sucked on her straw giving a slight impression of her true intentions. “Yeah?” the man said clearly curious and possibly interested. “You’re quite a mountain of a man aren’t you?” Jennifer asked seductively. “Depends on what mountain you’re looking at,” the man said. “Ms…” “Jennifer,” she said. “Jennifer Bassett.” She ordered another Mai Tai when she finished her first. “Minkus?” the man prompted. Jennifer hid the eye roll at the mention of her spineless husband, the last man she wanted to picture. This blond muscular man was the complete opposite of Stuart in every sense. “We’re not exactly together right now, Mr…” “Brock Sampson,” Brock said. “Sampson, the strong man,” Jennifer said. “Could you be taken down by a haircut?” She teased looking forward to being his Delilah. She glared at the bartender. “Are you deaf?” She shouted. “I ordered another Mai Tai!” The bartender nodded. “I’m sorry Madam,” he said as lay down another drink. “Make it fast,” Jennifer said with a tone that meant she could have killed the man right then and there. She looked right back at Brock as he stood up and paid for his beer. He headed in the direction of two small boys that had called his name. “Wait where are you going?” Jennifer asked. “Maybe you and I could be alone for awhile.” She hinted giving him a come on stare as she put her hand on Brock’s shoulder. “Sorry Lady not interested,” Brock said. “I got somewhere I need to be.” He was about to head to the direction of the boys again when Jennifer stopped him. “Maybe later.” Jennifer grabbed Brock’s arm so tightly that she hoped it would bruise him. “You’re not going,” she hissed. No one turned Jennifer Bassett-Minkus down. “Not interested now or ever Lady,” Brock said heading for the two young boys. “You scare the shit out of me!” He could see that she was one of those psychotic types who once they latched on to someone did not want to let them go. He was about to follow the small boys when Jennifer snorted. “I suppose little boys are More your thing!” Brock whirled around and pushed Jennifer forward so her face was close to his. Jennifer felt a sexual charge that things were about to get very rough and public. She laughed. “That’s another reason,” Brock said. “You’re disgusting!” He dropped her arm and walked off. Jennifer flopped back on the barstool. “Another Mai Tai,” she spat at the bartender.

Sophia and Farkle swam in the ocean water, its coolness filling all around them. Farkle giggled as he dogpaddled in his water wings towards his nanny. Sophia laughed and held out her arms as Farkle floated right in them. The nanny playfully splashed her charge with the water which he joyfully returned. Near them, Sophia could see a tall muscular blond man with two young boys a
little older than Farkle. He swam ahead a few laps while the blond boy willingly followed him. The red-haired boy stayed in the shallow end looking at the man and the other boy, possibly his brother, Sophia guessed with a forlorn expression. The boy met Farkle’s eye and Farkle smiled and waved. The other boy smiled and waved back. The man and the blond boy swam back laughing. “30 seconds,” the man congratulated the boy with a deep gravelly voice. “Good job, Hank.”

Hank, the blond boy high fived the man and made a face at the other boy. “You didn’t try Dean, you’re such a loser!”

“I am not,” Dean countered.

“Are too!” Hank shot back.

“Okay break it up,” the man said.

The two boys looked up meekly. “Okay,” “Sorry Brock,” the whimpered.

“That’s more like it,” Brock said. He looked at Sophia and Farkle who watched the display. “Hey there,” Brock said.

Sophia blushed. “Hello,” she said shyly. She cleared her throat and returned to her charge feeling a bit embarrassed.

Farkle’s movements became slower in the water and he stared at the waves going up and down. “Miss Sophia” he said. “I don’t feel like swimming anymore.”

“Oh well alright,” she said. “Do you want to play on the beach for a while? Maybe you can build a sand castle for your Papa and your Mama to see eh?”

“They’re too busy today,” Farkle said sadly. “Besides Mommy isn’t going to want to see it.”

Sophia nodded not wanting to say anymore about her employer’s maternal instincts or often lack thereof. “But your Papa will. Tell you what if you make a good castle, I will take a photo of it and send it to your Papa. Now make it real special.”

Farkle looked up smiling despite his sad expression. Though Sophia did not work for the Minkus family long, she knew that Farkle was distracted by any sort of project in which he could show off his genius. “Daddy has been reading me La Morte D’Artur—He pronounced the title slowly “- and Fellowship of the Ring! I could make it just like Camelot or Rivendell!”

“Yeah, he will love that!” Sophia encouraged. She lifted Farkle on her back and carried him out of the water.

Sophia and Farkle returned from the lockers to the beach where she laid out two blankets for them then reached for the sunblock. She poured some on her shoulders, arms, and legs and handed it to Farkle. “Your turn,” she told him. Farkle gave an exaggerated sigh but obeyed her. He then reached for his MIMS.5 from Sophia’s tote bag and began to type a few things inside. Sophia looked over his shoulder and saw that he was computing the shape of a castle.

“A good inventor or architect always needs to make a diagram before he builds,” Farkle said pompously.

“Oh of course,” Sophia replied. She leaned back on the lawn chair that she had pulled out and sat under the umbrella reading a paperback mystery novel.

Farkle worked on the plans for his sandcastle as he felt a shadow over him obstructing his view of the diagram. Farkle looked up to see the red-haired boy from the water look down. “You aren’t doing it right,” he said.

“How do you know?” Farkle challenged.

The other boy sat down and pointed at the castle’s towers. “The towers should be more like battlements.”

“Well that’s how Camelot’s castle looks like,” Farkle insisted.

“Yeah but Camelot would have been in the pre-Medieval era,” the boy reminded him. “It wouldn’t be as ornate yet.”

Farkle looke down at his model. “You’re right, the early Celtic struc-turs were less orn-um-ornate than the later invashens by Sectons and Nortons.”

The boy giggled. “Saxons and Normans,” he said. “Here let me show you.” He sat down and drew the towers as he described.
Farkle had to admit, it did look more historically accurate. “That looks good,” he said. “Would you like to help me?”

“Sure,” the boy said. “I’m Dean.” He stuck out his hand and Farkle shook it.

“I’m Farkle,” he said.

Dean giggled. “That’s your name?” He asked.

Farkle blushed remembering how other kids laughed at day care. It was a silly name! He turned away from Dean.

Dean instantly felt sorry. “I’m sorry I like your name,” he said. “Do you still want to build the castle?”

Farkle turned towards the other boy. “Well, okay.” He said. The two then gathered up the sand and worked together on the diagram to make the castle.

“There,” Farkle said delighted. He and Dean high-fived as Brock walked towards the two young boys. “Miss Sophia, look, we finished it!”

Sophia placed a bookmark in her novel then gaped in amazement at the castle. Dean and Farkle had built a sandcastle similar to a pre-Medieval building. The details were incredible from the lines around the stones to the jagged parts of the sand around the castle simulating a moat. “That is impressive,” Sophia said holding out her Farkle phone.

She stared in amazement as she snapped pictures of the sand castle. Brock had a straight laced look of nonchalance like he expected such things from Dean, but his eyes showed pride in the young boy.

“You two haven’t seen the best part yet,” Dean said. “Ask for permission to enter the castle.”

Sophia and Brock exchanged glances and shrugged. “Alright,” Sophia said. “Do we have your permission to enter the castle?”

Dean stood up and cupped his hands across his mouth. “Lower the drawbridge!” He commanded.

“Lower the drawbridge,” Farkle repeated as he flicked on a crank made of sand. A drawbridge made of sand moved by itself and lowered onto the ground. “That’s not all,” Farkle said. “Raise the flag!” He commanded.

“Raise the flag,” Dean repeated as he tapped on one of the turrets. A flag made of sand, then emerged out of the window and waved in the Hawaiian air.

“Now all we need is a fanfare,” Brock said wryly. Before he could even finish that sentence, three horns emerged from another tower and sounded a small fanfare. “And there it is,” Brock said.

“Good job boys,”

“I agree,” Sophia said. She snapped photo after photo of the boys’ sand castle and texted the pictures to Minkus. “Your papa would be so proud!”

From behind the sand castle and Sophia’s picture taking, the ocean water began to get choppy and rough. A blond female lifeguard perched on her seat looked at the rough water and the gray clouds forming in the horizon. She picked up her talkie. “Dave, this is Pam, looks like a storm coming in, over.”

Her boss’ voice crackled over the radio. “Weather said it’s going to be rough. An undertow is approaching, get everyone out of the ocean water, over.”

“Roger that, Dave,” Pam repeated. She then picked up her megaphone and shouted inside.

“Attention, attention, everyone please exit the ocean water. A severe storm is approaching and there will be an undertow. Repeat exit the water! A severe storm is approaching and there will be an undertow!” She was satisfied as most of the beachgoers left the water, some complaining and shouting about their ruined vacation or summer break, but they left. The sailors slowed their boats down or moved towards the docks. It was practically a mass exodus from the water.

Dean, Farkle, Sophia, and Brock paid no attention to the ocean warning as they heaped praise on the sandcastle and Dean and Farkle demonstrated all of the intricate details that the two worked on including the throne room, the dungeon, the dining room, the king and queens’ bedrooms, and the
battlements. Hank glanced at the castle with a mischievous expression. “Hey Deano, who’s your friend?” He had been playing near the water but left after the pretty lifeguard told him to leave the water.

“Hank this is Farkle,” Dean invited. “Farkle this is my brother, Hank.”

Hank doubled over with laughter. “Farkle that’s your name? It sounds like a word for pee pee! So Farkle, you got to farkle, Farkle!”

Farkle’s face reddened with embarrassment and he hid behind Sophia. “Leave him alone, Hank,” Brock corrected blandly though he did have to admit Farkle was a dumb name.

“Stop being Hank!”

“Yeah stop being Hank,” Dean corrected defending his new friend. “Besides he helped me build this castle!”

Hank looked closely at the castle. “Neat, except there isn’t a monster,” Hank said. He stepped closer to it. “No wait I see one.”

“No, I don’t,” Farkle answered. “Where is he?”

“Right here,” Hank said. Then he leaped on the castle standing right in the middle of it. He then made monster like growls and yelled. “Godzilla is destroying the castle!” He then made the Godzilla like growl.

Farkle ran up to Hank, “Stop it!” He yelled approaching the older boy, but Hank continued to kick down the tower and destroyed the battlements. Farkle then kicked the older blond boy in the shin. The rain began to emerge from the sky and drop on the Venture-Minkus boy debacle.

Hank at first was surprised then he approached the younger boy.

“Hey don’t kick my brother,” Dean said angrily to Farkle. Farkle stepped back wondering if Dean was going to hit him for kicking his brother, but Dean then turned to the mess Hank was still making. “Dean, leave it alone,” he commanded. He then hurled himself on top of his brother as the two fought with each other.

“I was just playing, Dean,” Hank said. “You’re such a wuss!”

“Am not,” Dean argued. “You’re a brat!”

“Am not,” Hank countered. He pointed to Farkle. “He’s such a baby!”

“I am not,” Farkle hotly objected.

“You are too,” Hank argued. “You’re still wearing water wings. The baby is a Farkle! The baby is a Farkle!” He danced around the castle as Dean tackled him.

The twins continued to wrestle until a pair of large hands picked them up. Brock picked up the two boys and separated them by his tremendous arms’ width. “Do I have to put you on opposite sides of the beach?”

“No Brock,” the boys both said in unison.

“Well then find a way to play nicely before I clean your clocks,” Brock gave them a low threatening growl.

Farkle stepped away from the castle not wanting anyone, the older boys or Sophia to see him cry. Sophia followed him. “Farkle,” she said his name softly as Brock, Hank, and Dean left. She knelt down next to Farkle and gave him a hug. “It was a very lovely castle and look,” She showed him the text message that she had received. “Your father loved it too.”

She held Farkle closer to her phone so he could read the message: “A great architectural marvel! Good job, son! :D” Farkle smiled knowing that he made his Daddy happy.

Sophia nodded over to where she could see the bar. “Come on, let’s go inside. The rain is starting to come down and I can see your Papa!” She stood up and held out her hand as Farkle took it. The two then approached the bar.

Minkus answered Sophia’s text message about Farkle’s sand castle. As always he was impressed with what his son could do. He texted that it was an architectural marvel. That picture made him smile and momentarily forget his search for his wife. He called and texted Jennifer but she wasn’t in her hotel room. Where was she? After their fight that morning, he did not want to disappoint her
again. He searched for his wife until he came to the outdoor bar. He shook his head. He should have known that Jennifer would be there. Where else would she be? He walked inside the bar and stood next to his wife. Jennifer was drinking a Mai Tai and in deep conversation with a Japanese man dressed in a white tropical pattern shirt. He tapped her on the shoulder. “Jennifer, I have been looking everywhere for you,” he said.

“Oh sorry,” Jennifer giggled. “I was here talking to Mike was it?” she asked. “Apparently, he’s one of your fellow nerds.”

“Mr. Minkus,” the man said shaking his hand. “Mike Suriyama of Suriyama Robotics.” He handed Minkus a card. “I was just speaking to your charming wife. She reminds me a great deal of my girl, Leslie Cohen and—“

“Fine,” Minkus held up his hand and approached Jennifer. “I thought you wanted to spend the day together. Remember we had this whole discussion?”

“Well I got bored waiting for you to be done with your stupid convention,” Jennifer snapped. “I decided to entertain myself.”

“How much entertaining did you do?” Minkus asked. Jennifer looked confused. “How many drinks have you had?”

Mike held up his hands and stepped away obviously not wanting to get in the middle of a spousal argument. Jennifer rolled her eyes. “One,” Minkus looked at his wife clearly not believing her. “Alright two.”

Minkus glanced over at the bartender who shook his head and held up five fingers. Jennifer growled at the two men near her. “What are you a cop? What difference does it make to you?”

“It makes a big difference when you are so smashed that I have to help you walk,” Minkus said trying to keep his temper in, but people were already staring at them. “It makes a big difference when you are drunk off your gourd barely 100 feet from where your son is right now!” He indicated the beach where he could see a blond boy kicking and destroying the sand castle that Farkle built and a taller man, that Minkus remembered was Rusty’s bodyguard Brock Sampson standing next to Sophia watching the destruction. “Do you really want Farkle to see you like this?”

He asked helping his wife off the bar stool.

“Better he sees this than his father dragging his mother around like she was an infant,” Jennifer shouted. “You think that you can order me around? Why because you’re the man of the house?”

She laughed bitterly. “Face it, Stuart I’m more man than you are!” Minkus once again held onto Jennifer, but she pushed herself off. “Let me go! You pathetic spineless excuse for a human being! I saw someone today who was all man, all muscles, and sexiness!” Mike smiled with pride and breathed onto his fingernails before he rubbed them on his shirt in a self-satisfied gesture. Then Jennifer continued. “He had the longest thickest blond hair and muscles that wouldn’t quit!”

Mike’s face fell when he realized that he wasn’t the man that Jennifer described. Jennifer continued with her rant. “He was a man, but you, you are nothing! Just a pathetic loser and you’re turning your own son into a pathetic spineless loser just like you! He already is nothing just like his father, a nothing little baby!”

Minkus was angry enough with his wife to strike her. At this point, he didn’t care if they were in public. Why would Jennifer do this to herself or to them? Did she enjoy causing her husband and son pain?

He looked to the edge of the bar where he could see Sophia and Farkle standing right at the doorway. One look at the boy’s stricken pale face indicated that he heard everything his mother said. Minkus approached his son, “Farkle,” he began.

Instead of coming towards his father, Farkle turned away from him. Sophia tried to hold onto the boy, but he pushed away from her and ran towards the beach. Minkus pushed against Jennifer, Sophia, and other beachgoers who were going inside huts, shops, bars, and restraints to get dry from the storm to follow his son. He paid no attention to the lifeguard’s yell through her megaphone. “Do not go into the water! Repeat do not go into the water!”

Farkle paid no attention as he ran into the water without any floatation devices. He heard his father
call to him. “Farkle, get out of there now,” Minkus begged as he entered the water himself to pull his son to safety.

“I’m not a baby,” Farkle objected as he tried to swim closer to the deep end of the ocean.

“I know you aren’t Farkle,” Minkus gasped out of breath with trying to keep up with the rough waters and hold onto his son at the same time. A difficult feat considering that Minkus was not a good swimmer either. No sooner did he get a hold of his son than a wave covered the two holding them under for a few seconds. Minkus was the first to emerge. “Farkle,” he yelled, but then saw his son cough and sputter a few feet from him.

“Daddy help me,” Farkle called. “I’m scared!”

“It’s alright son,” Minkus said trying to swim to his side. “Daddy has you and he won’t let go!” He was about to touch his hand when another wave pushed the two further from each other.

Salt water entered Minkus’ throat and eyes. He felt like he couldn’t breathe. He struggled to keep his head above water and his eyes on Farkle, but he couldn’t see where he was. Farkle was no longer in his line of sight. “Farkle, Farkle!” he called trying to swim to look for his son. He tried to swim forward but he felt a pressure hold onto him. “Worry about yourself right now,” a low voice said over the wind and waves. Minkus coughed as Brock Sampson held onto him and swam towards the shore.

Minkus wasn’t worried about himself. Brock was built like a submarine, they were able to avoid the waves. But he continued to look around for Farkle. “Where is my son?”

“She has him,” Brock said nodding at Sophia who swam to shore holding an unconscious Farkle in her arms.

Sophia and Brock landed on the beach placing Minkus and Farkle on the ground. Minkus stood up feeling a head rush. “Thank you,” he said to Brock and Sophia. They nodded as Minkus ran to his son’s side. “Come on wake up, son,” he begged silently.

A crowd had gathered from the huts around the beach. Jennifer had originally been frozen to the bar frightened at the sight of her husband and son drowning. Instead she ran to the beach as sobbing. “Let him be okay, let my baby be okay!” She continued to cry.

Sophia opened Farkle’s mouth and lightly pumped on his chest. She counted down as she pumped again. Minkus stood up and held Jennifer in his arms as she continued to sob.

Dean and Hank ran to Brock’s side with their father, Rusty close behind. “What’s going on, Brock?” Brock held up his hand for quiet as Sophia continued to breathe into Farkle.

Jennifer winced and buried herself in her husband’s arms. There was a tense second until Farkle coughed water out of his mouth and opened his eyes. “Mommy, Daddy,” he asked weakly.

There was a great sigh of relief as Sophia helped the boy to sit up and patted him on the back. Minkus gently let go of Jennifer and knelt next to Farkle. “Are you okay, son?” Minkus asked.

Farkle nodded. “I won’t go into the deep end again, I promise!”

“No until I teach you to swim better,” Minkus said. “Until I teach myself how to swim better.” He hugged his son tightly.

“This shouldn’t have happened at all,” Jennifer’s sharp voice interrupted the sweet moment. Farkle and Minkus pulled away from their embrace.

Rusty nodded at Brock and his sons as if indicating that it was a private moment. The others followed him out of the beach.

Jennifer angrily turned to Sophia. “Why weren’t you watching him?” She yelled at the nanny.

“I was watching him, Mrs. Minkus,” Sophia objected. “He just ran off!”

“Jennifer she just saved his life,” Minkus argued.

“And because of her it almost ended,” Jennifer countered. Neither Sophia nor Minkus wanted to state the obvious, that it was running from the sight of seeing his intoxicated mother calling him names that caused Farkle to run off in the first place. Minkus knew that his wife was looking for someone to blame for this accident and it wasn’t going to be herself. She elected Sophia to take the fall for Farkle’s near drowning and her own lapse in parenting.
“Mrs. Minkus,” Sophia objected. “I have been doing my best!”

“Well it’s just not good enough is it,” Jennifer sneered. “I’m going to have to let you go, right
now!”

“Jennifer, we’re in Hawaii,” Minkus reminded her. “Can’t she at least finish the trip with us? How
is she going to get home otherwise?”

Jennifer snorted. “Can you say, ‘Not my problem?’ I don’t want that woman traveling with us or
our son any longer!” She turned back to Sophia. “Get your things and leave the hotel
immediately?” Sophia lingered for a second as if in shock. “Did you hear what I said? Get your
things!”

Sophia tried to keep her anger and tears in check as she packed her bags. She acknowledged the
knock on her door. “Who is it?” she asked.

“It’s Mr. Minkus,” the voice of her male former employer said. Sophia sighed and opened the door.
Stuart visibly paled and looked sorrowful, but he was all business and professional.
Obviously he had been through this before. “I am truly sorry, Sophia. I have no fault in your duties
and you have been wonderful with Farkle.”

Sophia nodded. “Thank you, Mr. Minkus.”

“Thank you for saving his life. I would like to give you your final paycheck in addition to any
severance,” he said.

Sophia nodded. Other domestics at the agency mentioned that Stuart Minkus was often very
generous with payments, particularly final payments. None were sure whether it was because he
was simply a kind and generous man or he wanted to avoid potential negative publicity or lawsuits.
Observing him in action, Sophia guessed it was a bit of both.
Minkus bent down and wrote Sophia a check for her final payment. He handed her the check which
was three times what she usually made for a regular work period.

“Thank you, Mr. Minkus,” Sophia breathed in surprise. “This is most generous.”

“Are you alright?” Minkus asked. “Do you need any assistance for your flight? I can make
arrangements-“

Sophia shook her head. “It is alright, sir. I have already exchanged my ticket for one for tomorrow
morning.”

Minkus nodded. “That’s good. I will certainly give you a reference. What will you do now?”

“Well I will check out of the hotel, then probably spend the day on the beach and the night at the
airport,” Sophia said.

“That sounds dangerous,” Minkus suggested.

“I will be fine, sir,” Sophia replied firmly.

Minkus continued to ask. “Will you need any help when you return to New York for another job or
a place to live?”

Sophia held up her hand. “Mr. Minkus, I will be fine. I am grateful that I am not a live-in. I already
have an apartment and I am sure another job will come up. You need not concern yourself with
me.” She looked down at her check and her luggage saying something that she did not want to say
aloud, but knew had to be said. “I am more concerned for you than I am for myself.”

Minkus nodded. He knew what she was talking about. He stuck out his hand. “Thank you, Sophia.
I have enjoyed having you work for us.”

“I have enjoyed working for you and looking after Farkle,” Sophia said returning the handshake.
She closed her suitcase with a decided snap as Minkus left the hotel room.

Sophia locked her hotel room door and headed for the lobby allowing the tears to finally fall. Even
though she had an air of confidence, the emotions overwhelmed her. She was worried about where
her next job would come from. She was also worried about the future of Farkle and his father
forever in the clutches of that horrible woman. She tried to hold her feelings in, but gulped with
sobs as she walked down the hallway.

“Hey, Aqua Girl,” a voice called. Sophia looked up to see Brock Sampson leaning out the hallway
to the ground below defiantly smoking despite the No Smoking sign in front of him. “Good swimming you did with the kid.”

“Thank you,” Sophia replied. “You’re weren’t so bad yourself with the father.”

“Just doing my job and so were you,” Brock answered. “You look like you could use a drink.” He nodded beckoning towards the nanny with an unmistakable expression. Despite her earlier sadness, Sophia couldn’t help but smile and walk towards Brock. After all, she didn’t have anywhere to be until the next morning.

Minkus opened his and Jennifer’s hotel room door where Jennifer stared icily as he closed it. “Farkle,” Minkus bent down. Farkle had been sitting quietly at the table looking at his parents with fear like a war victim watching the sky in dread and anticipation for the next air strike, used to it but terrified when it came. “Why don’t you go back into your hotel room?”

“Why should he leave?” Jennifer asked. “You don’t want him to hear that his father just fucked his nanny?”

Rather than respond right away to his wife’s accusation, Minkus immediately shepherded his son out of the hotel room and into his own promising that he will see him as soon as possible. He then locked the room and returned to face his wife.

“I am not having an affair with Sophia Andreas,” Minkus insisted.

“You were alone with her,” Jennifer accused.

“For all of two minutes just to give her severance check,” Minkus objected. “I barely had time to sit down let alone unzip my fly.”

“Even if you did, she would laugh at what a little fly it is,” Jennifer mocked.

Minkus rolled his eyes. For a beautiful woman, Jennifer had one of the dirtiest mouths. “No wonder you try to act so big and wealthy, it’s to cover up how small everything else is,” Jennifer laughed.

Minkus turned away not wanting to hear anymore. “Jennifer that’s enough!”

Jennifer poked her husband on the shoulder. “Oh no, it’s not enough! I’ve only just begun!” She continued to poke him. “Big Money CEO Businessman, huh! Big money only because of his wife’s money.” She said the last words in mock sympathy knowing that this was a sore point with Minkus’ pride. “You try to act so big in front of everyone so no one could see how small you really are!” She poked him again on the shoulder as Minkus continued to walk away. Each time she poked him, the pokes got harder, fiercer, and more painful. “A stupid small little man living off of his wife! You. Stupid. Small. Little. Man.”

Minkus whirled around and looked angrily at his wife as she laughed again. “Oh did I hurt it? Does she want to come out and play, Stewie? Can you finally get it up?” He turned away and was about to open the door. “I’m not finished!” Jennifer shouted. Minkus held open the door and was about to open it further when he heard Jennifer hiss. “You come back in here or I go into the next room to have a little ‘talk’ with that brat of yours!” Minkus sighed and closed the door facing his wife.

“Who’s going to stop me,” Jennifer asked. “My Hobbit of a husband?” She laughed and approached the door but Minkus grabbed her wrists to keep her from moving. “Let me go, Stuart,” she begged speaking extremely loudly.

Her voice instantly changed to one of power and dominance into one of fear. “Please, let me go, Stuart.” She said her eyes filling with tears and continued to raise her voice. She shouted again about him letting her go and how sorry she was. Confused at her quick change in emotion, Minkus relaxed his grip on her. This gave Jennifer an instant advantage as she quickly reached over and socked her husband on the eye.

Surprised by the blow, Minkus collapsed on the floor holding his hand over his eye and silently shaking. He rocked back and forth rather than looking at his wife. Jennifer knelt down and taunted.
“You want to hit me, Stewie?” She whispered harshly. “Go ahead, fight me back you little worm! Do it!” She poked him speaking harshly each time. “Do it, hit me!” Minkus continued to resist shaking his head and not looking at her. Jennifer pulled him by the hair and so he could look straight at her. Then she punched him again so he fell right into the dresser. The fact that Stuart wouldn’t hit her incensed Jennifer more than if he had.

Minkus slowly got up to stand as Jennifer stepped back again speaking in that very dramatic frightened voice. “No Stuart, don’t hurt me! I’m sorry I drank so much earlier, it’s all my fault! But that shouldn’t justify-No Stuart! Please don’t hurt me, think of Farkle!” Minkus stood in silence looking at his wife. Before he could react, Jennifer again headed for the door. “No Stuart, don’t hurt Farkle not my baby!” Jennifer opened the door and Minkus closed it behind her. He approached her again as Jennifer backed off. There must have been some kind of protective look on behalf of Farkle that Stuart must have shown because Jennifer dropped the theatrics and genuinely looked frightened. Her hands clenched in fists but before she had a chance to use them, she lost her footing on the edge of the bed and fell over.

She grunted in pain and grabbed the edge of the bed to stand. Before she could make another move, a severe kick filled the bedroom. “Mr. and Mrs. Minkus, Honolulu Police open up!” The husband and wife looked warily at each other as Jennifer opened the door a crack. Two male police officers, one younger and blond and the other, an older Polynesian man stood in the hallway. The gray haired man spoke first. “Mrs. Minkus?” Jennifer nodded. “I’m Lt. Tan and this is Sgt. Wilby. We are here because some of the other guests have complained about a domestic disturbance.”

“I don’t know what they’re talking about,” Jennifer said as she attempted to close the door. “People were reporting raised voices and bumps sounding like there was hitting involved,” Lt. Tan began.

Jennifer looked downward and spoke. “Oh well my husband and I were rather intoxicated and—“

“There is no need to protect him,” Sgt. Wilby said glaring at Minkus. Lt. Tan looked clearly annoyed at Wilby’s presumption. “May we come inside?”

Jennifer sighed and rolled her eyes bidding them to enter. The police officers observed the room looking for signs of a struggle. Sgt. Wilby looked at the couple all business and accusatory and Tan looked more concerned, but they both looked at Minkus with obvious hostility.

Lt. Tan asked. “Can either of you tell us what happened?”

Neither Jennifer nor Stuart spoke right away. Jennifer’s lip shook and Minkus stood in the corner. Sgt. Wilby spoke more forcefully. “One of the guests on this floor heard a woman’s voice telling her husband not to hurt her and it came from this room.” He walked over to Minkus and glared. “You wouldn’t know anything about it would you?”

Jennifer was about to say something when Minkus stared at the officers incredulously. He pointed at his face which clearly had two bruises and blood trickling down. “Um excuse me, I’m the one who’s bruised here!”

“Which you clearly got from your wife defending herself,” the blond sergeant accused. “There have also been reports that you two had a public altercation downstairs at the hotel bar.” Tan glared at Minkus. “Were you drinking?”

“No, she was,” Minkus said. Jennifer looked shocked that her husband would say such a thing. “He would say that,” Jennifer chimed in, her voice sounding frightened and shaken.

“Listen scum,” Wilby said. “I know you’re one of those rich types but if I found out you hurt your wife, I would let you see how it feels!”

“Simmer down, sergeant,” Tan said. He turned to Jennifer. “Is that what happened? We can protect you.”

Minkus felt the room spin. It was obvious that he was the one who was beaten, that he and Jennifer had argued in public. Anyone who was at the bar knew that it was Jennifer who was drunk not him. He looked at the accusing faces of his wife and the police officers. Both of the officers looked
at him like they wanted to slap the cuffs on him right away. Jennifer had a brief smirk, but quickly changed it to one of fear.

Minkus quickly sized the situation. He knew that he would have no allies in this situation. He heard enough domestic abuse stories about abusive husbands and innocent wives. The stories were appalling. How many had he heard where the situation was reversed? Almost none and the few he had heard were like this. Police were called in and the male party was always arrested. Stuart and Jennifer Minkus got into a fight with raised voices and there were sounds of a scuffle. Stuart Minkus was the man, enough was said. He knew that he would never be believed, now or ever.

Before Minkus could say anything, Jennifer began. “We were both intoxicated actually,” Jennifer said her voice shaking. “We got into a bit of a fight that got heated and-“ She glanced solidly at Stuart. “Stuart and then I fell at different times, isn’t that right?” She looked at Stuart with an obvious look of dominance, as though she could program him with just a look.

Stuart nodded. “Yes that’s what happened,” he agreed. “I think we were both a little too excited tonight. We promise to behave ourselves for the rest of the night.” Jennifer nodded.

The police officers glanced at each other in silence, and then at the couple. It was clear it was a losing battle. “Alright,” Lt. Tan said. “We’ll be off. But for the sake of everyone else and out of respect for the guests, please keep it down.”

“We don’t want to come back here again,” Wilby glared. Tan cleared his throat and the two left the married couple in the room.


“I won’t,” Stuart promised. And he wouldn’t. Jennifer had something that she could always use: that no matter what happened preceding a fight between them, no matter how many bruises that Stuart would have on his face or how many drinks Jennifer had beforehand. To the outside world Jennifer would always be seen as the victim and Stuart, the abuser. She had threatened that after Farkle was born, but this was no longer a hollow threat. This was a real hurtful event that could become even more hurtful if Stuart didn’t play along.

Stuart sighed and gathered his pajamas and an extra blanket and pillow. “I’m going to go sleep in Farkle’s room tonight.” He was afraid for a minute there, that Jennifer would stop him. He winced as the bruise hurt his face. Blood had trickled near his eye making things difficult to see. He absentely picked up an ice bucket and a dish cloth so he could put some ice on his eye.

“Go ahead,” Jennifer said flopping on the bed and waving her hand in a manner like a lady dismissing her servant.

Minkus nodded and mouthed okay. He was about to leave the room when he held the door open.

“Jennifer the weather report said that there was going to be some more rain tonight. The roads will be treacherous. Don’t, um, don’t drive anywhere tonight.”

“I wasn’t going to,” Jennifer said rolling her eyes as though it was an absurd notion.

Minkus walked towards the freezer and poured ice inside the bucket. He sighed as he sat down on a plastic chair that was used for gazing out at the beach. The chair was wet, so Minkus balanced his pajamas and bed sheets on his lap as he placed the ice inside the dish cloth and patted it on his eye and cheek. His knees still shook from his fight with Jennifer and he sighed with exhaustion and spent emotions. Out of his good eye, he could see the night sky over the ocean waves. The waves beat in and out in an almost tonal rhythm that joined with the palm trees swaying in the wind. In the horizon, Minkus could still see the clouds that had covered the night sky barring the view of the moon and stars. Lightning in the sky promised more storms to come. Minkus shook his head at the irony. People have often dreamt, saved, and struggled to visit Hawaii considering it some sort of Paradise on Earth where they could rekindle a romance or be close to nature. Now here was Stuart Minkus in this so-called Paradise and he was as miserable as he would have been if he had remained in New York. It never failed. When one is miserable, they take their misery with them no matter where they are.

Minkus let the ice and water sooth his bruise until he felt that it was wet enough. Then he sat up
ready to go into Farkle’s bedroom. He fished in his pocket for the hotel key that the manager allowed him to keep in Sophia’s absence. He propped his things under one arm and was about to place the key in his son’s hotel room when a sarcastic voice interrupted him. “So how’s it going between you and the Mrs.?”

Minkus looked at the top of the stairs where Rusty Venture leaned over a railing, a mocking grin on his face. After what happened earlier between the two geniuses, Minkus knew that the last person that he wanted to talk to was Rusty Venture, so he was about to walk away from him. Rusty then sauntered down the stairs so he could be at eye level with his competitor. Minkus turned away rather than speak again. “Hey you didn’t answer my question.” Minkus still wouldn’t answer so Rusty continued to needle him. “So where did the bruise come from? The wife left more than a hickey?”

“Leave me alone, Dr. Venture,” Minkus said. After their encounter, Minkus looked on the Internet about more of the history of Venture Industries after Jonas’ death. The company certainly took a downward spiral after his son took it over and there was certainly a lot that Minkus could say. But right now, he was too spent to try. Once again he put the key in Farkle’s room lock and was about to turn it when Rusty interrupted him again. “ ‘Leave me alone’ is all you can say?” Rusty mocked. “I would have thought that the Hero of the Convention would say more than that.” He put up his hands as if in defeat. “But I guess that’s to be expected from a stupid small little man hiding behind a Big Money CEO’.” Minkus whirled around angrily to face Rusty. It wasn’t the words that Rusty said that angered him, well mostly not them. It was the way Rusty said them like he was quoting them from someone else like he was quoting what Jennifer had said earlier. “You heard her?” Minkus asked.

“I think the whole floor heard her,” Rusty said dryly. Minkus’ mouth dropped open. “Then if the floor heard what was going on than they could have told the police that she hurt me! Why didn’t they?” Rusty crossed his arms and scoffed. “I think most people have selective hearing. They only hear what they want to hear. They heard a woman beg her husband not to hurt her and they heard what sounded like someone being pushed around. Everything before that suddenly became immaterial. What more was there to hear?”

Minkus then looked accusingly at Venture. “You heard everything why didn’t you tell them?” Rusty laughed bitterly. “Look just because your wife has your nuts in a grinder doesn’t mean that you have to take it out on me! I needed my beauty sleep and I live a careful regiment of not giving a damn!” Minkus rolled his eyes and turned away from Rusty but the balding super scientist followed him. “The real question is why didn’t you? It was your wife, your fight, and I think it’s your kid in the other room! Why didn’t you say anything?”

“It’s complicated,” Minkus mumbled under his breath. “What’s complicated about it?” Rusty said. “This may shock you but you’re a dude! Men are supposed to be genetically stronger than women. You should be able to stand up to her.” Minkus was about to say something when Rusty interrupted him. “And don’t give me this crap about how-“his voice dripped with sarcasm. “-You’re a gentlemen and gentlemen won’t hit a girl!”” His voice then sounded normal. “You can bet that if it were my situation and my-“He hesitated, but spoke again. “Let’s say whether it was man, woman, kid, or a three-toed sloth that wouldn’t stop me. Unless of course you cannot fight a woman. That’s entirely possible!”

Minkus glared at the other scientist becoming more irritated with this conversation, partly because these were things that Minkus had been telling himself since Jennifer punched him and broke his cell phone long ago when they were engaged. For six years he had been asking the same questions and making the same mistakes and never finding a conclusion. Instead of admitting it, Minkus took the offense. “Said the man with a bodyguard who’s built like a tank! I highly doubt you have ever done your own fighting, Rusty!” He emphasized Rusty Venture’s name to put them on the same level.

“If I were you, Minkus, I wouldn’t be talking about what a person is and is not able to do on their
own,” Rusty sneered. “You know like running a company!”
Minkus stared at Venture in anger and shock. “Everything I ever got I earned myself!”
“And your wife’s family had nothing to do with it,” Rusty said sarcastically. “I did a little research.
I wasn’t aware that Edward Bassett was in the pimping business! But figures why not whore out
his son-in-law!”
That was going too far. Minkus decided to go for the jugular. “I may have become an international
company because of my father-in-law, but at least I am making my company a success! I’m not
dragging my company down just to live up to, or no doubt down his father’s reputation.” Minkus
was satisfied that he saw a similar look of anger and hurt in Rusty’s eyes as his face tried to show
the sardonic disdain. “You’re not the only one who can do research.” Rusty stood in silence as
Minkus continued while he unlocked the hotel room door. “Let’s face it, Rusty. The only reason
that you’re trying to get to me is because my company is on top and yours isn’t. We’re like a pair
of scales, I’m up you’re down. So, here’s a bit of advice from me to you: enjoy the downside.
You’re going to be there awhile.” Minkus gave Venture the same wink that he gave him at the
Convention and he slammed the door in the superscientist’s face.

Minkus leaned against the door for a minute then threw the extra pillow and bed sheets on the
spare bed vacated by Sophia. He quickly crept into the bathroom so as not to wake Farkle. The boy
was already asleep. Obviously the excitement of the day and the incident in the water completely
wore him out. He was sound asleep on his bed. Minkus gently patted his son on the hair before he
turned on the bathroom light. As Minkus changed into his pajamas, he examined the bruises on his
face. His eye was still swollen and his cheek was red and tender. The blood had caked on his nose.
Minkus continued to soothe and nurse the bruises with ice not wanting to look at them in the mirror.
Rusty’s words came back to haunt him. They hurt because in his heart, Minkus believed them.
Stuart Minkus had allowed his father-in-law to take his business and Jennifer to hurt him, and
Stuart became rich because of them. What could be more whorish than that? Minkus prostituted
his talents, his business, his safety, and himself to Jennifer and her family. That simple truth hurt
him as much as Jennifer’s fists did. He hurt himself just as easily as Jennifer did. She was right he
was really was a small stupid little man hiding behind a Big Money CEO mantle. He deserved
whatever she gave him. The emotions that he felt all day filled Minkus at once as he let himself cry
softly in the bathroom.
The tears caused the bruises to hurt, so Minkus willed himself to stop. He washed his hands and
wiped off the excess blood and tears from his face and gave his injuries one last bit of soothing.
Then he turned off the light and practically fell into bed.

Minkus didn’t sleep long when he heard a blanket from a nearby bed drop on the floor, a pair of
little feet pitter patter on the carpet, and felt a small weight crawl into bed next to him and two
small arms cling to his torso frantically. Pretending that Farkle just woke him up, Minkus flipped
on the table lamp. “Is something wrong?” Minkus asked innocently.
“Yes I know,” Minkus said thinking that Farkle was talking about earlier. “But I came after you
and Miss Sophia and Mr. Sampson saved you. You’re okay now.”
“But Godzilla was chasing me after he destroyed our castle and Mommy told me to go into the
water in the deep end and you weren’t there and I drowned.”
Minkus held his son closely and whispered comforting words to him. He understood now. Farkle
was talking about a dream. “It’s alright son,” He said. “It was just a dream. I’m here for you. I will
always keep you from drowning.”
“Even if you can’t swim?” Farkle asked his Daddy. “Like today?”
“Especially when I can’t swim,” Minkus said determined. “Though I think that Miss Sophia and
Mr. Sampson were the real heroes today.”
Farkle nodded. “But you went in there first,” Farkle said.
Minkus hugged his son tightly. “Well I’d rather go down trying to save you than standing at the
shore wishing that I had.”

Farkle lay silent in his father’s arms listening to his heartbeat. He lay so quietly that Minkus thought he had fallen asleep. The sounds of pleased moaning came from another room. Minkus rolled his eyes thinking that some people had no shame to keep their pleasures to themselves. He became even more annoyed when it occurred to him which direction that the noise was coming from. His thoughts were confirmed when he heard the woman moan, “Oh Mike!” As in Suriyama no doubt, Minkus sarcastically thought.

“They’re pretty loud,” Farkle said.

“You want me to turn the TV on distract us from them?” Minkus asked. Farkle nodded as Minkus flipped it on to the Weather Channel silently hoping that Farkle didn’t make the connection that the noises were coming from his mother’s hotel room nor would he ask what the noises were about. He had a feeling that Jennifer, aware that her husband was sleeping in their son’s hotel room, was purposely giving Minkus an earful.

“Daddy,” Farkle said his voice hovering between asleep and awake as peaceful New Age music played among blue screens showing temperatures around the country.

“What?” Minkus asked.

“I was really mad when Hank Venture broke our sand castle,” Farkle said.

“I wouldn’t blame you for being mad,” Minkus said. “You and Dean worked hard on it.”

“I even hit him a couple of times,” Farkle admitted.

“You should never hit someone Farkle,” Minkus said.

“Even if they do something to be mean or they make me mad?” Farkle asked.

“Especially then,” Minkus said.

“Why not?” Farkle asked.

Minkus hesitated. “Because that’s what they want you to do and when you hit them, all it will show is that the other person got to you,” He said.

“Does Mommy ever make you mad enough to hit her?” Farkle asked. “I think she hurts you as much as Hank hurt me when he broke my castle. Do you ever hit Mommy?”

Farkle leaned on his father’s shoulder and Minkus held him closely. He draped one arm around Farkle’s waist and then used his other hand to smooth back his son’s hair. “Yes sometimes Mommy does make me mad when she hurts me, but I don’t hit her. Because I don’t want to show her that she got to me.”

“So what do you do when Mommy makes you mad?” Farkle asked.

Minkus kissed the top of his son’s head. “Sometimes the only thing you can do when someone does or says something to you that is walk away from it. Don’t ever let them see that they hurt you and keep it as much inside of you as you possibly can.”

“But in your room, you told Mommy that she wasn’t going to come after me,” Farkle said. “You didn’t walk away then.”

“I didn’t because I knew that she would take her anger out on you,” Minkus said. “As long as she’s hurting me, she’s not coming after you.” He kissed the top of his son’s head. “I’d rather Mommy hit me 100 times over than hit you once. I’d rather she call me a dictionary full of bad names than even say one even remotely bad thing about you.”

“So you keep it inside you so it’s not inside me,” Farkle said.

“Just like that,” Minkus said as he settled Farkle in so he could be more comfortable. He wondered if Farkle would return to his bed, but he had a feeling that the boy was in for the night. Minkus maneuvered himself so he could be a bit more comfortable though it was hard to do with a four year old so close. He managed to settle both himself and his son in.

When Minkus finally felt exhaustion begin to fill him, he heard his son call his name again.

“Daddy.”

“Yes, Farkle?” Minkus asked.

“I wish that you didn’t have to keep it inside you either,” Farkle said. Minkus at first didn’t understand what Farkle meant then he remembered. Farkle was saying that he wished Minkus
didn’t have to hold his anger in at Jennifer to protect Farkle. Minkus was touched at his son’s loyalty. “Thank you, Farkle,” he said. “I wish I didn’t either.”

Rusty, Dean, Hank, and Brock headed for the X-1 reminiscing about the recent trip which involved saving the Venture Bros. from Baron Underbheit. “You think that most villains would be smart enough not to put their hideout in volcano,” Rusty mocked. “But nooo! It never occurs to them that there isn’t any oxygen inside and they could suffocate.” Of course Underbheit was rescued by his allies Magic 8 Ball, Girl Hitler, and Servant and Underbheit left with the standard “Curse you, Rusty Venture!”

“Well what do you expect,” Brock said. “I don’t think that there are that many volcanos in Umlaut,” He said referring to Underbheit’s dictatorial society.

“Which reminds me,” Rusty said. “Where were you at the start of our adventure the other night?” Brock removed the cigarette from his lips. “Oh Minkus’ ex-nanny got fired and she was upset to be going home.”

“And you helped her?” Rusty said not believing his macho bodyguard suddenly became Joe Sensitive.

“Well when she left for her flight the next morning, she was pretty satisfied,” Brock said with his usual cool swagger indicating what had happened.

“Brock you hound,” Rusty taunted giving his bodyguard a fist bump. Rusty then nodded into their direction. “Speaking of, looks like the Kid’s not so hot in the morning!” He nodded as Brock looked to the small family.

Jennifer walked ahead of her husband and son, carrying nothing. Minkus on the other hand had his arms full of not only Jennifer’s suitcases, but several bags and boxes. They dangled off his arms and some were even toted on his back. He carried one inside his teeth. Farkle held onto his father’s forearm as he carried his own suitcase. “Hurry up, Stuart,” Jennifer demanded. “We have to get on our flight.”

“Yes Jennifer,” Minkus mumbled though his voice was hard to understand with the shopping bag in his teeth.

“Yes Jennifer,” Rusty mocked. “You’re right about one thing, Brock. People like Minkus don’t need an arch nemesis. Looks like Minkus is married to his!” He mocked. Minkus met Rusty’s eye. Neither the superscientist nor his bodyguard could resist as Brock made a whipping motion and Rusty held a fist in the palm of his hand and made a grinding motion. Minkus ignored the two.

Seated on the return flight to New York, Minkus practically collapsed with relief. After the incident with the police, Minkus returned to Jennifer’s room and apologized for making her angry and upset and causing a scene. That led to the rest of the trip for Minkus filling his wife’s desires (when he wasn’t attending the convention lectures or the keynote dinner on the final night): taking her shopping, buying her clothing and jewelry going dancing, dining out, and clubbing with her and spending more than a great deal of money on her. He wasn’t sure but the money was probably GDP of a small country.

Sometimes Farkle was with them clearly bored out of his skull but playing mobile device games. Other times he was watched by some of the hotel staff that Jennifer paid to watch him.

Minkus felt like a cliché: the henpecked husband with his arms full of his wife’s shopping bags. But what else could he do? It beat Jennifer becoming angry and hitting him or especially hurting Farkle.

Jennifer was asleep in her seat, an eye mask covering her vision. She was hung over from a marathon session of tropical drinks the night before. Minkus glanced over at Farkle’s seat. The boy was seated alone looking at his MIMS.5 Minkus felt extremely guilty. Since he went out of his way to please Jennifer, Farkle really was unable to have hardly any fun on this trip. He never got to do the things that Minkus promised that he would do like take him sailing and they never got to swim together. Minkus gingerly undid his seatbelt when the flight attendant gave permission to move around the cabin. He then sat next to Farkle. “Hey,” he said.
“Hey,” Farkle answered.
“You know, you never did tell me about your castle,” Minkus said.
“What castle?” Farkle asked.
“The one that you and Dean built,” Minkus said. “What’s it called? What’s the kingdom like? Who’s the king? Is he a tyrant or a good ruler?”
“I don’t know,” Farkle said. “It’s just a sand castle.”
“Well you put that much effort into it, then there has to be a story behind it,” Minkus said encouraging him. “Come on give it a try. What’s the castle’s name?” He then showed Farkle the pictures that Sophia sent him of the sand castle.
Farkle shrugged. “I don’t know, Farkledean!”
“Farkledean,” Minkus said. “That’s a good name and it’s in the kingdom of…..Minkaven!” He waited for a second as Farkle began to smile. “Of course the most important builder gets his name first!”
Farkle couldn’t resist a giggle.
“Farkle I am trying to sleep.” Jennifer called sharply from her seat.
For some reason, his mother’s words made Farkle giggle again. But this time, he made his laughter quieter.
“Okay so who’s the king of Farkledean in the kingdom of Minkaven?” Minkus asked trying to pick up the story for his son to continue.
“Well he’s really wise and smart,” Farkle said. “Lots of people say he’s a genius!”
“And is he?” Minkus asked.
Farkle nodded. “He makes all of these really neat inventions and he is very good at science so people have lots of good medicine and don’t get sick and they go to school and learn lots of stuff.”
“Wow,” Minkus said. “Sounds like a really great place to live. Now tell me about the prince, the king’s son.”
“How do you know the king has a son?” Farkle asked.
“Well there’s no point in building a kingdom if there isn’t a son to inherit it someday is there?” Minkus asked.
Farkle shrugged. “I guess you’re right well anyway, he does have a son. Well one day the king and the prince heard about this monster that was going to destroy the castle…. So Minkus listened as Farkle told his father of the adventures of Castle Farkledean in the kingdom of Minkaven the way home.
Chapter Summary

While the cat's away...Jennifer goes off with a new paramour and Stuart and Farkle bond over movies, books, and a chance to view the stars.

Jennifer put on lipstick admiring her reflection in the mirror while Farkle entered their apartment.

“Hi Mommy,” Farkle said excited.

“Hello Honey,” Jennifer said not taking her eyes off the mirror.

Farkle began chatting away about his day at school while he set his bookbag down in the closet.

“We had reading and Miss Bell didn’t believe that I could read the whole book and bigger books with chapters, so she made me stop reading and listen to the other kids.”

“Well Farkle sometimes people especially teachers don’t want children learning so much right away,” Jennifer said feigning interest as she dabbed some eyeliner on her eyes. “It makes them embarrassed, so you probably shouldn’t tell them.” She critically eyed her reflection up and down. She was tastefully dressed in a white knit blouse, navy blue leggings, and white sandals. Her hair hung simply with a blue headband.

Her body was still fit even after having given birth five years ago. She scanned her face for any age lines or crow’s feet. She caught some faint lines near her eyes. When she returned from her trip, she was going to have to ask Stuart to pay for cosmetic surgery. Of course Stuart would waffle and say that she looked beautiful, but what did he know? In four years, Jennifer would be 30! It wasn’t the time to be looking old just yet. Maybe she should get her nose fixed again. She hadn’t had it done since high school.

“But if I already know things then why can’t I tell people,” Farkle asked interrupting his mother’s intense gaze at her reflection.

Jennifer rolled her eyes and returned to the subject at hand. What was it? Oh yes Farkle and the reading. “Farkle, don’t you want to fit in with other kids?” Jennifer said. “You don’t want to be a loner freak like your father do you? You want to have friends don’t you?”

Farkle shrugged. “I guess so.” He didn’t have any close friends. It was kind of lonely with having only Rexy and his other toys to talk to when he came home.

“Then you have to fit in,” Jennifer said. “To do that you can’t show them how weird you are. People like you when you act normal like them.”

She glanced at her watch. In about two hours, Stuart would come home and she would go to Martha’s Vineyard with her friends. She was looking forward to it, especially her time with Alexander Withersby, a handsome and divorced art dealer that she met at a recent gallery opening. Like her, he came from an old money family and had a fine appreciation for the good life. They began talking about things that they had in common, similar tastes in music, fine wine, gourmet cooking, and nightclubs. One thing led to another and they ended up in Alexander’s bed at the Plaza. Now they were going to continue their liason in a remote location. She shivered audibly. She felt like Anna Karenina heading off for a rendezvous with Count Vronsky or Madame Bovary arranging a couer d’affaire with Rodolphe. Of course those women ended up dead, but Jennifer would never make that mistake. She would have Alexander and when she was no longer satisfied
with him, she would leave. Two hours later, Jennifer was starting to become impatient. Where was Stuart and where was Alexander? Typical men run on their own standard time. Jennifer opened a bottle of Wine Zinfandel in her kitchen and began to drink. While she had been drinking regularly at social occasions, since high school, she noticed that her drinking had increased since she and Stuart had moved to New York. At first it was to ignore the butterflies that she felt in a new location where the Bassett family name carried no more than a faint sense of interest than in Philadelphia where they were practically deified. Then it became to cope with disappointments for example after angling for invitations and coming up short or after disagreements with her husband over money. Lately she had been drinking alone to overcome the stress and ennui of being stuck at home with a husband and son that she didn’t understand and who clearly didn’t understand her. When Stuart and Farkle talked to each other, she felt an urge to check the dictionary for the definitions of most of their words. She couldn’t help, but feel left out of their world. The more they talked and bonded, the more irritated that she became with them. The more irritated that she was, the more she drank. The more she drank, the more unpredictable her behavior became.

Farkle leaned against the glass table with his coloring book. He reached for an orange crayon inside his red box. His elbow leaned against a tea rose bone china vase. The vase began to tipple. Farkle reached for the vase, but it was too late. The vase beat against the side and fell on the ground. Farkle closed his eyes but when he opened them the shattered remains of the vase still lay on the floor.

Jennifer reentered the living room at the sound of the breaking. She screamed and turned to Farkle. “You little shit!” She slapped her son hard on the cheek. “Can’t you do anything right?” Farkle screamed as Jennifer turned him around and whacked him on the bottom five times. “Go and clean it up,” she commanded. Farkle obeyed and returned to the living room with a broom, dustpan, and sponge. He had learned how to clean up after messes that he or Mommy made right away. Because he knew if he didn’t do it, it would just stay there and Mommy would get even more mad.

“Farkle you are such a useless nothing,” Jennifer said. “If you aren’t more careful, people won’t like you. They can’t trust you if you break their things.”

“I’m sorry Mommy,” Farkle said as he cleaned up. “It was an accident.”

“Having you was an accident,” Jennifer retorted sharply.

“Do you still like me even though I broke the vase?” Farkle asked as he threw away the mess.

“I like you only when you are good and quiet and you don’t break things,” Jennifer answered.

“Your father only likes you then too! We don’t like boys who are loud and clumsy!”

Farkle lowered his head in shame. Daddy didn’t like him either? “I’m sorry, Mommy.”

“Well it won’t bring back my vase now will it,” Mommy said. She took a deep breath. “I’m sorry for getting mad Farkle, but you know you have to be careful with things that don’t belong to you. Now that it’s clean, we don’t need to tell Daddy about this do we? I will tell him to buy me a new vase, but otherwise it’s over.”

Farkle nodded. He knew that he wasn’t allowed to tell Daddy when Mommy got mad at him. Though sometimes she got mad when Daddy was home and he knew then. Then again Daddy said that he wanted to know when he got hurt even if it was by Mommy. Who was right? It was confusing, so Farkle didn’t tell him.

The door unlocked and Stuart entered the apartment. “Is it safe to come in?” he asked joking as he entered.

Farkle broke into a smile and ran up to his father. “Hi Daddy,” he said as his father picked him up and swung him by the arms.

“Hello Sonny,” Stuart said. “I have a great big surprise for you for tomorrow.”

“What?” Farkle asked.

Minkus looked shocked. “Now Farkle if I told you what it was, it wouldn’t be a surprise now would it? You’ll just have to be kept in suspense!”

Farkle pouted. “But that’s so far away! It’s like an eon!”
“Farkle, an eon is about a million years. Tomorrow is less than 24 hours surely you can wait that long.” He gave his son a big hug and set him down. Jennifer looked at the window and smiled. “Oh that’s me, I have to go! Good-bye, Honey; Good-bye Stuart!” She blew kisses at Farkle and gave Stuart a quick peck on the cheek before she ran into the bedroom to get her bags. Minkus looked downward at his son. “Farkle, I’ll be right back okay?” He said and followed his wife into the bedroom. Stuart watched as Jennifer picked up her bags and was about to head out of the bedroom. She had a light blue suitcase, and small travel bag probably for her cosmetics. She also had a red evening gown wrapped in a dry cleaning bag. She picked up her sunglasses and was about to head out the door when Stuart stood in her way. “You don’t even have the decency to hide it in front of Farkle anymore?” Stuart asked. He knew that Jennifer had long stopped caring about her husband’s feelings, but he hoped at least she had some standards to not have men pick her up when Farkle was home. “I don’t know what you are talking about but you can move,” Jennifer sharply retorted. “What’s his name?” her husband asked. “Or do you even remember?” “I am not going to discuss this and certainly not now,” Jennifer said. “I am going to Martha’s Vineyard with Dana, Libby, and their husbands. I would invite you but I don’t think that they can stomach another exciting conversation about the invigorating world of nanotechnology!” Stuart rolled his eyes and glanced out the window at the figure leaning on the red sportscar. “Hmm looks like either Dana or Libby has been doing well in her testosterone treatments! Though, she might want to shave first.” Jennifer glared. “Are you trying to make a point, Stuart?” “Umm I thought the guy outside with the fancy car who is clearly not your husband since he’s standing here talking to you was point enough,” Stuart said as though his wife were a slow study. Jennifer dropped her bags and took the rings off her finger. “Remember Stuart we had an agreement. You get what you want and I get what I want. That includes having my fun on the side and you I’m sorry to say are not exactly what I would call fun. You are just the loser that I married.” To make her point, she threw the rings at her husband. Stuart was too surprised to catch them until they landed on the floor. Jennifer had never done that before. The past few years, he had occasionally found her rings in the bedroom after she went out or she took them off leaving them on the bureau, but she never threw them at him. This was a new attack in her private war against her husband, a psychological battle to say I can toss you away just as easily as these rings and forget the life we built together and you can’t do anything about it. “I can stop you, you know,” Minkus threatened. He grabbed her wrist for emphasis. “By hitting me, Stuart,” Jennifer dared. Stuart rolled his other hand into a fist but Jennifer smiled an icy smile. “Go ahead, Stuart, you know you want to. Bang me around, give me something really juicy to tell the press and my father.” Stuart unclenched his fist and dropped his hand. He let go of his wife. Their trip to Hawaii flashed in Stuart’s mind. “I didn’t think so. Now can I go?” Stuart opened the door and waved for her to leave. “Thank you, Darling. I’ll be back when I get back. Don’t wait up for me.” She picked up her bags, the dress, and put on her sunglasses. Then she walked out the door ignoring Farkle’s good-bye. “Daddy can we order pizza?” Farkle asked as Stuart looked out the window. He felt a prick in his heart as he watched Jennifer walk to the car bags in hand. The man helped her place her bags inside the trunk and gave her a deep kiss. Stuart could see his wife look upward no doubt recognizing her husband looking down on her. She then returned with an even longer kiss before she accompanied the man into the passenger seat of the car. “Daddy?” Farkle asked. Minkus turned from the window. “Sure Farkle, we can have a Guy’s Night In. I’ll order it and ,tell you what, you can pick a couple of movies to watch on the Blu-Ray.” “How about Finding Nemo?” Farkle asked. Stuart was about to object since they had seen it so many times that he knew it by heart, but it was Farkle’s favorite Disney/Pixar film,
so he nodded. “Sure why not?” Minkus asked. “How about another one?”

“Meet the Robinsons,” Farkle said instantly. That was another of his favorites and he knew it was one of his father’s favorite animated films too.

“That’s a good one,” Minkus agreed. “I’ll make the orders and you get the movies out and start the Blu-Ray.” He picked up the phone and ordered the pizzas. Even though Farkle watched Finding Nemo over and over, Minkus admitted that it still touched him. Part of the reason was because when Farkle was very little, Stuart bought his then four-year-old son a Nemo stuffed toy at the Disney Store. He thought that Farkle would be happy, but the little boy said that he would only be happy with it, if his father had a Marlin to go with it. He told him that “Marlin and Nemo belong together, just like you and me, Daddy.” Knowing that he couldn’t resist a request like that, Minkus bought the Marlin for himself, which still lay on the table by his side of the bed. He must admit that he strongly identified with the neurotic clown fish father.

“Daddy why don’t we hear fish talk to each other like in the movie?” Farkle asked.
“Because, Farkle, when people make movies they aren’t really about fish or other characters,” Minkus explained to his son. “They are about people.”

“They look like fish to me,” Farkle said looking confused at the screen. He tried to look closer. No Marlin and Dory definitely looked like fish.

“Do you know what a symbol is?”

“Not those cymbals. This type of symbol is something or someone that stands for something else. Marlin and Nemo stand in for many fathers and sons. Remember when you started school and how it was just like when Nemo started school?”

“I was so embarrassed.” He put his hand to his face.

“Right, I felt like Marlin then,” Minkus said. “I worried about you but you turned out alright. I still do worry about you sometimes.”

“But I didn’t get put in an aquarium,” Farkle announced. “Or did I and I just don’t remember?” He was confused trying to recall.

“Well it’s not an exact story of all fathers and sons,” Minkus said. “I just meant that the feelings between Marlin and Nemo are the same as the feelings between you and me. I worry about you like Marlin does about Nemo and I want to look after you like he does.”

“Then I’m like Nemo,” Farkle realized. “Because I get scared but I still want to learn things and do things. But I always come back to you Daddy.” He thought for a minute. “But Mommy isn’t really like Dory. She doesn’t forget things and she’s not funny like she is.” She’s also kind of mean, Farkle thought but didn’t want to say.

“No, she isn’t,” Minkus answered truthfully. “We’re Marlin and Nemo Plus One. Is that alright?”

The Minkus father and son talked very little through Meet the Robinsons until the end. “So if Lewis hadn’t gone to the Science Fair, he would never have been a millionaire, or invented all those neat things, or met Franny and the Robinsons?” Farkle asked.

“It appears that way,” Minkus said.

“That’s silly,” Farkle answered. “He could have done all that stuff. It was just one thing!”

“One thing hmm,” Minkus said. He personally identified with Cornelius “Lewis” Robinson for many reasons among them that he understood how much a Science Fair meant to the character. Sometimes those events could mean many things. Did you know I got my start at a Science Fair when I was in 8th Grade?”

“Really?” Farkle asked.

“Really,” Minkus answered. “You remember the MIMS? I made the first one for a Science Fair. One of my teachers, Mr. Turner, said that I was a super genius and I could one day make money off of it. I like to think that he inspired me by giving me the idea.”
"Wow," Farkle said. "Did you win?"
Minkus shook his head. "No, I had some problems at school at the time. People thought that I was different and I went to an area at school where they treated kids who were different. Because of that, the judges didn’t believe that I did the work and they disqualified me."
"What’s ‘disqualified?’" Farkle sounded the word out slowly.
"It means that I wasn’t allowed to compete," Minkus answered.
"That’s not fair," Farkle said.
"No, it wasn’t," Minkus agreed. "I was very angry at the time and I destroyed the device. I spent a lot of time doubting myself and wondering how people saw me. I think part of the reason that I started my company is because I wanted to prove the people at school wrong that thought I wasn’t any good."
"Well you showed them," Farkle said.
"That I did," Minkus said with pride. "That I did." He looked down at the pizza boxes. "Well I’m full, you want to help me put things away? Then we can get ready for bed and read your stories?"
Now when Minkus read at night, he and his son took turns. Usually one person read a chapter in one book and the other read a chapter in the other book for the night. Because of this duel reading time, Farkle was doing very well in reading and advancing above most children his age.
Farkle thought about what his mother said about how people liked him if he was normal and how his father said that people, even grown ups thought that he was weird. "I don’t want to read tonight," Farkle said slowly.
"Not read tonight," Minkus was stunned. This was their nightly ritual. He looked forward to it as much as Farkle did. "Don’t you want to find out how Tom Sawyer gets out of his punishment or what job Jonas gets at the Ceremony?"
"Doesn’t he become The Giver, that’s what the book is called?" Farkle asked.
"Well you won’t find out if we don’t read them now will we?" Minkus said.
"I’m not supposed to know how to read big chapter books yet," Farkle said.
"Who says?" Minkus replied.
"Miss Bell didn’t believe me when I said that I did," Farkle answered. "I don’t want her to be embarrassed and I want to make friends. People don’t like me if I’m weird. Can’t I be normal like other kids?" The only close friend he ever made was Dean Venture and he hadn’t seen him since the trip to Hawaii. Maybe Dean forgot all about him.
"Well Farkle you could stop reading at night but you will never unlearn what you have learned," Minkus said. "It will always be in your head. Besides I have a secret for you. I have known it for years. Your Great-Grandpa Ginsburg taught me and I’m going to teach you.” He invited his son to lean closer and whispered. "Normal is overrated.”
"What is ‘overrated’?" Farkle asked.
"It means that so many people want to be ‘normal’ that it becomes boring," Minkus answered.
"When I was a little older than you, I wanted to be like the other kids, what they considered normal. I’m serious, I wore a lot of funny clothes like loose bright yellow baggy pants, a baseball cap turned sideways, and bright striped shirts.”
Farkle laughed at the mental picture that his father described. “You would have looked funny.”
“Oh I did and not at all like myself,” Minkus said. “I lost sight of what made me unique and special. I think that’s what people do when they try to fit in into what they believe is ‘normal’ or ‘average.’ You are a very intelligent bright loving boy and you should never hide that to try to fit in.”
“But what if I’m trying to make friends?” Farkle asked.
“Well if they don’t appreciate who you really are, then they shouldn’t be friends of yours,” Minkus said matter-of-factly. “Your real friends will accept you for all that you are.” Maybe that’s why I didn’t have any, Minkus thought bitterly.
Farkle thought about it. “Daddy we can read if you want.” Minkus nodded. As they cleaned up and he got his son ready for bed, Minkus hoped that one day Farkle would find friends that would
accept him for who he was. It was too late for him.

As Stuart read his son Tom Sawyer, he got to the part where Tom tricked his friends into white washing the fence. He shared a similar story in which a neighbor boy tried to trick some friends into painting his fence. Minkus however was able to see right through them, because he was the only one who read Tom Sawyer in the Summer Reading List. “He fooled them but not me,” Minkus boasted. “I was too smart for him. I flat out refused and didn’t do it. I was the only one to walk away.”

Farkle looked at his father quizzically. “Really, Daddy?” he asked. He knew when his father was just bragging.

“Okay I might have helped but we got bribed with ice cream and later played Water War,” Minkus said. Farkle laughed. Minkus continued. “I may still have my water gun somewhere.” He thought for a minute. “Nah. It broke a long time ago.”

After The Giver when Farkle read that Jonas was selected as the Receiver of Memory, Minkus asked his son how he would feel if he was told what job he would have. “Well I don’t know what I would want to be when I grow up,” Farkle said. “Did you know?”

“Yes, for a long time I knew that I wanted to be involved in computers,” Minkus said. “So I worked and studied really hard and I did.”

“But did people tell you to be something else?” Farkle asked.

“Well your Grandma and Grandpa Minkus didn’t always understand me,” Minkus answered. “They wanted me to run Grandpa’s hardware store after Grandpa became too old. In school they wanted me to play sports and make a lot of friends. So I have a feeling that if I were in the Ceremony of the Twelve, that’s what they would have said for me even though that wasn’t what I wanted to do.”

“Grandma and Grandpa wanted you to be normal?” Farkle asked. “Yes they did in the worst way,” Minkus answered. “They thought that I was weird, at times even dangerous. I think I also wanted to prove myself to them too.”

“I think he was disappointed,” Minkus replied. “But I hope that he understood that I wanted to live my own life and find out what I could do.”

“Would you be sad if I didn’t want to work with you?” Farkle asked. “I mean I don’t know that I don’t want to work with you. I like computers and I wouldn’t mind working with them. But I don’t know what I want to do yet.”

Minkus laughed. “Hey, kid, you still have plenty of time and whatever you decide, even if it’s not working with me, will be just fine.” He lay his son down and tucked him in the covers. “You better get some sleep. We have to get up early for the morning for the big surprise.”

“Will I like it?” Farkle asked.

“I think you will.” Minkus said as he kissed his son on the top of his head and wished him good-night. Farkle wished him good-night back as Minkus turned off the lights and walked into his bedroom.

Minkus woke Farkle up early in the morning. The little boy moved slowly and languidly as many children do when they were woken up early on a Saturday morning. Farkle put on his clothes and socks and shoes, ate his breakfast, and went through the rest of the morning rituals slowly and half-awake. He was confused as his father put some things in two backpacks and lay out some food into a cooler. “Are we having a picnic in Central Park?” Farkle asked.

“Nope, it’s a bit different than that,” Minkus replied still being secretive. He handed one of the backpacks to Farkle and wore another one around his back. Then he held the cooler with both hands. “Shall we?” he asked. Farkle shrugged, knowing that he would never find out the surprise if he didn’t follow his father. The two left the apartment. Minkus locked the door and the two entered the elevator.

Starting to feel awake, Farkle skipped through the hallway and through a flight of stairs to the highest level of their apartment. Minkus balanced the cooler on one knee and opened the door. The rising sun practically blinded the little boy as his eyes became adjusted. Farkle’s eyes widened in surprise as he saw a blue helicopter with the Minkus International logo on it. An African-American
man in a pilot’s uniform was standing in front of the helicopter drinking coffee. “Hey Mr. M.,” he said.

“Hi Harvey,” Stuart answered. “This is my son, Farkle.”

“Hey Farkle,” Harvey answered. “That will be an easy name to remember.”

“Are we going to ride in the helicopter is that the surprise Daddy?” Farkle asked. His daddy took the company helicopter on business trips. Farkle always wanted to ride it, but his father so far told him no because it was used for the company.

Minkus smiled. “Well that’s part of the surprise, the rest will be when we get there,” Minkus answered.

“I thought it was only for the company,” Farkle said confused.

“Well I borrowed it just for this weekend only, so we can use it this once for fun,” Minkus answered. “It will take us there and it will take us home. Now come on, you won’t get to see the inside if you wait out here.”

Minkus then put the cooler in the back compartment and lay their backpacks on top of them and lay two somethings wrapped in covers. Farkle tried to get a closer look at them. “What’s in there, Daddy?” Farkle asked.

“None of your business Nosy,” Minkus teased as he ruffled his son’s hair. “Now Farkle it’s very important that you fasten your seatbelt. The helicopter can’t really fit three people that well so you have to sit still and make sure that you are buckled up, alright?”

Farkle nodded as his father picked him up and helped him into his seat. Harvey held onto the little boy as his father climbed in. It was a bit of a tight fit with three people and their stuff piled into the small area, but they managed to squeeze everything and everyone inside. Minkus demonstrated how to fasten the helicopter seatbelt on his own body and put the headphones on so they could speak to each other. Farkle obeyed and copied it immediately.

“Okay, Mr. M., Farkle, if you two are ready, I am,” Harvey said.

“Are you ready?” Minkus said holding his son’s hand.

“I’m ready, you ready?” Farkle said.

“I’m ready,” Minkus answered. He nodded at Harvey as the pilot flipped the switches. The copter blades began to turn as the chopper gave a slight bump. Harvey then pushed the accelerator to cause the helicopter to leave the building. Minkus motioned for Farkle to look out the window. The little boy’s eyes opened wide as he saw Manhattan under them. “Wow, Daddy,” he said.

“Everything looks so small! They look like my Legos!”

Minkus laughed. “Yes they do now that you mention it. Can you see your school?”

Farkle looked closer and examined the world below him. He saw the familiar building with the red painted roof. “There it is!” he said in delight. He pointed again. “Look Daddy isn’t that your work?” He pointed at the big skyscraper.

“That’s it alright,” Minkus said. He held onto his son as the two pointed out landmarks that they recognized on the ground. Sometimes Minkus motioned for his son to look at the birds that were flying right across from them and glance at the clouds that were right above them. Harvey slowed the helicopter down as it began its descent. “Now Farkle this is very important,” Minkus said. “I want you to close your eyes.” Farkle obeyed keeping his eyes shut. “Now are they closed?”

“Yes Daddy,” Farkle answered. He kept his lids opened slightly so he could fool his father into thinking that they were closed and he could see what the surprise was.

“You’re not doing that thing where you are pretending your eyes are closed but they are only opened slightly, like you tried to do on your birthday are you?” Minkus asked.

Farkle was surprised. How did his Daddy know that? “No,” Farkle said shocked, shocked that his father would think such a thing. Okay they were completely closed now.

Harvey then landed the helicopter with a thud. His eyes still closed, Farkle overheard his father say thank you to Harvey and a loud scuffle as he was taking things out of the helicopter. In what seemed like forever, and Farkle almost fell asleep, he could feel a tap on his shoulder. “Okay Farkle you can look now,” Minkus said as he undid Farkle’s belt.
He held onto Farkle and carried him out of the helicopter to an open hill. Laying on the hill were a checked blanket, the cooler, and two telescopes facing the sky. “I thought that you would want to go stargazing with me,” Minkus told his son.

Farkle smiled open mouthed at the scene before him. He never got to look at the stars in Manhattan! They were always covered by big buildings, city lights, and air pollution. “This is the surprise?” Farkle asked.

“Yes it is,” Minkus answered. “When I was a little boy, I used to love to sit on the roof of our house with my telescope and look at the stars. Now, I am showing them to you.”

Farkle jumped up and down excited and hugged his father. “Thank you Daddy,” he said but then he thought. “I won’t know what I’m looking at without my space books and star charts.”

“I already thought of that,” Minkus said as he motioned to the backpack. “We have everything for a campout, our astronomy books, a flashlight, a picnic lunch, sleeping bags, Tom Sawyer, and The Giver. It’s going to be a good night.” He turned to Harvey. “Thank you Harvey.”

“No problem Mr. M.,” the pilot said. “I’ll be back here tomorrow morning.”

“Unless I call you sooner for any reason,” Minkus said. “I really appreciate this and will certainly compensate.”

“Looking forward to that too,” Harvey said with a laugh. “Bye Mr. M., Bye Farkle.”

“Good-bye Harvey, thank you,” Farkle answered. Harvey ruffled the little boy’s hair. “I like this kid,” he laughed as he entered the helicopter. He waved at his passengers and revved the helicopter as it took off in the sky.

Both father and son waved back. When night fell, Stuart and Farkle Minkus looked inside their telescopes viewing the stars. Minkus pointed out the names of the stars and explained a bit about them like what a red dwarf was and what constellations were.

“You see that one up there,” Minkus pointed at one. “That’s Ursa Major. It’s a bear.”

“It doesn’t look like a bear,” Farkle said confused.

“Let me show you,” Minkus said. “You see the Big Dipper right there.” Farkle nodded. Minkus described the bear’s form. “On top you can put those stars together to make its nose. Up there are its ears and there are it’s body and feet.”

Farkle nodded. “Oh now I can see it,” he realized.

“There’s also a little bear called Ursa Minor,” Minkus replied.

“Why do the constellations look like animals, people, and other things,” Farkle said.

Minkus thought. “Well a long time ago, people used to tell stories about how they think that the world was made. They called them myths. For them the myths answered questions about how they believed that the world was created, or how seasons came about. We know that the world was created with the Big Bang Theory.” Farkle nodded as his father continued. “Well a long time ago people didn’t know that, so they created myths to answer their questions. A lot of the myths were about heroes, gods, goddesses, animals and other creatures. When the people looked up at the sky and saw the stars, sometimes they thought that the stars formed patterns and shapes that looked like people and other things that they knew. So they created stories around what or who the shapes looked like. For example Ursa Major was once a human lady named Callisto.”

“Why was she a bear?” Farkle asked.

“Callisto was a huntress and a nymph sort of a fairy,” Minkus answered. “Callisto worked for a goddess named Artemis who insisted that all of her followers could not be romantically involved with anyone sort of like nuns are today. Well the king of the gods, Zeus, had an eye for pretty ladies and he fell in love with Callisto. After Callisto gave birth to a son, Arcas, Artemis found out and banished her from her group. Zeus felt so sorry for how Callisto was treated because he knew Callisto would be unaccepted anywhere else, so he turned her into a bear. Her son, Arcas was as good a hunter as his mother. So, one day he saw a bear and was determined to hunt it. He aimed his bow and arrow at the bear, but the bear looked at him with such pleading and sadness. Arcas instantly recognized that the bear was his mother, Callisto and he couldn’t kill her.
After all, she may have been a bear, but she was still his mother and he couldn’t kill his own mother. So he prayed to Zeus that he would be turned into a bear too so he could be with her. So Zeus put them in the sky so they could always look out for each other as Ursa Major and Ursa Minor.”

“So it was like Finding Nemo,” Farkle reasoned. “It was a symbol of a mother and son. It sounds like you and me Daddy!”

Minkus shook his head. “No, Farkle remember in the story it was a mother and son. It would be like you and Mommy.”

Farkle looked sad. “But you look out for me more than Mommy does.”

Minkus looked off in the distance. Sometimes at five years old, Farkle showed quite a bit of wisdom. “I do, don’t I,” he asked but then he smiled. “Tell you what our version will be Urseus Major and Urseus Minor.”

“Yeah,” Farkle said with a smile.

“And it will be male warrior,” Minkus said but then thought. “No, we’re not the warrior types. We’re more of the reading intelligent types. It’s a sorceror and his son, who’s also his apprentice!”

“Yeah,” Farkle said standing up and getting into the story. “And Urseus Major had to battle a mean old wizard!” He picked up a stick and started waving it around like a magic wand.

“That’s right,” Minkus said picking up another stick. “They challenged each other to a wizard’s duel.” The two began to point their sticks at each other and pretended to duel like Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy. He pointed the stick towards his son as Farkle ran around and giggled. “So the mean old wizard tried to get Urseus Minor by surprise and-Farkle be careful around there,” He noticed that Farkle was getting too close to the telescopes. But Farkle didn’t pay any attention until his foot got caught in one of the scope’s tripod. Farkle struggled to get his foot out, but in the meantime he knocked the telescope to its side. It banged against the other one and the two fell over.

Farkle managed to free his foot, but stood frozen as his father ran towards the telescopes.

“Farkle, you have to be more careful,” Minkus admonished his son. He then examined the telescopes. They were alright except one had a cracked lens and the other had a lens that was out of alignment. “Well no more stargazing tonight,” Minkus said with a shrug.

Farkle sniffled and his body shook with tears. “I’m sorry Daddy, I know you don’t like me now!”

Minkus turned around to face his son. “Farkle it was an accident. I should have put them away before we started running around. It was just as much my fault as it was yours. Why would you think that I wouldn’t like you for this?”

“Well I know you don’t like me when I’m loud and clumsy,” Farkle said sobbing. “Mommy said that you only like me when I’m good, and quiet, and don’t break things.”

“Mommy said that to you, when?” Minkus asked his son.

“Yesterday when I broke Mommy’s vase,” Farkle said. “She said that people don’t trust me if I break their things.”

Minkus pulled his son closer and held him tight. “Farkle, listen to me. You made a mistake, that’s all. You shouldn’t have done it, but you know better now don’t you.” Farkle nodded as his father spoke. “I could never dislike you for anything especially for something as minor as this. People make mistakes and have accidents all the time. It’s all a part of life.”

“But I broke them and we won’t be able to look at stars anymore,” Farkle sniffled.

“Well you just slightly damaged the lenses and we can get new ones or fix them,” Stuart answered.

“We just won’t be able to do more star gazing tonight, but we can do other things.”

“Like what?” Farkle asked.

“Well the way I see it we have one of two choices so choose and choose wisely,” Minkus said holding out two fists. “Door Number 1) There is a hotel that’s not far from here. In fact we can walk to it. You and I could check in, watch TV, and sleep in a bed for the night or Door Number 2) You and I can lie here on the ground, in our sleeping bags, and sleep under the stars. What do you say?”

Farkle thought for a minute. “Let’s sleep under the stars,” he suggested.

“We’ll do that then,” Minkus said as he laid out the bags.
Farkle woke up to creepy sounds. He heard chirping and hooting. “Daddy,” he said frightened. “What are those?”
“They are owls and crickets, Farkle go back to sleep,” Minkus said half-awake.
Farkle was about to fall back to sleep when he heard a loud barking in the distance. “Daddy was that a wolf?” Farkle asked terrified.
Minkus leaned upwards on the bag. “Farkle it was a dog, you’ve heard dogs before. Now calm down and relax.”
Farkle tried to shut his eyes and relax, but the sounds seemed to get louder. He tried to ignore them and go back to sleep when a caw caw made him leap out of bed and jump into his father’s sleeping bag. He held onto his father shivering.
“Farkle, do you want to sleep in the hotel instead?” Minkus asked.
“No,” Farkle said fearfully.
“We can if you’re scared,” Minkus encouraged.
“I-I’-mm not s-s-scared,” Farkle stammered.
Minkus stood in front of the receptionist desk clerk at the Motel 6. Their items were strewn around them and a sleepy five year old was standing by his side. “One room please for two, for the night” he asked and handed the clerk one of his cards.
Stuart had dried his wet hair with a towel as he emerged from the shower. He must admit there were definite advantages to sleeping in a hotel instead of camping out. Farkle had already lay on the bed watching HBO and was half-awake. He had bathed and was now dressed in his pajamas. Minkus sat next to his son and smoothed his hair. He then called Harvey to tell him to pick them up by the Motel 6 instead of the hill where he dropped them off.
“I’ll be there Mr. M.,” Harvey promised before he hung up.
By the time, Minkus hung up the phone his son was almost asleep. Minkus turned the TV to the Weather Channel since he considered it a soothing white noise to lull them further into sleep. He and Farkle read the next chapters of Tom Sawyer and The Giver. When they were finished, he kissed his son on the temple and wished him good-night.
He climbed into his bed and flicked off the light. Before he could fall asleep, he heard a tiny small voice say, “Thank you for showing me the stars. Good-night Urseus Major.”
Minkus smiled and said. “Good-night Urseus Minor.”
Christmas Wishes (Stuart Age 27; Farkle Age 5)

Chapter Summary

It's Christmas. As Jennifer's affair comes to an end, Stuart contemplates one of his own and Farkle questions the existence of a character in a red suit.

The Lives of Genius
A Boy/Girl Meets World Fanfic
By Auburn Red
Chapter Twelve: Christmas Wishes (Stuart Minkus Age 27; Farkle Minkus Age 5)
Author’s Note: Sam Russo and Alexander Withersby are original characters. The Goddess Wars’ concept is completely made up by me but shares characteristics of fantasy films and books like Dragonlance and the Dark Crystal.
Minkus listened to Jessie’s announcement on his computer. “Mr. Minkus, Sam Russo, the West Coast Game Developer is here.”

He looked up from Sam Russo’s resume and bade his administrative assistant to let the developer inside. Minkus was eager to get Minkus International involved in the world of adult computer gaming and wanted to hear some potential games that could be developed. His former colleague Ingrid Iverson-Smackle recommended Sam Russo as the perfect candidate for the job. The game developer had worked in the West Coast office of Minkus International and was now at the New York office for this temporary assignment.

Minkus wanted to meet this newcomer personally to find out some ideas.

“It’s nice to meet you,” Minkus said standing up and about to shake his guest’s hand. He nearly fell over in surprise. He was standing face to face with a woman who could easily have been Topanga Lawrence’s sister! She didn’t look exactly like Topanga. While just as curly, her hair was several shades darker closer to red than blond and was tied back in a braid. Her eyes were green but had the same intelligence and drive. But he could see her all the same, the same short height, tanned skin, and the same round face. She didn’t dress like the hippy Topanga of his youth, more like the business Topanga of the high school years with her white top and gray blazer and skirt. Minkus felt the familiar pang of a lost love staring at him in the face.

“Is something wrong Mr. Minkus?” the woman asked. Okay her voice wasn’t exactly right either. It was huskier, lower, and had a definite West Coast accent.

Minkus started realizing that he must have looked like an idiot. “Well I saw the name Sam Russo-”

“You thought that I was a man,” she interpreted.

Minkus smiled. “Nah, I’m just messing with you. Your resume clearly states Samantha Joanne Russo.”

She smirked. “Well I walked right into that one didn’t I?” She and Minkus shook hands and he invited her to sit.

Minkus looked closely at her resume. “Alright let’s see what we have here.” He pretended to look at her qualification and experience. “Lie, lie, lie. Deceit, deceit, deceit.” Sam laughed knowing that he was teasing her again. “Graduated from Cal-Poly,” Minkus teased. “So you got your degree between building floats for the Tournament of Roses Parade?”

“Hey, we won two years in a row,” Sam said with a smile.

“No no you take pride in that,” Minkus said as he continued reading. “You worked in Microsoft Gaming Division on some of the Xbox games, before you came to Minkus.”
Sam nodded. “I even got the chance to meet Bill Gates a few times. He really liked what we were doing.”

Minkus smiled confidentially. “In the years that I have been CEO of Minkus International, I only met him once at a convention in Seattle. I believe my exact words were—‘He stuck out his hand and imitated a fake stammer—‘Humma sawa sawa ah ah sir. Which is ‘Nervous Geek Out’ for, ‘It’s nice to meet you. I’m such a fan, sir.’” Sam laughed at Minkus’ self-deprecating humor. “So what’s he like?”

“Puts his golf pants on one leg at a time like everyone else,” Sam answered. She looked at the photo of Farkle on the desk. “He’s a cute little boy. Is he yours?”

“Nope came with the frame,” Minkus quipped. “Unfortunately, after I bought the frame, they told me that I had to take the kid home, feed him, clothe him, and let him call me Daddy. I don’t know why.” The two laughed and Stuart smiled. “Yes, he’s my son, Farkle.”

“Oh so he’s the one that the Farkle Phone is named for,” Sam realized recalling the variation of the smart phone that Minkus International put out. “I thought the name just joined ‘fire’ and ‘sparkle,’ you know how two words joined together a—”

“-Portmanteau,” Minkus finished for her. “Well it was both in a way.” They smiled at each other for a long time before Minkus returned to attention. He cleared his throat. “Well back to business. I have to ask with such an impressive resume, what brings you to our side of the world, Ms. Russo?”

“Well on a personal note, I lived in California and Washington State for a number of years, but I’m a native New Yorker,” Sam explained. “I thought I would pay the old town back.”

“You don’t talk like a New Yorker,” Minkus observed.

Sam then raised a finger and spoke with a perfect Queens’s accent. “You wanna make somethin’ a’ that?” She then answered with her normal voice. “I’m from Queens originally. My parents and I moved to California when I was 11. The other reason is that I am impressed with what Minkus International is doing and I understand that you are interested in branching out in the gaming division and I think that I can fill that need.”

“Really how so, Ms. Russo,” Minkus asked.

“Well there is an untapped market that many companies don’t recognize: the teen and adult female gamer,” Sam said. “Many of the games are targeted to males with male heroes fighting evil, saving princesses, and all of the usual quests. While there is the odd Lara Croft, or Lost Kingdoms, the way that women are dressed is clearly meant to appeal more to the male demographic so that they can ogle the female character rather than the girls and women who are expecting a strong confident female lead.”

Minkus nodded. “You know I always did wonder why the franchise was called Legend of Zelda when it was Link that was doing all the work.”

“Right,” Sam said. “In a perfect world, it would have been Zelda saving the day. She didn’t get to until Ocarina of Time. My personal favorite game growing up was Metroid and I still remember how freaked out people got when the developers revealed that Samus was a woman.”

“I hear what you are saying,” Minkus replied. “Many people don’t realize how active women are in science and technology. In fact one of our original founders was a woman, Prof. Ingrid Iverson-Smackle.”

“I took her online Software Design course,” Sam replied.

“She spoke very well of you,” Minkus answered holding up the recommendation letter. “So you think that Minkus International can draw in the female gamer?”

“I’ve seen what Minkus International has done with the Funearns,” she said. “They are a huge hit. I know that you have a reputation for innovation. I think if anyone can, it would be you.”

Minkus thought. “Well you already have the job. This is just a preliminary interview so I can see what ideas that you have. I think they will be very interesting.” He took out his hand. “Welcome aboard, Ms. Russo. If you can give me a concept idea for your game, maybe a lead character and some sample graphics by Monday, I think that we can make it work.”

Sam returned the handshake. “Thank you Mr. Minkus.”
“Please call me Stuart,” Minkus answered. “Do you prefer Samantha or Sam?”

“Oh Sam’s fine,” Sam replied.

Minkus opened the door and led the woman outside. “I’m looking forward to working with you, Sam.” He showed her to the elevator amid Eddie and Jessie looking at them.

“I’m looking forward to working with you Mr-Stuart,” she said as she commanded the elevator to go down.

Minkus felt an unfamiliar and not altogether welcome stirring as he watched the young woman leave. He glanced at the elevator door longing to see Sam Russo again. Eddie’s throat clearing broke him from his thoughts. “Oh right the accounts meeting,” Minkus said. “Come on Eddie,” he invited. “Let’s get to it.”

Minkus held onto Farkle’s hand as the two walked in the busy New York street. The two were going window shopping to decide what Farkle wanted for Christmas and what they were going to get Jennifer and everyone else. Minkus was dressed in black slacks, a white sweater, a black leather overcoat and brown gloves. Farkle wore blue jeans, a red sweater, green turtleneck, a blue coat, and a red hat and mittens. Farkle jumped past a curb as his father swung him onto the sidewalk. His red boots were getting wet from the slushy pavement.

The stores were decorated for Christmas. Minkus put a five dollar bill inside a Salvation Army kettle as the Santa Claus thanked them and wished them a Merry Christmas.

Farkle continued his story telling his father what happened when his teacher read the class the poem, “A Visit from St. Nicholas” by Clement C. Moore. “So I asked Miss Binney how Santa Claus delivered all those toys in one night, when it was impossible to make deliveries to billions of kids all over the world and how reindeer fly when they are mammals and their bodies can’t fly.”

“What did Miss Binney say?” Minkus asked.

“She told me to stop asking so many questions and just listen to the story,” Farkle said sheepishly.

Minkus laughed and Farkle asked. “Daddy is there really a Santa Claus?”

“Well do you think there is?” Minkus asked his son.

“Miss Binney says there is and a lot of the other kids say there is,” he said.

“I’m not interested in what Miss Binney and the other kids think,” Minkus leaned down to be eye level with his son. “Farkle, the reason that I teach you so much is that I want you to love learning and to understand that knowledge is the key to great things. Most importantly, I want you to use that learning and knowledge to think for yourself. I’m interested in what you think. Do you think that there is a Santa Claus?”

Farkle shrugged. “I don’t know. It seems impossible, but he seems so nice and he always visits and gives me presents. I think he might be real.”

Minkus smiled. “Well then he might be.” Even though Minkus considered himself a man of science, he wanted his son to hold onto his childlike innocence as long as he could and to enjoy the world of creativity and imagination. That side of Farkle loved tales of sorcery, magic, aliens, and other worlds. The side still believed that toys could talk and that good guys always won. He wanted his son to keep that sense of wonder as long as it lasted and wasn’t about to tell his son anything about Santa Claus, until the boy was good and ready to hear it.

“What do you want for Christmas Daddy?” Farkle asked.

A new wife, Minkus wanted to say bitterly, but he didn’t. “I don’t know, Farkle. Whatever you give me, I will love.”

The two of them walked a little further until they reached FAO Schwartz. “Now remember Farkle,” Minkus said. “We are just looking for now for you and getting your Secret Santa gift for school. I might buy you a small something. But mostly, you just look and see what you want for Christmas.”

Farkle nodded. “Okay, Daddy, I know you told me already,” the little boy insisted.

The two walked into the famous toy store and looked at the displays of new items. They passed by the floor piano used in the movie Big, now no longer able to be played. Minkus admitted that when he first visited the toy store several years earlier, he was a bit disappointed that the keyboard was no longer able to be used. He loved the movie when he was a kid and visualized himself jumping on the keys playing “Heart & Soul/Chopsticks” like Tom Hanks and Robert Loggia did in the
movie.
Farkle took a look at some of the bicycles playing with the wheels and pushing on the seats. He took his time examining several of the possibilities. He and Minkus then looked at construction toys. Farkle marveled at an Erector set that could build a set of the New York skyline. “Whoa,” he said amazed.
They then examined some of the more educational toys such as a homemade chemistry set and biology set. Farkle tapped on one of the Bunsen burners and looked at his reflection inside. His face looked wide and silly. He stuck his tongue out and giggled. The two then looked at board games and examined chess sets and Risk. “The White Knight needs to move to C6 to take the pawn,” Farkle said looking at the picture on the box.
“Yes, but the Black Knight can take the Knight, see?” He said pointing out that his son’s move would leave the Knight exposed.
The two then walked over to electronics. Minkus felt a sense of pride and accomplishment as he saw some kids and their parents examining his company’s software. Even after all this time, he had an urge to tell the people, “You see that? I made it.” He also curiously looked at many of the video and CD-ROM games that were being sold. He examined them with a critical eye weighing the competition’s strengths and weaknesses. He could see some excellent graphics, and intriguing storylines with deep characters, but he could also see other ones that didn’t seem as intriguing. He had to admit that Sam was right. There were very few games that had female protagonists and the few that did had women in very scanty clothing. (Okay they were quite attractive, he realized but that wasn’t the point).
“What’s the name for your Secret Santa gift?” Minkus asked.
Farkle took out the paper and read the name, “Billy Ross.” He said.
“Well what does Billy want for Christmas?” Minkus asked.
Farkle shrugged. “I don’t know. He doesn’t talk to me much. He thinks I’m weird.”
Minkus considered. “Well what does Billy like to talk about with other kids? Does he do something in school that he particularly likes or the teacher thinks that he’s good at?”
Farkle thought. “He likes sports. He talks about baseball quite a bit and he likes to color! Miss Binney always hangs up his color pictures!”
“Well there we are,” Minkus said. “We can give him a coloring book about sports and maybe some crayons to go with it.”
He then led his son to the art projects and coloring books and pages. Farkle pointed one out.
“Daddy, here’s one,” he said reading the title. “Famous Baseball Players!”
“Sounds like a good one,” Minkus picked it up and thumbed through the pages. “Do you think so?”
“Yeah let’s get that and these crayons,” Farkle pointed at the Crayola 36 crayons pack.
“I love it when a plan comes together,” Minkus agreed as he picked up the crayon box.
“Are you beginning to get some ideas about what you want?” Minkus asked as he approached the cash register with the coloring book, crayons, and stuffed tiger that Farkle selected for himself.
“I think so,” Farkle said. “I’m not sure if I want the chemistry set or the bike.”
Minkus held onto his chin in deep thought. “Well tell you what, if Santa doesn’t give you the bike for Christmas, I can get you one for your birthday. It might be a better present then.”
“Why?” Farkle asked.
“Well think about it, when’s your birthday silly?” Minkus teased his son by ruffling his hair.
“Oh April 21,” Farkle reasoned.
“Right in the springtime, better bike riding weather,” Minkus said. “Plus you will be older then and able to balance on your bike better.”
“Okay, I guess that’s alright,” Farkle said. “I guess. I think so, I don’t know.” He was still confused as Minkus paid for the stuffed tiger, coloring book, and crayons. “Daddy, I’m hungry.”
“Me too, actually,” Minkus said. “Why don’t we get out of here and get something to eat?”
“Stuart?” a voice called. Stuart looked up to see Sam Russo looking at him. She was dressed in black jeans and sweater, a red overcoat, brown gloves, a black scarf, and a black hat.
“Sam hi,” Stuart said. “Scouting the competition?” He teased.
“Getting some ideas,” Sam answered. “Also doing a bit of Christmas shopping.”
“You have kids?” Stuart asked.
Sam shook her head. “No worse, I have five nieces and nephews and my oldest sister is having another one! We are a very fertile people.” She looked down and realized that she was in the presence of a small child. “Oh I’m sorry I meant that—"
“I know what fertile means,” Farkle said. “It means that they are able to have lots of babies.”
Sam’s eyes widened impressed. “Wow you are a smart one aren’t you?” she asked.
“This is my son, Farkle,” Minkus said. “Farkle, this is my friend, Sam Russo. She works for us.”
“Sam,” Farkle said in surprise. “That’s a boy’s name!”
Minkus put his hand on his son’s shoulder. “Son, be respectful.”
“Don’t worry about it,” Sam said then she turned to Farkle. “Well Farkle is a phone’s name!”
“Yep Daddy named the phone after me,” Farkle said proudly.
“You should be proud of that!” Sam said.
“I am, but Daddy I’m hungry,” Farkle wailed.
“Okay, we’ll get something to eat,” Minkus said. “I’m sorry, Sam.”
“Don’t be,” Sam said. “I’m on my way out anyway. I’ve been jonesing for a Corner Shop Pizza for the past 16 years! I can’t wait any longer!”
Minkus turned to his son “You want to get some pizza, son?”
“Okay,” Farkle answered.
On their way out, Farkle pointed at a big box. “Daddy what’s that?” he couldn’t read the name because several people were standing in front.
Minkus read the name. St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital. “Well Farkle, the toys that go in that box are going to go to sick children in the hospital so they can have a merry Christmas.”
“They are in the hospital,” Farkle asked. “But they won’t be at home for Christmas?”
“Sometimes they’re not,” Minkus said. “Sometimes they have to be in the hospital for a long time either they have a serious operation or because they are too sick to go home.”
“I’ll bet they’re sad and scared,” Farkle said.
“They probably are,” Minkus answered. He was about to lead his son out the door to the toy store when Farkle stood in one place.
“Daddy wait,” Farkle insisted. He then walked over to the box and put the stuffed tiger that his father just bought inside. “Maybe he will make somebody feel happy and brave.”
He walked back to his father. Stuart then squeeze his son’s hand tightly. “Farkle that was a very kind unselfish thing that you did.” He then held his son by the shoulders and gave him a hug.
“He’s an amazing kid, Stuart,” Sam said.
Stuart nodded. “Sometimes he amazes even me.”
Farkle, Minkus, and Sam approached the Corner Shop pizza and ordered three big slices of pepperoni and cheese and three sodas. They then sat in a nearby bench to eat their food. “So Farkle do you know what you want for Christmas?” Sam asked.
“I don’t know,” Farkle reasoned. “I can’t make up my mind yet. I could ask for the bike, or maybe the chemistry set, maybe the chess set, or Risk! I don’t know! If I choose the wrong thing, I would have to wait a whole year to get something else!” Sam and Stuart exchanged amused parental glances at Farkle’s over thinking about his possible Christmas gift.
“It’s a very big decision one that could change your whole life,” Sam said in mock seriousness. Farkle’s eyes widened with fear, but Sam smiled. “I’m just teasing you. I’m sure whatever you ask for, you will love and I’m sure Santa will give you exactly what you want!” She turned to Minkus. “It’s okay to mention Santa right?” she whispered through clenched teeth.
“It seems to be for now,” Stuart whispered back. He then reverted to his normal voice.
“So any good ideas for the game?” He asked then turned to his son. “Farkle, Sam is going to be creating a game for our company.”
“If your daddy likes it of course,” Sam said winking. “Well I have some ideas. I definitely want it to be two lead female characters to give the player some options and maybe add a few more as the game goes along. I also noticed that fantasy settings are quite popular, so I may try one myself. But
you’ll see the finished product on Monday.”
“Of course, it will be very interesting,” Stuart said. “Already I am intrigued.” Stuart looked down at his plate. “Well I’m done, the rest of you guys?”
“Yep,” Farkle said.
“Me too,” Sam agreed. She then took her plate and was about to take the other two when Minkus picked up her plate.
“No let me,” he said. As he touched her plate, their hands temporarily touched. Minkus shivered feeling a rush of energy emerge as they held hands. He looked into her eyes as Sam stared back.
“Daddy,” Farkle said. “The plates are on the ground.”
Minkus looked downward and laughed. “Oh of course, they are. I’ll pick them up.” He picked up their trash and threw them into the nearby trash and recycling cans. He then cleared his throat.
“Come on Farkle, we have to get home. You have a letter to Santa to write. Besides, it’s getting late.” He took his son’s hand and the boy leapt off the bench.
“Yeah I’d better be going too,” Sam agreed. “I’ll see you at work, Stuart.” She blushed as she picked up her purse.
“Yeah I’ll see you then too,” Stuart agreed. He and Farkle then walked one way down the street while Sam went the other way. Minkus turned around once but the game developer had disappeared already into the crowd.
Jennifer stood in Alexander Withersby’s kitchen as the two toasted with Dom Perignon. They had been seeing each other off and on since spring and now they were officially back on. She had to admit out of the lovers that she had, there was something about Alexander that kept her fascinated, perhaps his charm or charisma. Perhaps he was unashamedly as much a player as she was, so there were no strings attached. He was very handsome with his fair almost golden hair, deep blue eyes and good looks including his slight beard giving him a rugged appearance. He also dressed in a very stylish manner like now he wore a Calvin Klein white suit and cream colored tie.
She clinked glasses as the two sat over a meal of gourmet pheasant, vichyssoise, Waldorf salad, and oysters. The two joined in a toast. “To us,” Jennifer said.
Alexander put his glass down and looked at Jennifer seriously. “Listen, Jen, it’s been a lot of fun but I’m afraid that I’m going to have to end this for good.”
Jennifer looked at her lover stunned. “What?” she gasped. “You’re leaving me?”
“Yes Jennifer,” Alexander replied. “I’ve enjoyed our time together, but you’re not exactly what I am looking for.”
“What do you mean by that,” Jennifer growled through gritted teeth.
“Well there’s the temper for one thing,” Alexander replied. “Last week, you kept calling me.”
“I was returning your last call,” Jennifer answered loftily.
“18 times in one day?” Alexander questioned. “If I wanted someone to be that clingy, I would have had another wife. But I am not interested in another wife. I’m afraid that this is our last meal together. I’m sorry.”
Jennifer looked down at the gourmet meal on beautiful gold lined china plates. “Our last meal together,” she said repeating him. “Our last meal together!” She then picked up her plate and threw it on the ground. “OUR LAST MEAL TOGETHER!” The plate shattered and the remains of the food spattered all over the floor.
Alexander leapt up to examine the mess. “Dammit, Jennifer!” he shouted. “See what I mean? You act like a spoiled child!” “He then rang a bell and commanded for his maid to clean up the mess.
“Also will you see Mrs. Bassett-Minkus out?” he asked.
The maid curtseyed. “Yes Mr. Withersby,” she said.
Jennifer rejected the maid’s arm and glared at her former lover. “You don’t leave me,” she hissed.
“No one leaves me.”
“I’m afraid that I am,” he said sharply. “Now please leave before I call the police to have you escorted out.” He realized that he was going to have to move tonight and make sure that he had his cell phone number changed in case Jennifer started stalking him.
Jennifer stood up and stormed off. She picked up her sable fur coat and glared at him. “Do you
Jennifer glared at her erstwhile lover wordlessly and icy as if to say you’ve done enough. She then stomped outside the penthouse, slammed the door, and ran to the parking lot to get her convertible. She wanted to get good and drunk before she had to go home to boring Stuart Minkus for the rest of her life.

The phone’s ring broke Stuart from his sleep. He had an uncomfortable dream that he was standing in his office alone and Sam Russo was waiting for him. The gaming developer had begun to unbutton her blouse when Minkus pulled her towards him and gave her a passionate kiss. The two began to rip each other’s clothes off when-they were interrupted by an annoying ring.

“Mr. Minkus, I’m Lt. Zellner with the NYPD,” a voice said over the phone. Stuart instantly straightened up. “We are holding your wife.”

Minkus listened to the police officer and memorized the information over what precinct that she was being held. He promised to be there as soon as possible. He hung up the phone and threw on a pair of black pants, a white sweater, and his leather overcoat. He then ran downstairs to Apartment 122.

Minkus waited patiently as the door opened to reveal an elderly white haired woman in a pink housecoat and curlers. “Mrs. Perkepsian,” he said. “Is something the matter?”

“Of course, Stuart,” the widow said with her Eastern European accent. “I’m sorry to bother you so late but could you watch Farkle for now?”

“Just give me one minute to get dressed,” the woman said. A few minutes later she reappeared wearing a red sweater and black Capri pants.

“He’s asleep right now, so you shouldn’t have a whole lot to do,” Stuart breathlessly explained as he led her upstairs to their apartment. “Just if he wakes up, tell him that I had to step out but I will be back soon. I don’t think I’ll be longer than an hour or so. All numbers are on the fridge and in an address book in the top right hand drawer under the microwave. I’ll have my cell phone with me and it will be on in case you need to get in touch with me. If for some reason I’m not back by morning, Farkle will eat Fruit Loops and buttered toast with milk. Sometimes his mother makes him pancakes and bacon, but more than likely she won’t be in any-I mean she may not be well enough to do so. It’s Saturday, so he won’t need to get ready for school thank goodness. That’s one less thing to worry about.”

Mrs. Perkepsian nodded. “Do not worry, Stuart. I will be there. I know what to do. You just take care that Jennifer is alright,” the older lady said as Stuart led her inside the apartment.

“TI really appreciate this,” Minkus said. Mrs. Perkepsian nodded as Stuart shut the door and headed out into the late night.

Jennifer felt woozy as she looked up from the bars. She remembered very little after leaving Alexander’s hotel room. She remembered calling both of her best friends, Libby Harper-Chastain and Dana Pruitt-Livingstone. Both were sympathetic but weren’t able to come drinking with her. Libby was putting her twins to bed and had to get up early to show a house. Dana’s four-year-old had the chicken pox and she was preparing for a deposition. She then tried to call Mitzi Van Houten, but she was in Europe with her rap mogul boyfriend and shooting episodes of her reality show, Mitzi Moves.

So, Jennifer decided to go drinking alone. Mostly she remembered driving very wobbly, a light flashing in front of her eyes, and a police officer acting very rudely towards her. After that her thoughts were a blur.

She wasn’t the only woman inside the cell. The other woman was dressed in black leather and had spiked hair. She was chewing gum with all of the intensity of a bovine. She glared at Jennifer. “What are you staring at?” she demanded between snaps of her gum.

Jennifer sneered. “The ’80’s called. They wanted to remind you that it’s 2007.”

The woman glared. “Bitch!”
Stuart followed Lt. Zellner into the drunk tank. He explained that Mrs. Minkus had been arrested for a DWI and for attacking a police officer in the performance of his duty.

“We found out your wife had a previous record of attacking a police officer when she was 18,” the police officer explained. “So we have to take away her license, since this is a second offense.”

Minkus nodded. “Is there anything further that will be done with her?” he asked.

“Just get her the hell home,” Zellner said. “Of course there will be a hearing.”

“Of course,” Minkus said wearily as he looked through the cell at his wife. Jennifer looked lost, pathetic, and wretched.

Minkus drove his wife home in his black car. Jennifer silently rubbed her aching forehead and looked downward. Neither said a word until they were home. Minkus unlocked the door and thanked Mrs. Perkepsian. He reached into his wallet to take out some money.

Mrs. Perkepsian stayed her upstairs’ neighbor’s hand. “No there is no payment necessary,” she said. “I am just trying to help.”

“Thank you very much,” Minkus said.

“You are very welcome,” Mrs. Perkepsian said. She then turned to Jennifer. “I hope you are feeling better, Jennifer darling.” She said before she left leaving the married couple alone together.

“Stuart I’m sorry,” Jennifer began.

Stuart held up his hands. “I’m sure you have a creative explanation for this.”

Jennifer sank on the sofa and rocked herself back and forth. Stuart rolled his eyes becoming more irritated than sympathetic. “He left me, Stuart. He wanted to break up with me for good.” Her body shook with tears. “The thing is, I think that I was starting to love him.”

Stuart hung his and Jennifer’s coats in the closet giving himself a bit of extra time before he answered her. “Why are you telling me, your husband, that you are upset because your lover left you? So the man that you are not married to broke up with you and you think that gave you an excuse to drink yourself senseless tonight? The man that you have sex with for no other reason than to get a cheap thrill took off and you think that gave you permission to attack a cop and lose your driver’s license?”

Jennifer glared. “I said I was sorry. Oh you wouldn’t understand!”

“I wouldn’t understand,” Minkus said incredulously. “What are you 16 and going out with the town rebel? Jennifer, sometimes I feel like I live with a little girl! You do realize that Farkle acts more mature than you do?”

Jennifer refused to answer that comment instead she defended her former lover. “He made me feel special,” Jennifer said. “He made me feel like a woman!”

“He made you feel like a woman,” Minkus repeated. “How do I make you feel, like a water buffalo?”

“I don’t know but ever since we’ve had that stupid kid things have changed,” Jennifer demanded. “You spend all your time with him and none of it with me! What else could I do but look elsewhere?”

Stuart sighed. Of course Jennifer was thinking of herself, it was what she was best at. “Of course things have changed. It’s called parenthood! It’s called being a grown up!”

“Does that little nothing always have to be in the way?” Jennifer shouted. She wanted to go to the kitchen and get another bottle when her husband grabbed her by the wrist.

“Jennifer that is enough,” he said. “You have had enough to drink tonight! In fact this has got to stop!”

“What,” Jennifer pulled away from him. “Remember what I could say.” She even nodded towards the wall as if to imply that she could push herself in front of it just to purposely injure herself.

Stuart stared at his wife defiantly. He wasn’t going to let her manipulate him into letting her get her way this time. “I cannot put up with the drinking anymore! Tonight you lost your license! What if the cop hadn’t stopped you? You could have ended up in the hospital or the morgue.” He charged into the kitchen ahead of her and began picking out wine and champagne bottles and lay them out. “I’m not going to let you do this to yourself, Jennifer, I’m sorry but it has to be done.” He took out as many wine and champagne bottles as he could find, even searched inside cabinets, drawers,
and above the refrigerator. One by one he opened them and tossed the contents inside the sink.
At first Jennifer was stunned but she ran towards her husband as he continued to make the kitchen
dry tossing each of the liquids inside the sink. She pounded on his shoulder. “Stuart, stop doing
this! Are you crazy?” She shouted but her husband did not pay any attention to her as he threw the
glass bottles in the trash. She continued to scream obscenities at him as he ignored her continuing
with his work.
“I’m warning you Stuart if you put one more in the sink, just one more,” Jennifer dared.
Stuart gave his wife an icy look and just drained the final Chateau Marmot dry. Before he could
throw it in the trash with the rest, Jennifer grabbed the now empty bottle from his hands. She then
broke it on the countertop and aimed the bottle neck at her husband.
Stuart’s hands were shaking. He knew that his wife had emotional problems. He knew that his wife
had a bad temper that did not hesitate to take things out on her husband and son. But would she kill
her own husband? He wasn’t sure, but he was not going to let her hurt herself any longer.
“Go ahead, Jennifer,” he dared. “Kill me. That’s the only way that I will stop doing this.” He then
opened the final alcohol bottle, a bottle of Dom Perignon and slowly drained it down the sink.
In a rage, Jennifer screamed and ran towards her husband with the bottle neck in hand just as Stuart
poured the last bit of the champagne in the sink and tossed the empty bottle in the trashcan. He
ducked to avoid the approaching glass, and grabbed her wrists. She managed to give him a slight
cut on the neck before he wrestled the bottle neck out of her hands and it shattered on the floor
below. She struggled and managed to kick him in the crotch. He doubled over in pain and let go of
his wife as Jennifer pushed her husband towards the counter. The force of the blow knocked his
head into the countertop as he fell.
Jennifer panicked and knelt by her husband’s side. Stuart was pale and his eyes were closed. She
didn’t you just let me keep my drinks?”
“Mommy’s what’s going on,” Farkle came into the kitchen. “Are you and Daddy fighting again? I
thought I heard yelling.”
Jennifer covered her husband’s body so that her son wouldn’t see the image of his father lying on
the ground. “No, Farkle, Honey, you’re just having a bad dream,” she said frantically. “Go back to
sleep alright?” At first the little boy wouldn’t move but his mother repeated more severely. “Go to
sleep.”
“Okay,” Farkle said as he left the kitchen and walked back to his bedroom, Jennifer hoped.
Jennifer continued to look over her husband. “Stuart, please don’t die,” she begged. “I need you. I
love you.” She sobbed.
Stuart’s eyes opened and he held onto the back of his aching head. “I’m not dead, well not yet
anyway.” He said. “I think the wind was knocked out of me.”
Jennifer shook frantically. “Stuart, I’m-”
Minkus sighed and winced. “It doesn’t matter. Let’s just go to bed alright. I’ll clean this in the
morning.” He and Jennifer held onto each other and walked towards the bedroom.
Jennifer followed her husband slowly. “Stuart do you still love me?” she asked wearily.
Stuart Minkus looked downward. He knew what he wanted her to say, what she always wanted to
hear ever since her first affair and after she threatened him with divorce. It was almost a verbal
pact that spoke louder than their marital vows that Stuart’s fate was and always would be
intertwined with his wife’s for better or worse, til death do they part. “I love you and I would be
nothing without you,” Minkus repeated the feeling gone from his words.
Stuart entered the building ready for his meeting with Sam Russo to look at her preliminary
graphics and concepts for the game when he was stopped by Eddie Giatti.
“Good morning Stuart,” he said. “Been a good weekend for you?”
Stuart eyed his Vice President warily. Eddie was polite, but there was something that seemed too
polite almost cagy. “Average, Eddie how was yours?”
“Normal,” Eddie replied. “Have you been catching up with the news?”
“As much as I could,” Minkus said. “It’s been somewhat chaotic at home.”
“I suppose since your weekend was so chaotic you didn’t have time to read the paper,” Eddie said opening up Page 3 of the New York Sun. He didn’t have to read further than the headline “Computer CEO’s Socialite Wife Caught In Conflict With Cop.”

“A reporter was apparently tipped off to Jennifer’s arrest Saturday morning,” Eddie said. “No fooling,” Stuart said sarcastically. “I want to see Amisha Watson and you in my office for immediate damage control.” He then turned to Jessie before they entered his office. “Jessie, give Sam Russo my apologies and tell her that I will meet her in about an hour if she gets a chance.”

“I’m on it, Mr. Minkus,” Jessie said as she called the gaming developer’s number.

Stuart sat in his office with Eddie and his publicist Amisha Watson, a tall Indian-English woman sitting across from him. Eddie read the article posted on the Internet:

“Zellner reported that Bassett-Minkus’ blood alcohol content was 0.5 above the legal limit. While no formal charges have been made, she has already been deprived of their license. Bassett-Minkus was unavailable for comment.” Do you want to hear the Internet comments?”

“I’d rather not thanks,” Minkus said sarcastically. He knew that the Internet could be a harsh place and people were often unkind and unthinking in what they said. He didn’t want to read what the New York public, possibly the entire Internet had to say about his wife.

“This isn’t the first time that Jennifer’s name has come up in negative press,” Amisha said. “Remember last spring when she went to Martha’s Vineyard?” She pressed the names “Martha’s Vineyard,” “Jennifer Bassett-Minkus,” and “May 2007” on the Internet and quickly came up with a tabloid article. Minkus could see the photos of Jennifer and a blond man, possibly the man that she had gotten drunk over. For all Stuart knew there could have been others. Amisha continued. “She had been seen with this man. It is somewhat innocent but the rumor mill speculated that they were lovers.”

Stuart nodded. “I remember, it was a story that sprung up and died just as quickly,” he said.

Eddie spoke cautiously. “Stuart, I hate to suggest this but Jennifer could cause problems for the company. A lot of potential and current clients are the old school business types. They don’t like to do business with someone who can’t control his home life. Jennifer’s behavior could do serious damage to the business. We could lose clients and have trouble getting new ones.”

Stuart’s hands folded. “Are you suggesting something, Eddie? Are you suggesting that I what, divorce my wife?”

Eddie shrugged. “Well I don’t know. You two aren’t happy are you?”

“Eddie that is none of your business,” Stuart said. “You don’t know Jennifer like I do. She has a wild streak, but she is also very vulnerable. Plus, you know what the financial results would be if we got divorced.”

“I know,” Eddie recalled. “I’ve read the contracts remember?”

“She is a very sick and troubled woman who needs help,” Minkus said. “She doesn’t need to be abandoned and I will not leave her.”

“Well maybe you can’t or won’t leave her, but if you don’t get her help, the police will make that decision for you,” Eddie said.

Stuart considered. He knew that unlike Alvin Meese, Eddie Giatti genuinely was concerned about Stuart and his family on top of concerned for the business.

“I’ll think about it,” Minkus said. “For now I’ve removed all alcohol from the house. She seems to be alright with that decision for now. She’s scheduled to see a drug and alcohol counselor tomorrow night.”

“That’s a good start,” Amisha said. Eddie wordlessly nodded. “What do you want me to tell the press?”

Stuart considered. “Just tell them that Mr. and Mrs. Minkus are going through a troubled period and that she is currently seeking help for her issues. Ask that they please give us privacy in this time. Sounds fair?”

Amisha copied the statement and stood up. “I’ll get to it right away,” she said as she left the office amidst her boss’ thanks. Eddie opened his mouth wanting to say more, but instead he followed Amisha out the door.
Sam entered Minkus’ office as she turned on her computer to show her graphics. The first showed an image of two tall beautiful women, one in white with long blond hair and the other in black with ebony hair. Sam began the back story to her game. “The tale begins with two goddesses, sisters in fact. One, Illaria represented the Light and Order and the other, Damaris represented the Dark and Chaos. When they were together, they were able to balance each other out. Unfortunately, the world below them fell to petty squabbles, clan wars, and disension. The Goddesses themselves began to war with each other with no side able to claim victory. One day, Illaria and Damaris disappeared leaving the World Below to fend for itself. The Order that Illaria represented fell prey to self-righteous dictators and corrupt zealots. The Chaos that Damaris represented fell to venomous creatures that took whatever they could. The Goddess War and abandonment led to a world of disaster and deluge.”

She then showed a graphic of a world fallen into disorder. The environment was mostly barren with dead trees and raging storms.

The next graphic showed two women standing side by side. One was tall and thin with a blond boyish hair cut, pale skin, and was dressed in a white leather top and pants. The second woman was small and plump with dark braided hair, dark skin and was dressed in black robes. She showed another graphic of the blond woman.

“One of our protagonists is Fienna, a peasant woman who dreams of being a warrior. An orphan, she had been training in secret while working as a serf for the lord’s lands. When she was unceremoniously removed from her serfdom after resisting the feudal lord’s advances, she became a thief.

Because of her training and her work, she can fight and run as well as any man. She is the character for the physical combat, well versed in hand-to-hand fights and sword training.”

Sam showed images of Fienna’s training and her sword fighting skills. Sam then flipped to the second character, the dark haired woman. “The second protagonist is Marilena. While Fienna is the doer, Marilena is the thinker. Marilena is the child of Wanderers who discovered that she had a talent for magic. This talent led her to the Sorcerer’s Temple where she showed promise as a highly trained magic user. Unfortunately, corruption and wickedness in the Temple forced Marilena to flee the Temple on the run for her life. She took with her a powerful book of spells and various other magic tools from the Temple when she encounters Fienna the two become united in running from their enemies.

Marilena is the magic user, the one who is capable of using sorcery to fight her assailants. She also has an added bonus in that she is very well read and intelligent and is able to solve riddles or puzzles that could come in the way of our protagonists.”

The next image showed Marilena making light appear from her fingertips and reading a spell book and chanting as a magic circle appeared around her.

“In this world, there is no direct good or evil. The task of these two is to bring balance by uniting the goddesses once more. Unfortunately, they have to face many antagonists particularly-Lord Zhanite.” Sam showed a dark haired man in a black cloak. “He is in league with many of the dark creatures in the game and has the ability to shape shift into various creatures such as a wolf and most importantly a beast. He also leads various thieves and assassins to do his bidding. The antagonist on the side of Light is none other than Marilena’s former leader of the Sorcerer’s Temple, Jahnis.” She then showed a tall ageless woman with long white hair and in a white robe.

“Jahnis was once a sorceress dedicated to the cause of good, but she had become drunk with her power and self-righteousness. Now she considers all who oppose her as a threat including her former student.”

Sam showed a small group including a handsome dark haired character in brown leather, a small blond fairy in green, and a middle aged man in chain mail with gray hair and a mustache. “Along the way, Fienna and Marilena will meet various characters that will assist them leaving the player with other options of characters to choose from once they are unlocked. There is Darien, a Robin Hood type forester/thief who is also a skilled archer and potential love interest for Fienna, Charise a trickster fairy who is useful for pulling her friends out of tight situations such as traps and is
capable of moving them rather quickly, and Sebastian, an older grizzled former warrior who is well versed in axe combat and is the potential love interest for Marilena. With these characters, the player will be able to navigate through the world of—“ the final image showed the title card written in a Gothic style font with the words broken in two as one showed light and the other dark. “-The Goddess Wars.”

Sam closed her presentation and faced Stuart Minkus trying to bury her growing nerves. In what seemed to be a long intermittent silence, Stuart finally spoke. “It’s very good. It has a well thought out premise. You have broken several barriers with the characters. We not only have one female protagonist, but two. You also broke various stereotypes regarding age, class, race, and appearance. Neither of our leads are the typical bombshell characters—one has a very tomboy look, the other is full figured. Neither of the lead characters are princesses, which is overtly trendy with lead female characters. One is even a peasant. One of the leads is a woman of color. You don’t see that very often in fantasy films, let alone in games. We have a balance of male and female antagonists. We also have an older character who is a fighter and not just an exposition father figure.

I particularly like that there is no specific line between good and evil, light and dark. Each side is just as necessary as the other. Many plots concern with fighting evil or lately some have gone the opposite way and it’s all about the darkness. You set the perfect balance and show that both are needed.”

“So you like it then?” Sam asked.

“Let’s put it this way,” Minkus said. “I think Minkus International has its first game!”

Sam did a “YES!” pose and cheered. “Oh thank you, Stuart! Thank you, thank you!” She and Stuart stood and she hugged him. “I know that is completely unprofessional, but thank you so much!”

Stuart laughed. “I don’t mind an occasional hug,” he said.

“You really made my Christmas wish come true,” Sam said.

“Well what better ways to say Merry Christmas than to make you do more work,” Minkus teased.

“I hope that I could do something for you,” Sam said.

Minkus felt a sense of longing for the game developer standing next to him. The dream came to him. He had an urge to grab her right there, unbutton her blouse, and lay her on top of his desk. He looked downward feeling the blood rushing. Oh no! He was really feeling uncomfortable now. Minkus held onto Sam’s shoulders and was about to lead her out the door. “Well it was a good presentation,” he said. “I think that you have a bright future in the gaming industry.” He could feel the redness fill his face. “I think that you have a bright future in the gaming industry.” He could feel the redness fill his face. “I think that you have a bright future in the gaming industry.”

“I think that you will, um, one day brag about how we accepted the first game created by uh Samantha Russo.” He felt weak at the knees as he stood next to her towering over her by a head. He could just touch the red curls and smell her perfume. What was it, cinnamon and spice? He inadvertently put his hand on her hair. Sam looked upward. “I’m sorry.” He opened the door a crack. “You can go if you want.” He said. “I don’t want you to feel uncomfortable or pressured. I’m your boss and there are barriers and protocol, so if you want out just say the word.”

Sam leaned her hand over to the door and shut it tight. She then put down the shade on the inside window and leaned over to Minkus. She then kissed him slowly almost shyly. Her kisses were certainly different from Jennifer’s. Jennifer’s were always passionate, possessive all about filling her needs. Sam seemed more receptive, ready to accept a return from Stuart as though they were equals in their passion.

Minkus pulled away. “So what’s the word?” he joked as he pulled her towards him and they kissed again.

The phone broke into their kiss. Minkus pulled back feeling disappointed and irritated at the interruption. He held up a finger as if to say wait a minute and answered the phone. “Yes?” he asked.

“Mr. Minkus, Thomas and Teddy Bassett are here for the stockholder’s meeting,” Jessie said.

Stuart winced and wiped off the lipstick from his face with a tissue. The last thing that he wanted was the Bassett Twins seeing any evidence that their brother-in-law had kissed a woman other than their sister. “I’ll be there, Jessie,” he said. “Thanks for letting me know.” He hung up and turned to
Sam. “I think this meeting is over. I’m sorry.”
Sam nodded and picked up her laptop. “I understand. Thank you for listening to my pitch and encouraging me.”
“You’re welcome,” Stuart said. “I’ll walk you out.” He then led Sam out the office door and watched her move towards her office. Minkus then joined Teddy and Thomas Bassett at Jessie’s desk. “Well fellas, as always it’s a pleasure to see your smiling faces.”
Teddy smirked. “Stuart as always it’s interesting to visit your little company and find out how much—”
“Our father’s money was wasted in putting this dime store operation together,” Thomas agreed. Minkus smirked not feeling like engaging in a verbal battle with Tweedle Dumb and Tweedle Dumber. The three then joined Eddie in the conference room as they began their meeting. Out of the corner of his eye, Minkus noticed that his brothers-in-law kept giving him suspicious looks. While that was not unusual with them, after all they never liked Stuart, but Stuart wondered if it was more than their standard dislike going into it. Did they have suspicions about Sam as she left the office? Was there something in their appearance or demeanor that betrayed their kiss? Did they see something in Stuart’s glance as Sam returned to her office and would they tell Jennifer about it? Minkus kept all of these worries in the back of his mind as he continued on with the meeting carrying an appearance of business-like detachment.

Stuart tied his tie while looking at his reflection in the mirror. He and Farkle had just finished reading The Christmas Carol and Life and Adventures of Santa Claus, before he tucked his son in for the night. Stuart and Jennifer were heading for the Minkus International Office Holiday Party while Farkle was going to be watched by Mrs. Perkepsian for a few hours until they returned.

Jennifer’s cell phone interrupted his preparation. “Are you going to get that?” he asked to the bathroom door. The sound of the blow dryer gave his answer. Minkus sighed and picked up his wife’s phone.

The number wasn’t one he recognized. “Hello?” he asked.
“Is Jennifer there?” a male voice asked.
The dryer fell silent. “No, I’m sorry she isn’t here,” Stuart answered. The door opened and Jennifer ran in the room, wearing a terry cloth robe, her hair soaking wet. She grabbed the phone from her husband’s hands.
“Give it here,” she commanded. She then closed the door and spoke into the phone. “No, I told you not to call me here. We’ll talk later. Yes, whatever you too. Bye.” She then hung up the phone and returned to the bedroom throwing the cell phone on her nightstand.

“Is there something that I should know?” Stuart asked.
“It’s nothing he’s the counselor at the alcohol treatment meeting,” Jennifer said brushing, almost attacking her hair with the brush.
“And you told him not to call you here, why?” Minkus invited.
Jennifer rolled her eyes. “Is there a moral to this, Stuart?”
“Well obviously the grief period for your last lover is over,” Stuart said. “You’ve clearly moved on. Maybe you could move—here’s a crazy thought—towards your husband!”
“What grief period?” Jennifer taunted as she dabbed anti-aging cream and then foundation on her face.
“The one when you were so emotional that you got drunk and arrested?” Stuart prompted. “The one where you lost your driver’s license? The one that is the reason that the kitchen has been alcohol free for the past few days?”
“I swear, Stuart, spending all your time talking to a 5-year-old has given you an overactive imagination,” Jennifer said as she continued making up her face. “There is no alcohol in the kitchen because I decided to quit drinking for Christmas and I’m seeking help on my own for it. I did get slightly tipsy and the cop was overzealous in his duties, but after a fine that problem should be taken care of. I certainly would not get over emotional about a cheap affair. Are you sure that you aren’t the one who should be in counseling?”
Stuart stared at his wife incredulously. “Are you saying that I’m crazy?”
“Well one of us is and it’s not me,” Jennifer said. 
Stuart shook his head. This wasn’t how the incident was. He remembered it clearly. He remembered the conversation that he, Eddie, and Amisha had the following Monday. He wondered if his wife was either shifting blame onto him, by denying the actual details or she was gas lighting him, making him think that he was going insane for remembering it as he did. Either way it was a losing battle. “You’re right,” Minkus said giving in. “That’s how it happened.” He returned to the original subject. “So is this guy the counselor?”

“No, he’s just someone that I met in the group,” Jennifer said. “Sometimes we partner up to encourage each other to have a good time participating in activities without alcohol.”

“Oh I thought it was something like that,” Minkus said sarcastically humoring her. “So do any of these activities begin and end on someone’s bed, because I only heard your half of the conversation but it sounded serious.”

“I could have a lover if I want to,” Jennifer said. “Per our agreement.”

Minkus smirked. “Well if that’s how you feel about it, I don’t see why I can’t play too.”

Jennifer laughed. “You would never have a lover. You’re not the type.”

“How would you know?” Minkus dared his wife.

“Because I know you Stuart,” Jennifer toyed with him. “Underneath that new money, the confident smirk, and that stupid technology company, you are still the little nerdy nothing Strat Freak! You could never do that. You wouldn’t know what to say to another woman let alone get her to go to bed with you.”

“Shows how little you know me,” Minkus said as he tied his shoes. 

Jennifer’s expression changed from one of triumph to one of suspicion. “What do you mean by that?”

Minkus shook his head. “Nothing forget it,” he said realizing that he said too much. “Let’s just get ready for the party alright?”

“No what do you mean?” Jennifer asked grabbing her husband by the shoulder. “Stuart, I’m talking to you!”

“I meant nothing, Jennifer,” Stuart said. “I was just arguing. I don’t have a lover.”

“What’s her name?” Jennifer demanded. “Or possibly what’s his name?”

Minkus glared at his wife. “Jennifer I don’t have a lover of any kind. You’re right, I don’t know what to say to women. I’m still just the little nerd inside, let’s leave it at that.”

“What’s your lover’s name?” Jennifer raised her voice.

“Will you please lower your voice?” Stuart asked. “I already told you that I don’t have a lover. Now if you want to go to this year’s Christmas party as compared to next year’s, I suggest we get ready and forget this conversation ever occurred.”

The Minkus International Office Holiday Party was already in full swing by the time Stuart and Jennifer Minkus arrived. Minkus wished his employee’s a happy holidays giving them cards with their bonus checks inside. Jennifer smiled icily making small talk with some of the employees but continued to scan the room for Stuart’s possible lover. A handsome executive kissed her hand.

“Hello Mrs. Minkus,” he said.

“Thank you- um-“Jennifer prompted.

“Trevor,” he said. “I’m in HR.”

“Human Resources interesting,” Jennifer said with a yawn.

“I was wondering if you would like some punch,” Trevor invited.

Jennifer watched her husband walk away to talk to several of his colleagues. “I would be delighted,” she said to the man who approached her. She took Trevor’s hand and headed to the punch bowl.

Stuart traced the back of his wife’s silk black dress as she disappeared into the crowd with an employee. He decided not to interfere just yet.

He felt a tap on his shoulder. Stuart turned around to see Sam dressed in a red dress. “Well Sam, you are looking particularly festive,” Stuart said as he handed her the card.

“Thank you, Stuart,” she said as she opened and read the card.
She then accepted the bonus check. “That’s sweet and it’s nice to give them in person.” Minkus nodded. “I figured what the heck, Technology company or not sometimes I could spread a little Old School Holiday cheer.”

Sam laughed and held up a box. “Would it be inappropriate to give you and Farkle a gift?” she asked.

“No way, I like presents,” Stuart said. He accepted the gifts with thanks and opened his. It was a black coffee mug with the words “Thanks Boss,” in white. Sam shrugged. “It’s kind of corny I know, but I wanted to say thank you for going with The Goddess Wars.”

“No, Sam, thank you,” Minkus said. “It’s what I always wanted: actual tangible proof that my employees like me.”

Sam smiled. “And I got Farkle, a toy Velociraptor, I hope he doesn’t already have one.”

“Coincidentally that’s what his Secret Santa got him at school,” Minkus said sheepishly.

“Oh then I’m glad that I kept the receipt,” Sam said taking back the gift.

Minkus laughed and stayed her hand. “Don’t worry about it, he’ll love it anyway. You remember Jurassic Park? They attack in pairs and know how to open doors.”

Sam laughed. “Yeah it could be a husband and wife Velociraptor waiting for a baby.”

Minkus laughed. “Yeah that makes sense.” The two laughed and stared at each other again.

Sam cleared her throat, “Oh good news, I showed my presentation to the California staff and they loved it. They can’t wait to get it started.”

“That’s great, Sam!” Minkus said. “I am happy for you!”

Sam smiled radiantly and shook Minkus’ hand. Minkus held her hand tightly and pulled her closer towards him. He was about to kiss her when he felt someone sharply pull them apart and punch Sam on the lip. Jennifer glared at the two, her face completely flushed with rage. “Get away from my husband you slut!”

Jennifer had accepted the punch from Trevor. She drank from the goblet feeling tipsy. Trevor then whispered in her ear. “These parties are so dull,” he groaned.

“I hear you,” Jennifer said as Trevor pulled closer.

“Still it’s kind of neat to get to know a complete stranger,” Trevor encouraged. Jennifer didn’t say anymore as her lips made contact with the HR manager.

They continued kissing falling onto a nearby chair when Jennifer saw Stuart out of the corner of her eye talking to a red haired woman. “Who is that woman talking to my husband?”

Trevor looked up. “Oh that’s Sam Russo. She’s creating a new game for MI.”

“She and my husband have been together a lot?” Jennifer asked.

Trevor shrugged wanting to continue the kissing session. “I don’t know. I guess they’ve been in conference quite a bit—hey where you going?” Jennifer rose and approached the two. She then approached her husband and the other woman. Without another word, she separated them and punched Sam Russo full on the mouth “Get away from my husband, you slut!” she commanded.

The entire party went deadly silent. Stuart grabbed Jennifer by the arm to pull her off the smaller and not as physically strong woman. “Jennifer stop it!” he said. “We were just talking about work!”

Jennifer glared at the two, her face completely flushed with rage. “A likely story! You two have been in conference together haven’t you?”

“Yes to work on a new game,” Minkus said. “It’s completely innocent and you are making much ado about—”

“—NOTHING AM I?” Jennifer shouted. She threw her rings at Stuart. Then she pushed her husband so hard on the arm that he dropped his new coffee mug. It shattered to the ground. Stuart caught his breath and faced his wife. He could feel what seemed like a thousand pairs of eyes were staring at them.

“Jennifer you are sick and we need to go home,” Stuart began. He held onto his wife, but she grounded her heels. “Now come on Jennifer, we need to get you home!”

“I’m not going,” Jennifer hissed.

“Dammit Jennifer,” Minkus almost shouted. He momentarily forgot that they weren’t in their apartment having a private argument. They were now in his office in front of his employees and...
who knew who else. “Let’s get out of here. You need to get help.” Jennifer laughed. “Yes you would love if I got help.” She laughed and slapped her hands. Stuart could see his wife’s pupils dilating. He smelled her breath. No she wasn’t drunk that he could tell. He couldn’t tell if she was drugged and he wasn’t sure what frightened him more: the fact that his wife could be sneaking drugs and alcohol behind his back and him not being able to notice or the fact that she was behaving like this completely sober.

She continued to laugh as her movements became jerkier. “You would love it if I were gone, wouldn’t you? Wouldn’t you?! I were dead and you were free to be with your little slut! You want me to be dead don’t you? Just say it! Just say it!” She put her hands to her hair and began to pull at the strands.

“Jennifer stop it!” Stuart held onto her but Jennifer pushed her husband away. She pounded on her forehead and then approached the wall continuing to bang her head on the wall.

While watching, Eddie Giatti looked towards Jessie Goloff. “I don’t like the sounds of this,” he said.

“I’m way ahead of you,” the administrative assistant agreed as she dialed 911 on her cell phone.

Stuart grabbed his wife by the shoulders but she pushed him farther back, the force sending him to grab the table to keep his balance. Jennifer looked downwards and picked up one of caterer’s carving knives. “Ma’am you can’t do that,” the caterer said. Jennifer gave the woman a death glare so the caterer held up her hands in defeat. “Knock yourself out, ma’am.” Jennifer at first aimed the knife at her husband. “You would like it if I were dead wouldn’t you? I’ll save you the trouble.” She then pointed the knife at her own breast. Before she could even make a nick, Stuart ran up to and dropped the knife from her hand. It fell to the floor with a clang.

Stuart held onto his wife barely acknowledging the police and medical workers from the nearby psychiatric hospital appear and relieve him of his wife.

After Jennifer was sedated and taken away on the stretcher, the party eventually wound down. A few party goers staggered home. Some remained to have a bit of holiday cheer on their own.

Minkus was left behind with Amisha, Eddie, and Jessie. “None of you have to stay,” Minkus said. “I’ll be leaving soon anyway.”

“Is there anything in particular that you would like me to say about this?” Amisha asked knowing that there would be a big scandal.

“Just that I will give you a raise if you keep the publicity and scandal as minimal as possible,” Minkus said. He looked to Eddie. “Not just for the company for Jennifer too. Whatever they are going to do to her, will be twice as hard with a sea of photographers and reporters hounding her. Just say that, I don’t know, she’s suffering from nervous exhaustion and is going for a respite.”

“I guess that will do,” Amisha said. She held up her bonus check. “What a Merry Christmas huh?”

Minkus looked at Eddie and Jessie. “You guys can go. It’s Christmas Eve, I’m sure that you have things to do.”

“My girlfriend and I are going to her folks in Connecticut but we’re not supposed to be going until tomorrow anyway,” Jessie said.

“I’m going to visit my Ma in Brooklyn,” Eddie said. “But I can always get a bus tomorrow. We can stay if you want, Stuart.”

Minkus shook his head. “No, it’s okay. Santa has to get home and wrap some presents anyway. Besides I’d rather be alone right now.” Eddie and Jessie shrugged knowing that their boss was not in the mood to talk.

“Thanks for the bonuses, Mr. Minkus,” Jessie said.

“You’re welcome Jessie,” Minkus said. “Happy Hanukah, well a few days late anyway.”

“Merry Christmas,” she said.

“Yeah thanks,” Eddie agreed. “Merry Christmas.”

“You too,” Minkus said. His administrative assistant and vice president then turned to the elevator and left to celebrate Christmas.
Stuart could hear footsteps. Thinking that it was Jessie or Eddie and that they changed their minds, he became irritated. “Are you incapable of hearing? I said that I want to be alone-!” He looked up and saw Sam facing him. “Hi Sam.”

“Hi,” Sam said. “I’m sorry for all of the trouble with your wife.”

“No it’s not your fault,” Minkus said. “Not at all. You did not do anything wrong. I did.” He hesitated but decided that he was going to level with her no matter how personally difficult that it would be. “Sam, if I weren’t married or if we were Mormon and living 100 years ago, because Mormons don’t practice polygamy anymore, I would- But I am married and there you have it. It wouldn’t be fair to you, or to me, or to Jennifer or Farkle. I could be with you and we could kiss and have sex, but I would always know that it wouldn’t be right. I think that you would too and just because she does it, does not mean that I should. I don’t think that I would be able to look my son in the eye and try justify what we did and I wouldn’t want to. It would be like Ilaria and Damaris fighting a continuous war that neither side could ever win.”

“I wouldn’t want you to either Stuart,” Sam said. “I think we both know how this is going to end. I will get on the plane to Lisbon, actually since you’re the married one you’ll get on the plane to Lisbon and I will walk off into the fog with Claude Rains.”

Minkus nodded. “So what will you do now?”

“I will do the preliminaries for The Goddess Wars like we agreed and I will return to California and continue the work from there,” she said.

“I will remain here,” Stuart said. “It’s for the best.” He realized that once again he was having to say good-bye to Topanga Lawrence or rather her doppelganger. He supposed that hurt would never fully heal, the wondering of the one that got away. He wanted to kiss Sam once more, but he held back realizing that if they kissed then he would never be able to let her go. He stuck out his hand.

“Good-bye Ms. Russo,” he said. “It has been a pleasure doing business with you.”

“It has been for me too,” Sam said. “Good-bye Mr. Minkus.” She then turned to the elevator and told it to take her down to the lobby.

Farkle arose early on Christmas morning. He looked under the tree at all of the presents, his mouth hanging open in surprise. “Wow,” he said as he read that many of the gifts were addressed to him. Some were from his grandparents and aunts and uncles, but there were quite a few from Santa. “Quite a haul huh?” his father said standing behind him. He was dressed in his blue pajamas and black bathrobe.

“Merry Christmas Daddy,” Farkle said.

“Merry Christmas to you too, Farkle,” Stuart said as he knelt down. He picked up his digital camera and turned it on. “Do you want to start opening presents?”

Farkle looked around. “Should we wake up Mommy?”

Minkus set the digital camera down and looked sad. “No, Farkle, Mommy’s not here right now.” He said. “She got sick at the party last night and she’s in the hospital.”

“What kind of sick,” Farkle asked worried. “Does she have the fever? Is she like those sick kids that I gave the tiger to?”

“Not that kind of sickness,” Minkus said. “Mommy has a different sickness that’s in her mind. You know how when she gets mad, sometimes she yells and throws things?” Farkle nodded. “Well she did that last night at the party. You and I are used to it and we don’t say anything unless Mommy hurts us or herself. Well the other people at the party weren’t and they became scared and called the police. The police said that the only way that Mommy could live with us again would be if she went to a hospital for a little while.”

Farkle looked downward and was about to cry. “But when will she be all better?”

“I don’t know,” Minkus said. “But they are going to talk to her and give her medicine. When she is better and she gets out, she will be like a different Mommy.”

“Really?” Farkle said with a smile.

“Really,” Minkus promised. “Have I ever steered you wrong?”

“Can we open presents now,” Farkle asked.

“Sure,” Minkus said turning back on the digital camera.
Farkle sat next to his gifts: new clothes from his Grandma and Grandpa Bassett, gift cards from his uncles, a tool kit and football and basketball from his Grandma and Grandpa Minkus (“Yes Nancy and Tom please shove the irony down my son’s throat, Minkus thought bitterly towards his parents) and the presents from Santa. Farkle eyed the chemistry set, biology set, New York skyline metal Erector set, chess game, 5000 piece 3D jigsaw puzzle, computer games, classic books, and Risk board game all from Santa. He looked at them with a long face.

“What’s wrong son?” Minkus asked. “Are you worried about Mommy?”

“No,” Farkle answered.

“Are you upset that you didn’t get the bike?” Minkus asked. “Because Santa and I talked about it—“

“Daddy, I know,” Farkle answered. “You are Santa aren’t you?”

“What makes you say that, Farkle?” Minkus asked.

“You know the letter that I wrote to Santa,” Farkle replied. “I never mailed it. You always tell me that to find the answers I have to test things scientifically. So I figured that if I didn’t send the letter and still got everything that I wanted then I would know, that you were Santa Claus. So are you?”

Minkus sat down and put his son’s hand in his lap. “Yes Farkle, I am.” Farkle looked down at his hands. He knew it but his father continued to talk. “But so are you and so are a lot of people this time of year.”

“How?” Farkle asked.

Minkus pulled his son to the side and gave him a hug. “Remember when I first took you stargazing and we talked about myths and symbols, well Santa Claus is like that. During this time of year, people like to do things for other people whether it’s their friends or families or even people that they don’t know. They like to give gifts, spend time with them, and do whatever they can to make another person happy. Santa Claus is a symbol for those feelings of hope and togetherness. Now he really does exist. He may not be a man in a red suit that lives in the North Pole that drives a sleigh with flying reindeer, but every time you give something to someone you are Santa. Remember when you put that tiger in the box for those sick children or decided what you wanted to give Billy? You were being Santa then because you were thinking of another person other than yourself.”

“So you are being Santa in giving these things to me,” Farkle said.

“Exactly,” Minkus said.

“Well thank you Santa,” Farkle said giving his father a great big hug.

“Well you’re welcome,” Minkus said generously returning the hug.

“Oh, I almost forgot, Santa gave you something else,” Farkle ran into his bedroom and returned with a hastily wrapped present. “I bought it for you in the School Store and decorated it myself.”

“I wonder what this is,” Minkus said. He opened it to see a wooden box decorated with computer stickers and various different learning terms like “Math Genius,” “I’d Rather Be Reading,” and “E=MC2” among others. “Oh Farkle this is great,” Minkus said. “I will put it in my office.”

“You could put all your favorite things in there,” Farkle said.

Minkus looked in surprise. “Well it’s much too small then.” Farkle looked surprised as his father playfully tried to put Farkle’s hand inside the box. “You’ll never fit inside.” He said as he jokingly and lightly closed the box down on the little boy’s fingers.

Farkle snapped his fingers then returned with a wallet sized version of his last school picture. “Now I do,” Farkle said as he put his picture inside the box.

“It’s wonderful,” Minkus said. “Thank you, Santa.”

“You’re welcome Daddy,” Farkle said. “Do you think that Santa can visit Mommy too?”

“I think that he could swing by,” Minkus agreed.

Later that afternoon, an orderly knocked on the psychiatric room that Jennifer was being held in.

“Jennifer Bassett-Minkus,” she called. “You have visitors. They are your husband and son, do you want to see them?”

Jennifer turned away and didn’t want to face them or anyone. She didn’t say anything, just remained silent and immobile not wanting to acknowledge her family’s presence.

The orderly returned to the admissions desk as she saw the husband and son waiting in front. “I’m
sorry, she doesn’t want to see you,” she said. “Sometimes it takes awhile for them to adjust.”
“I understand,” Minkus said. “Can we leave our presents with you then?”
The orderly nodded. “Sure I’ll give them to her.”
Farkle then held up the small vase with fake roses and carefully lay it on the table. Minkus then
handed the orderly his five gifts for his wife. “Thank you,” he said.
“You’re welcome,” the orderly said. “Happy Holidays.”
“You too,” Minkus said.
“Tell Mommy Merry Christmas for me,” Farkle said.
“I will,” the orderly smiled.

Jennifer Bassett-Minkus looked outside the window watching her husband and son leave and
reenter their car. She felt a peculiar mixture of regret, sadness, exhaustion, and relief that they were
gone. She then returned to her bed to sleep the rest of the day and the medicine off.

“When do you think that Mommy will get better?” Farkle asked.
“I don’t know,” Minkus answered keeping his eyes on the road. “Sometimes it can take days,
sometimes weeks, even months. When I was in a hospital like that, it took me almost a month to
recover.”

“You were sick in your mind too?” Farkle asked.
“Yes I was,” Minkus answered. “When I was a boy, I had many problems with your grandparents. I
tried to run away to live with Great-Grandpa Ginsburg but he was too sick to take care of me. I was
also trying to be the best in getting good grades and pushing myself too hard. One day I just passed
out and woke up in the hospital.”
“Did you get better?” Farkle asked.
“Yes I did,” Minkus said. “They told me that I was tired and I needed rest. I think that’s what your
Mommy is going through right now. She needs rest and she needs to be taken care of by more
people than just you and me.”
“But we will see her right?” Farkle said.
“As many chances as we can get,” Minkus agreed.
Farkle stopped talking for a while but then he laughed. “It’s funny, ”
“What is,” Minkus asked.
“You being a boy,” he laughed. “You are so old now!”
Minkus gave a sarcastic laugh. “How would you like it if Santa Claus returned everyone of those
gifts to the store? He still has the receipts, Smart Guy!”
Farkle’s eyes widened. “I don’t think that I would like that at all.”
“Yeah didn’t think so,” Minkus said. He drove on until they reached their apartment.
“Daddy?” Farkle asked.
“Yes,” Minkus said as he turned into the parking lot.
“Merry Christmas, Daddy.”
“Merry Christmas, Farkle.”
Farkle meets some very special ladies and Minkus ponders his next step with Jennifer.

Chapter Thirteen: Boy Meets Ladies (Stuart Minkus Age 28; Farkle Minkus Age 6)

Author’s Note: Even though I am doing some revisions to these chapters, I decided to keep the girls meeting with Farkle the same as it is in the chapter, because it’s a bit hard to incorporate the canon version. There will be slight references to the girls’ first meeting from the canon though.

“Good Morning, Father,” Farkle said as he entered the kitchen. He moved the Knight one space from his and his father’s chess match the previous night. “Check,” he said proudly.

Minkus looked at the board and moved his queen forward to take Farkle’s king. “Check Mate,” he returned.

Farkle laughed. He liked that his father never let him win. It helped him learn different moves. Farkle accepted the waffles and juice from his nanny, Jordan Miller.

Minkus returned to his coffee and laptop, reading the morning news. “Anyway, Father, what happened to Daddy?” he asked in surprise.

“I’m older now and going to start first grade,” Farkle explained. “I need to behave more maturely.” Minkus and Jordan exchanged amused grins. “Well, clearly.” Minkus said. “By the way, Mr. Parker asked that you please not correct him and say that his teaching methods are puerile and not at all indicative of a child of your age group.”

“Well they weren’t,” Farkle said.

“Farkle, we only talked to him at orientation,” Minkus reminded his son. “Today is your first day of school. At least wait a few days, before you decide that his lessons are puerile.” Jordan raised his eyebrow in a surprised and slightly bemused expression at the odd exchanges between a genius father and son.

“Are you going to take me to school and home?” Farkle asked.

“We talked about this,” Minkus said. “I will take you, but Jordan is going to pick you up. I have to work late until the evening today.” Normally, Minkus at least tried to be home when Farkle was home. Even when he wasn’t home like on business trips, he tried to call Farkle every night via Skype just to check in, see how he was doing, and go through their nightly reading ritual. He felt that this was particularly important, now that he was the only parent in the house. He wanted to be sure that Farkle didn’t feel neglected. However, he had some extra projects to work on that day and didn’t anticipate being home until around 7 or 8.

“I’ll be there, Farkle, don’t worry about it,” Jordan offered ruffling his employer’s son’s hair. Jordan was a 19-year-old NYU student who already had an Associate’s Degree in Child Care and was now working towards getting a double degree in Psychology and Child Development. The thin curly dark haired male nanny was very patient and lively with Farkle and also got along well with his father. He also had a good sense of humor, something that Minkus noticed instantly at Jordan’s interview when the first thing he said, before the CEO could even begin his questions were, “Yes, I’m a man and I was born one. I’m straight and I have a girlfriend. Now that those two stereotypes are out of the way, I love kids and want to work with them. That’s why I’m a manny.”

“But it’s the first day,” Farkle said with a pout.
“I know and I’m sorry,” Minkus apologized. “But I have to work. In the meantime, you and Jordan will have fun, won’t you?”

“Yeah I guess,” Farkle said.

“You can tell me all about it when I get home,” Minkus promised.

“Will you help me with my homework?” Farkle asked.

“I’ll try, Farkle,” Minkus promised. “But we will read Huckleberry Finn and The Phantom Tollbooth tonight.”

“Besides if your Dad won’t be able to help you with your homework, I will,” Jordan suggested.

“Hey, I may not be a genius like your dad, but I know that 2+2 is—He pretended to think for a minute “-5 right?”

Farkle laughed. “It’s 4, Jordan.”

Jordan slapped his forehead in mock confusion. “Oh of course, I get those two confused.”

Farkle laughed again and Minkus rolled his eyes and shook his head in amusement. He switched off the laptop and held out his hand. “Come on, son let’s get the lead out,” he said as Farkle took his hand.

Mr. Parker watched as his students entered the classroom and hung their backpacks and lunchboxes. “Good morning, class,” he said. “I hope you enjoy first grade. When I call your names, I will tell you what group you will be sitting in.”

He called several names before he called, Maya Hart!”

A tall blond girl wearing holey blue jeans, a white t-shirt, and a blue jacket held up one finger. “Yeah,” she said sounding like she would rather be anywhere else.

Mr. Parker called another name. “Riley Matthews!”

“Here,” a dark haired girl with her hair in two purple ponytails raised her hand. She wore a dark purple dress with a picture of a unicorn and rainbow. She had a large smile.

“Farkle Minkus,” Mr. Parker called.

Farkle raised his hand. “Present!” Mr. Parker looked at the kid narrowly. He had a feeling at orientation that Farkle was going to be one of those know-it-all problem kids.

Mr. Parker pointed at a cluster of desks in the center of the room. “You three will sit there,” he said.

Farkle and Riley ran up to the desk excited while Maya just casually walked towards it. The desk was soon a jumble of three children putting out their school supplies and getting into slight fights over where to put their stuff.

Maya said to Farkle. “What is this?” She asked holding up a small instrument. “It’s an Ultra MIMS, it’s sort of like a calculator and planner,” Farkle answered. “My father made it for me at his work.”

“Well it’s sort of on my part of the desk,” Maya answered pushing the device to Farkle’s side then she turned to Riley. “Get these horse pencils out of my way too!”

“They aren’t horses,” Riley countered. “They’re unicorns!”

“Well whatever they are, I don’t want to see them,” Maya said. “I thought you wanted to be my friend when you heard me through the window,” Riley said her eyes filling with tears. “Shut up about that,” Maya glared clenching her fist.

“You’re mean,” Riley said sticking her tongue out.

“So you noticed,” Maya said sarcastically. “And get those kitten stickers off my desk!”

“They’re on my desk,” Riley reminded her as she stuck the kitten stickers on her side of the desk. “Do you want one?” She asked Farkle.

“Okay,” Farkle said surprised that someone wanted to include him in anything. Riley then put a white kitten sticker on Farkle’s desk. “Thank you,” he said.

“You’re welcome,” she said. “I like you, you’re nice.” She then gave him another wide smile. She had one of the best smiles that Farkle had ever seen. He wanted to see the girl smile all the time.

Maya however got mad again as Riley offered the girl a kitten sticker. “I don’t want one,” she repeated. She then tossed a box of crayons on Riley’s lap. The dark haired girl jumped in surprise. “Riley, Maya, that’s enough,” Mr. Parker said.
Riley sat back down and held up the sticker. “I thought maybe you would want to be my friend, always not just as the window, so you wouldn’t be so mad and so mean.”

Farkle was fascinated at the exchange between the two girls. Maya glared at him making her eyes wider to counter Farkle’s stare. “What are you staring at?” she demanded.

“Nothing,” Farkle said as he hurriedly put away his things.

The blond girl then looked at the dark haired girl and took the sticker from her hand. “Thanks,” Maya said as she stuck the black cat sticker on her desk. She then looked inside her own pencil box for something that she could give to Riley and handed her a purple crayon. “You like purple huh?” she asked.

“It’s my favorite color,” Riley said. She accepted the purple crayon from Maya and cheered. “Yayyy!”

“Riley, I don’t want to have to tell you again,” Mr. Parker repeated. The dark haired girl remained silent as the teacher told his students to take out their arithmetic books.

At recess, Farkle was reading his book, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn while he was swinging slowly. Over the pages of the book, he could see Riley and Maya run up the slide and slide down. He turned the pages wondering if those girls could be his friends.

He then felt a shove as some bigger boys pushed him off the swing. “These are ours,” one of the boys said.

Farkle hit the ground. The force caused his nose to bleed. He weakly stood up on shaky legs putting his hand on his nose to cover the bleeding. One of the boys picked up Huckleberry Finn and began to rip pages from it. “That’s mine,” Farkle said. “My Father gave it to me for Christmas!”

“Who cares,” the boy said.

“I do,” a familiar voice said. Farkle looked up to see Maya Hart standing over him. Before the boys could say any more, Maya punched one on the face. Then she shoved another one to the ground.

“How do you like that huh?” Maya asked.

“You hit like a girl,” one of the boys said.

“Thanks for noticing,” Maya said proudly.

She then turned to Farkle and helped him to stand. “Are you okay?” she asked.

Farkle looked at the blond girl and smiled. “Thank you,” he said. He then handed her his Ultra MIMS. “This is for you.”

Maya held it in her hand. “I thought you said that your father made it.”

“He did,” Farkle said. “He can always make me another one.”

“You are so cool to have a father that does stuff like that,” Maya said enviously. “Thanks.” She accepted it with another smile. It wasn’t as wide as Riley’s but it was nice and it was there. Maya was about to join Riley again when she turned to the boy. “Do you want to play with us?”

Riley also waved the boy forward. “Do you want to play, Farkle?” she asked.

Farkle smiled and said, “Sure.” He then joined Maya and Riley and the three slid down the slide and ran up and down the jungle gym laughing and talking with each other.

Jordan Miller arrived in front of the school waiting for Farkle to come through. He politely said “Excuse me,” as he sat between two people. One was a pretty blond woman in a waitress uniform and the other was a man in a dark suit with hair that was curlier than his.

“So which one are you waiting for,” the man said.

“I’m waiting for my daughter, Maya,” the blond woman said.

“I’m waiting for my daughter, Riley,” the other man said. He turned to Jordan. “Are you waiting for your kid too?”

Jordan shook his head. “Oh he’s not my son.”

The man nodded. “Oh your nephew or younger brother, or boyfriend’s kid?”

Jordan smiled and laughed. “Yeah I get that a lot. Actually, I’m waiting for my employer’s son, Farkle.”

“Odd name,” the man observed.

“Well my employer’s an odd man,” Jordan said. “I’m Jordan Miller.” He shook the other man’s
“Cory Matthews,” the man said. Then Jordan turned to the blond. “And you are-?”

The woman shook their hands. “Katy Clu-uh Hart,” she said.

“Well nice to meet you too,” Cory said. “You must be the famous Bay Window Maya’s mother.” Katy laughed. “Yeah that’s me.”

“Our daughter talked a bit about yours,” Cory said wryly. “I think she would like to be her friend.”

“Well I’m willing if you are,” Katy agreed.

The bell rang and practically an army of children exited the school. Cory, Katy, and Jordan stood in unison looking for the youngsters. Riley ran up to her father all smiles and chatters. “Hi Daddy,” she said.

“Hi Smiley Riley,” Cory said as he hugged his little girl. “How was your first day?”

“It was fun,” Riley said. “Can my new friends, Maya and Farkle come over tomorrow?”

Cory turned to Katy who had been talking to her daughter up until then. “Well it’s alright with me if it’s alright with you?” He prompted.

“Can I Mom?” Maya asked.

Katy shrugged. “I guess so, actually that would help a lot. I have an audition tomorrow, so the only one home would be your father and- “She hesitated. “Well you know sometimes Daddy isn’t in the mood to watch you, Baby Girl.”

“Mom, I’m not a baby anymore,” Maya reminded her mother testily.

“Well you’ll always be my Baby Girl,” Katy said slightly pinching her daughter’s cheeks.

“Mom, stop,” Maya said embarrassed as she pushed away. “So it’s okay?” Maya asked.

“Sure, Maya,” Katy said.

Farkle turned to Jordan. “I don’t know, as far as I know its okay. I’ll have to ask Mr. Minkus’ permission first,” the nanny said as he picked up his cell phone.

Cory Matthews looked at Jordan in surprise. “Mr. Minkus? Your employer is Stuart Minkus?”

Jordan felt a bit like a name dropper wondering if the man was just thrilled that he was talking to someone working for a famous person. “The very same.”

“You’re kidding?” Cory said in surprise as Jordan dialed his employer’s number.

Farkle was in the middle of filling out several business reports when Jessie interrupted him through her computer. “Mr. Minkus, Bellevue is on Line 3.”

Minkus’ heart leaped into his throat. It had to be about Jennifer. “I’ll get it, thanks Jessie.” He then pressed the line expecting to hear Jennifer’s psychiatrist call him.

“Stuart,” a low sexy but sad voice spoke through the phone.

Minkus’ eyes and mouth widened. “Jennifer? Are you alright?” Ever since Christmas, Jennifer had refused to see Minkus or Farkle. They faithfully visited once a week, but always returned home discouraged that they never saw her. Sometimes they sat inside the Visitor’s area for the entire hour waiting to her to come out.

The psychiatrist diagnosed Jennifer’s condition as “Borderline Personality Disorder” which he admitted was a tricky mental illness. People who suffered from BPD often were incapable of accepting blame and unwilling to change so they often needed a lot of work with medicine and therapy. Minkus wondered how much progress his wife had been making.

“Yes, I’m fine,” there was a sadness and vulnerability in her voice. Minkus could tell that she was fighting off tears. “I want to see you. Will tomorrow be okay?”

“Yes tomorrow will be fine,” Minkus replied. “About 3:00 sounds good?”

“Yeah, I guess that’s alright,” Jennifer said.

“Sure I’ll pick up Farkle from school and we can-“Minkus began.

“No,” Jennifer insisted. “I just want to see you not Farkle. I’m not ready-I don’t know if I can face him yet. Please come on your own.”

“Okay,” Minkus answered. He didn’t like it, but he wanted Jennifer to be comfortable. Jordan would probably watch him during that time. “I’ll be there.” He promised.

“Stuart, I have to go,” Jennifer answered. “This is a public phone and other people want to use it. I’ll see you tomorrow.”
“Tomorrow then,” Minkus agreed. “Good-bye, Jennifer.”
“Good-bye Stuart,” Jennifer said as she hung up the phone. Minkus listened to the dial tone for a
minute and then hung up himself concerned about his wife and what state she would be in the next
day.
Less than a few minutes later, Jessie once again contacted him to tell him that he had a phone call, this
time Jordan Miller.
Minkus answered the phone. “What’s up, Jordan?” he asked.
“Mr. Minkus, I just wanted to let you know that Farkle was invited to a friend’s house tomorrow
and I told them that it was alright but I wanted to check with you first.”
A few emotions went through Minkus’ head, happiness that his son found new friends, curiosity
about who they were, slight envy that the boy made close friends at a younger age than his father
did, but mostly concern about who these people were.
“Well I’m glad you asked first,” Minkus said concerned and he was aware obsessively worried.
“But I will have to know their names and address first. I want to look them up. For all I know, they
could be serial killers or child molesters!”
“He doesn’t look like the type,” Jordan replied.
“They never do,” Minkus reminded the nanny. “So what’s this friend’s name and can you tell me
the parents’ names.”
There were a few minutes as Jordan appeared to be asking some questions then he returned to the
phone. “Actually he said that you do know them. The friend’s name is Riley Matthews and there
will be another girl there, Maya Hart.” Minkus was stunned at the revelation of Riley’s last name.
Matthews? No, it couldn’t be! It’s a common enough name. Jordan continued. “Her parents are
named Cory and Topanga Matthews. Kind of a weird name, Topanga.”
Minkus shook his head. “You’re kidding! No they aren’t serial killers or child molesters,” Minkus
said. They’re worse, he thought bitterly remembering his former school enemy and former crush-
turned-academic rival. He pushed the Internet icon on his computer and looked up the names
“Cory Matthews” and “Topanga Lawrence-Matthews.” He read that Cory was a history teacher at
John Quincy Adams Middle School. Minkus almost wanted to double up with laughter with the
thought that Cory, the underachiever was now a teacher. He hoped Farkle would never be one of
his students. Topanga he found out was an attorney for a prestigious law firm. Unbelievable that
two people that he hadn’t seen in years would suddenly live in the same city as him.
He thought, that he could say no, that Farkle shouldn’t be friends with their daughter. He could pull
his son out of the school and not have him have anything to do with the Matthews. But he realized
how foolish and futile the gesture would be. For one thing, these were the first close friends Farkle
had ever made. He had never been invited to someone else’s house. When would he get another
chance?
For another reason, Minkus realized how selfish those feeling would be. They would have nothing
to do with his feelings for Farkle and everything to do with his dislike of Riley’s father. For all he
knew, Cory could have changed quite a bit. Besides if Farkle recognized something special enough
in Cory’s daughter to be her friend, maybe Minkus could recognize something in her parents.
“Mr. Minkus, what’s the verdict?” Jordan asked after a long silence.
“Oh sure, it’s fine,” Minkus said. “I have to be somewhere tomorrow after 3:00, so tell Cory that
I’ll pick up Farkle afterwards about 5 or so. What’s the address?” Jordan asked Cory and then
returned with the address. Minkus stared at the address in disbelief. Not only did the Matthews also
live in New York City, but they lived in the same Greenwich Village neighborhood less than one
apartment complex away from where the Minkus family lived!
Stuart walked outside the Bellevue grounds agreeing to meet Jennifer in the yard. “Stuart,” he
heard her voice. He turned to see his wife seated on a wicker chair. Her hair was extremely short
cropped to her neck and she wore the white patient’s uniform. She was also extremely thin, almost
skeletal. Minkus ran over to his wife and handed her the bouquet of flowers, and a sapphire
necklace, and kissed her. Jennifer held onto the flowers and put on the necklace. “It’s been so long,
I almost forgot what you looked like. You still look good.”
Minkus smiled. “You do too. You cut your hair.”

Jennifer ran her fingers through it. “Ugh, I look like a boy. One of the patients is studying to be a beautician. That’s what they like us to do here, learn some vocational skills so we can do things on the outside. She cut my hair, but I think she cut too much off.”

“Well it still looks terrific,” Stuart told his wife. “You’re so thin now.”

“I don’t eat as much as I should,” she said. “That’s what they tell me. Which reminds me, try these and tell me what you think.” She gave him a small box and took out a small chocolate truffle. Minkus tasted one. “This is amazing!” He said. It tasted rich with milk chocolate.

“I learned how to cook while I’ve been in here,” she said shyly.

“Jennifer, why did you want to see me?” Minkus asked.

“I figured that it’s been awhile,” Jennifer hesitated. “I haven’t heard from you in some time and I became curious. How have you been? Has business been going good?”

“Yes, actually it has,” Minkus said. “We have a whole line of computer games now. With that and Farkle Phones and MIMS devices among others, we’re doing quite well.”

“I know,” Jennifer said. “They actually have some of your games here. A couple of the guys were playing the historic war games, what are they called-?”

“The Great War and La Resistance,” Minkus said remembering the WWI themed trench battle game and the WWII era French Resistance game.

“Yeah,” Jennifer said. “I told them that you were my husband and they thought it was another delusion.”

“I’m so famous that I’m a delusion,” Minkus joked. “YES! I can cross that off my bucket list.” Jennifer laughed. “That’s what I miss. You could always make me laugh. How’s Farkle?”

“He’s doing really well,” Minkus said. “He’s in first grade now. He learned how to ride a bike, he loves it. Actually he’s with some friends, Riley and Maya. He’s at Riley’s house now.”

“He has friends?” Jennifer said amazed. “I just figured that he’d be like you. A total loner for life.” Stuart smiled blithely. “So what’s this boy Riley like that he’s at his house?”

“Actually Riley is a girl,” Minkus said confiding in her. “Of course Maya is too. Our son is quite the player.”

“Oh,” Jennifer said teasing. “At only 6 and our boy is a heartbreaker with two girlfriends.” Minkus grinned. “He informed me yesterday that Riley and Maya were not girls, they were ladies!” The husband and wife laughed good-naturedly. “You will never believe who Riley’s parents are, Cory and Topanga Matthews!”

“You’re kidding,” Jennifer said. She then made a face. “Ugh that idiot reproduced and with the hippy hair on legs?”

“She wasn’t that bad,” Minkus objected.

“Well she had no taste that was for sure marrying that Brillo Head,” Jennifer rolled her eyes. “I never could see what she or Shawn Hunter saw in him.”

“It was a long time ago, Jennifer,” Minkus offered. He knew his wife’s past history with Shawn Hunter and her animosity for Cory Matthews. His dislike for their former schoolmate paled in comparison to her absolute hatred for him. “Maybe things have changed.”

Jennifer sighed. “You’re right. I guess we should at least give the daughter the benefit of the doubt no matter how idiotic the parents were. Anyway, I’m not supposed to be thinking things like that here. They want me to curb my negative thoughts towards others.” She took a deep breath and relaxed mentally counting to ten. “There I feel better.”

“Why did you call me, Jennifer?” Stuart asked.

Jennifer looked downward. “Because I’m scared, Stuart. They say that I will be getting better soon. I could even go home, but I don’t know where I’d be going. I could go to Mother and Daddy’s house, but how long would I stay there? Mother in particular would get on my nerves.” Her voice quivered. “I literally went from my parent’s house to yours. I don’t know any other life and I want to come home with you.”

Stuart was silent. He wasn’t sure how he felt about this. The truth was, he and Farkle had been doing rather well the last few months. They had their mutual discussions about education and
learning, often still sharing in reading together, discussing puzzles, and spending time with each other. They also adjusted well as a duo. Farkle had metamorphosed into a bright outgoing kid who was less nervous and clingy. While Minkus himself had his moments of neurotic worrying over his son, he had begun to relax his hold over him. He missed Jennifer it was true, but he didn’t miss the mood swings, the fights, the accusations, and above all he didn’t miss her verbal abuse towards Farkle.

“I don’t know Jennifer,” Minkus said warily.

“I know that you have no reason to trust me,” Jennifer said. “You shouldn’t. I had multiple affairs. I drank. I spent your money. I yelled and hit both you and Farkle, but things are different now. I learned a lot about myself and my behaviors. I want to get rid of these destructive patterns and I need you to help me do that.”

“How can I help you?” Minkus asked.

Jennifer started crying. “You were always stronger than me. You put up with a lot more than you had any right to and you pulled me out when I needed it.” She began to cry harder and Minkus wrapped his arms around his wife. “I just need you to pull me out again. I just want to come home. Please let me come home.”

Stuart held onto his wife. He wanted to believe her, but she had manipulated him so many times in the past. Could he afford to believe her again? “I do miss you and I love you Jennifer,” he said as he kissed her. He purposely left the rest hanging in the air. “I want you to come home if I could believe that you could change.”

“Please let me show you,” Jennifer said. “You always were so scientific basing all of your decisions on logic. How can you come to a conclusion without testing it first?”

Stuart considered. “Well alright. I’ll think about it.”

“I promise you won’t be disappointed,” Jennifer insisted.

Minkus entered the hallway of the Matthews’ apartment. It had been sometime since he had seen either Cory or Topanga, that time after his grandfather’s funeral when he saw them through the window of Cory’s parent’s house in fact. He wondered what he would say to them. Would he have anything to say? He passed by a blond woman and a little girl, her daughter he guessed. He accidentally bumped into her. “Sorry,” he said politely.

“Sorry,” she answered back as they left. He idly wondered if the girl was the other friend, what was her name-Maya?

He knocked on the door of the number that Jordan gave him. The door was opened by a familiar looking face. “Yeeeesss?!” he jokingly said.

Minkus couldn’t believe it. Cory Matthews hadn’t changed a bit. He could still recognize the curly haired skinny kid that he knew in high school. From behind him, he could see Topanga. She hadn’t changed either-still looked as sharp and as beautiful as always. “Topanga,” he couldn’t resist greeting with a smile and he turned to Cory. “Cory.”

“Stuart,” Topanga greeted before her husband answered. “Minkus!”

Minkus couldn’t resist. “Right on both counts,” he said. “I’m here because you have something of mine.”

Cory put his hand to his chin. “Let’s see 6 years old, yay big-”He put his hand at knee level “-Talks like a scientist? Answers to Farkle? Haven’t seen him.”

Minkus gave his former rival a smirk. “I would believe that if I clearly didn’t see him coming into the living room.”

Farkle ran up to his father. “Hi Father,” he said.

“Hi ready to go?” Minkus asked. Farkle answered as he took his father’s hand.

“Stuart wait,” Topanga said and she approached him. “Farkle is welcome to come see Riley anytime.”

“He is?” Minkus asked.

“He is?” Cory asked. Upon Topanga’s stare, he answered. “He is! Actually, he’s a great kid. He, Maya, and Riley had a lot of fun together.”

Minkus nodded. “Well that’s good and thank you for the invitation,” he spoke to his son. “Do you
want to hang out with them more?”
Farkle nodded. “Yes I want to be with my ladies!”
Minkus motioned towards his son. “I think you have your answer. I think it will be good for them to be friends.”
“Yeah we do too,” Cory said nodding at Topanga who nodded back.
Minkus motioned for his son to come forward. “Well come on we have to get home alright?”
Farkle followed his father as they walked down the hallway and approached the elevator.
Farkle and Minkus walked towards their apartment hand-in-hand. “Daddy, Mr. and Mrs. Matthews said that they knew you,” Farkle said.
“Yes they did, Farkle,” Minkus answered. “I went to school with them.”
“They seem nice,” Farkle said. “Though Mr. Matthews said that you were a geek.” He giggled.
Minkus smirked. “Yes, he would say that. Mr. Matthews and I didn’t get along.”
“Why?” Farkle asked.
“Well we were…different,” Minkus said tactfully. “I was a genius and Mr. Matthews liked to tease me for being a genius.”
“He was a bully?” Farkle asked stunned. How could he visit the home of someone who was a bully?
Minkus shook his head. He wanted to set the record straight about Cory and he certainly didn’t want Farkle to be afraid of him and not visit his daughter. “Not quite, more of he would say things or do things to me without thinking about it. He was just thoughtless at times. But he had some very good friends and was very loyal to his friends and his family. I imagine he’s probably a very good father and would be very good to you.”
“He is,” Farkle said. “What was Mrs. Matthews like when she was in school?”
Minkus smiled. “Well she was someone who if things had been different could have been your mother. When we were younger in school, she was the first girl that I had emotional feelings for.”
“You loved her?” Farkle said not believing that his father was in love. “Did you know Mother then?”
Minkus shook his head. “No, I met Mother much later. I met her once in high school, but we didn’t get together until we were in college. But with Topanga, Mrs. Matthews, it was different. We went to elementary school together. We were both smart intellectual types. She was sort of bizarre but it worked on her.”
“Why didn’t you marry Mrs. Matthews then,” Farkle asked. “I’m not really upset, just curious. I mean if you and Mrs. Matthews got married, I would not have been born nor Riley. Or maybe we would have been brother and sister. That would be really weird. Is Riley really my sister?”
“No, Farkle, she’s not your sister,” Minkus said with a smile. “Actually I haven’t seen Topanga or Cory in a long time before today. Sometimes when people get older, they change. They aren’t always the same people. They may look different or have different interests, and wear completely new clothes. It may happen to you one day.”
“It will never happen to me,” Farkle said determined. “Farkle Minkus will always be Farkle Minkus!”
Minkus chuckled at his son’s already building ego. “Why do I have a feeling that I should record this conversation as a reminder?” He teased. Then he returned to the original subject about him and Topanga. “Sometimes you lose touch with people. That’s what happened between me and Mrs. Matthews. She went one way and I went another way. Once you go your separate ways, you can’t really come back.”
“So why did you marry Mother?” Farkle asked. “Did you love her too?”
“Yes, I did, Farkle,” Minkus answered. “I married your mother because we got along well. Her family liked me and they helped me get started with my company so we became a match because of that. We were both looking for something and we found it in each other. She was beautiful and well connected and I wanted a wife like that. I took care of her and helped her meet many people and she wanted a husband like that. We realized that we needed and loved each other.”
“Do you still love Mother?” Farkle asked.
Sometimes Minkus cursed all of the learning that he gave his son when the result was his precociousness. He was like Ginsburg in that way, always able to see right through him. “Of course I do, Farkle,” Minkus answered he realized all too quickly. “I wouldn’t still be married to her if I didn’t. Don’t you love Mother?”

Farkle nodded. “Yes, I do.” He answered also very quickly.

Jordan picked up Farkle at school a few days later. “Good news about your mom,” he said.

“We’re going to visit her?” Farkle asked.

“Yep you’re going to see her,” the nanny said.

“When?” Farkle asked.

“Well your dad is coming home early and you’re going to have an early supper,” Jordan replied.

“As soon as you two are done, you’ll go.”

“Okay,” Farkle answered as he followed Jordan.

When Jordan and Farkle entered the apartment, Farkle was dismayed. “There isn’t anyone here,” he said. “Where’s Father?”

Jordy looked around. “I don’t know,” he said. “Maybe he’s in his room.” He knocked on the door.

They heard Stuart say, “Come in,” through the door. Jordan opened the door and Farkle was surprised to see not only his father but his mother seated on the bed.

Jennifer had her arms outstretched and Farkle hesitated walking slowly. “Hello Mother,” he said warily. Jordan realizing the family needed time alone, stepped outside the room.

“Mother?” Jennifer asked her husband.

“He’s maturing now,” Minkus answered.

“How are you feeling?” Farkle asked.

“Much better,” Jennifer answered. “I’m sorry for the things that I said to you. I want to be a better person and a better Mom- uh Mother to you, Farkle. I miss you Honey. Did you miss me?”

“Yes, I did and I’m glad you’re home,” Farkle said as he ran to his mother to give her a big hug.

“You look different Mother! Your hair is shorter.”

“Well you look different too,” Jennifer observed. “You’ve gotten taller!”

Minkus smiled at his wife and son talking to each other. He looked down at his wife lying on the bed. “By the way, if you are still interested in the position, it’s still open.” He held out his wife’s rings.

Jennifer smiled. “I accept,” she said as her husband put the rings back on his wife’s finger.

Farkle then jumped into bed to meet his parents in a family hug. Stuart smiled as he embraced his wife and son. Maybe this would be a new start after all.
House Rules (Stuart Age 30-32 Farkle 8-10)

Chapter Summary

Covers a period of three years. Jennifer, Farkle, and Minkus weigh the rules each family members go by to survive.

The Lives of Genius
A Boy/Girl Meets World
By Auburn Red
Chapter Fourteen: House Rules (Stuart Minkus Age 30-32; Farkle Minkus Age 8-10)
Use any means to get what you want.
Ever since she returned from the hospital, Jennifer Bassett-Minkus learned some specific rules in adapting to her marriage, but the most important was: Use any means to get whatever she wanted out of her marriage. That included words, threats, and emotions. Anything would work, they would always work.

For a year, after Jennifer returned from the hospital, hers and Stuart’s relationship had somewhat improved. They began to attend marriage counseling and talked out their problems, rather than fight. Jennifer took her anti-psychotic medicine stabilizing her moods. Stuart, Jennifer, and Farkle even visited France and Spain that first summer and had a good time. But over time, Jennifer began to notice that her husband and son tip-toed around her, spoke in hushed tones, and treated the home like it was fragile glass. Jennifer noticed that she would hesitate before losing her temper, or speak in harsh tones. The three acted as though their family was a show that they were afraid would come down. As soon as Jennifer recognized these signs, she realized that these emotions could work to her advantage.

She recognized that Stuart still retained that protectiveness of his fragile wife, but she could sense that he was also afraid, afraid for her and afraid of her. Before it was always in the back of his mind, but now that he had seen it, she could tell that it moved to the forefront. She had attacked her husband in public, threatened suicide, and he would never forget that. He now could see that there were no limits to his wife’s madness and that would prove useful in any future arguments. Fear could be a powerful motivator, so could other emotions such as vulnerability. Immediately after Jennifer had returned from the hospital, she had played the helpless female to the hilt practically allowing her husband to dress her, feed her, cradle her, and comfort her. She didn’t even have to drink alcohol for him to do that. He was so wrapped up in his bit of a wife that he would do anything for her.

Admittedly, not all was for show. Jennifer still carried quite a few nightmares and flashbacks of her mania and needed her husband to pull her out. The vulnerability turned as if often did between them into passion and sex and well a skipped period later convinced Jennifer that she was once again in the family way.

Another emotion she was good at motivating others with was guilt something she practiced not only on her husband (“You know that since I’ve been back from the hospital, couldn’t I get some rest away from the city don’t you think maybe at a summer vacation home?”) but also with her son (“Could you please keep it down, Mother really doesn’t feel well. You don’t want me getting sick again do you?”). She could practically control her husband and son now with nothing more than a snap of her fingers with minimal disagreements or arguments. It was a nice trade-off for being married to a boring dull know-it-all and giving birth to his clone.

Jennifer reflected on these aspects with her closest friends Libby Harper-Chastain and Dana Pruitt-
Livingstone as they sat in her kitchen drinking coffee and talking. Any minute now, Farkle would be coming home from school. He would probably then ask if he could go to that horrid Matthews girl’s apartment. Farkle entered the apartment and put away his satchel before he greeted his mother and her friends.

“Hi Mother, Hi Aunt Libby, Hi Aunt Dana,” he said.

“Hi Farkle,” Dana said. “How was school?” Dana until then had been looking out the window in a far off expression barely paying attention to her friends’ conversation. Her blond hair was cut in a waifish style making her look even thinner and more wide-eyed than when they were younger. Libby’s only response was a curt nod to the little boy as she texted on her cell. Her platinum white hair had longed disappeared to her natural raven black. The two women were dressed like their friend, all trendy styles with brand names like Prada for Libby and Jennifer and Laura Ashley for Dana. Libby and Dana almost looked like chess pieces with Dana’s white knit shirt and capris contrasting with Libby’s black cap sleeve top and skirt. Jennifer was dressed in a white and black striped maternity top and black pants.

“Okay,” Farkle said answering Dana’s question. He liked his Aunt Dana a bit better than his Aunt Libby. She was somewhat nicer than the often self-involved Libby, even sometimes nicer than his mother. Even if she was often jittery and confused. “Mother, can Riley come over today?” Jennifer shook her head almost as soon as Farkle asked. “Farkle, no, you know I don’t want your friends coming over in my condition.” She rubbed her swollen abdomen. Jennifer was about four months along. They weren’t sure yet, but they had a feeling the baby was going to be a girl. Farkle said that it would be neat to have a baby sister. “The doctor said that I shouldn’t have any disturbances or complications during my pregnancy. You and your friends would make too much noise.”

“That’s weird,” Farkle said. “Mrs. Matthews is having a baby too and she doesn’t mind that Maya and I come over.”

“Well Farkle,” Jennifer began. “Pregnancies are different for different people. Was Mrs. Matthews in the hospital before like I was?”

“No,” Farkle answered.

“Alright,” Jennifer said. “My doctor said because of that I am prone to headaches, stress, and I’m sensitive to noise and confusion. Plus your sister and I need a peaceful and quiet environment and remember what your father said before he left for L.A.”

Farkle nodded. He remembered that his father said before he got on the plane, “Farkle, you are in charge while I’m away. Take care of your mother and future sister. They will need you. Make things as easy as you can for your mother.” Farkle knew that he had to obey both his parents.

“Okay Mother,” Riley said. “Riley doesn’t have to come over. I just thought it would be nice since I always go to her place. May I go over to her apartment after I finish my homework?”

Jennifer rolled her eyes. She really didn’t want Farkle to befriend Cory and Topanga Matthews’ daughter, but she knew that the boy had already become friends with her before Jennifer had been released. Better for him to go to her house than to risk that girl or the other one, the white trash friend whose mother was a-she shuddered at the thought—a waitress, come to theirs. “Well alright,” Jennifer said. “But only for an hour,” she said. “It’s a school night.”

“Alright,” Farkle said. He then ran to his bedroom with his book bag in hand excited as he contemplated his lessons for the day.

Dana and Libby looked at the young boy. “I have never seen a kid so excited about doing his homework,” Libby dryly observed.

“He gets that from his father,” Jennifer said with a snort and an eye roll. “He obviously didn’t get a whole lot from me.”

“I thought things were alright between you and Stuart?” Dana asked. Her eyes had the glassy expression and her voice had a heightened tone that Jennifer had grown used to over the years.

“As alright as they can be with Mr. Excitement,” Jennifer said. “He paid for the redecorating.” She nodded at the French Provincial style of the furniture and décor. “I’ve also finally convinced him to rent a house in the Hamptons for summer vacation. Though knowing him, he’ll probably spend
most of his time either on his laptop or in the city worrying about his company. He wouldn’t know
good time if it were staring at him in the face. Though, if I’m lucky, I may actually get him to
buy me a summer home.”
Libby shook her head approvingly. “You are so lucky to have a husband who pays for everything
for you. Whenever I ask Brian for anything, he always says, ‘Darling, we are a two career couple.
If you want something you can pay for it yourself’ as if I were five years old or something and he
were my father, not a bank executive. It just galls him that I make more money than he does.”
“Well you are one of the top realtors in Manhattan,” Dana encouraged. “You also have escrow on I
don’t even know how many properties. I must have lost count.”
“Yes I am and I love it,” Libby bragged. She then checked her text messages again and smiled.
“Would you excuse me for a minute?” She said. Jennifer smiled but didn’t say anything.
Sometimes it was just worth it to watch and observe her friends rather than say anything at all.
“Seriously what is your secret?” Dana asked her friend. “Ethan and I get along, but he’s so distant
at times. It’s hard to tell what he will say when I ask him for anything. He’s been losing steadily in
the stock market and that’s not good for a stockbroker so things have been tense between us. Last
time we got into such a fight, that we’re considering marriage counseling.” She hung her head very
sadly. Jennifer just listened feigning patience with her friend’s marital problems. “I just don’t know
how you manage it with Stuart.”
“A right man with the right money and the right connections,” Jennifer said with fake modesty. “It
also helps that he has the spine of a tube worm.” The two longtime friends snickered. “Besides
after I got back from the hospital, Stuart is so driven to make it work between us that he will
instantly give me anything I ask for.”
Libby returned to the table with a flushed and very pleased expression on her face. “Ah, so that’s
your secret,” Libby said. “Get drunk and arrested and have a public meltdown.”
Jennifer smirked at her friend. “Well get better certainly and fill him with guilt afterward,” she said
amidst her friends’ laughter.
This time it was Dana’s turn to get up from the table. She retreated to the bathroom. When she
returned, Jennifer noticed that she was very pale. The glassy eyed expression seemed to be more
dilated. She looked at her friends, her voice becoming more animated and lively than before. “Well
enough talk. Do you girls want to go out tonight for a drink? I mean you can’t drink of course
Jennifer. But there’s this nice little café near my apartment that just opened.”
Libby and Jennifer shrugged and stood up. Jennifer knocked on her son’s bedroom door. “Farkle,
I’m going out with Aunt Libby and Aunt Dana for a little while. I will be back about 7:00 or so.
There’s still that Chicken Cordon Bleu in the refrigerator if you get hungry. You can just heat it
up in the microwave. Remember what I said about the Matthews; you only stay for one hour. I will
call and if you aren’t here, you will hear about it.”
“Okay Mother,” Farkle said through the bedroom.
Jennifer, Libby, and Dana left the apartment as the door manager held the door for them. Jennifer
suddenly felt very queasy and felt her balance shift. She struggled to hold onto an awning pole. She
suddenly felt very dizzy. “Jennifer are you alright?” Dana asked holding onto her friend.
“I don’t know,” Jennifer said. “I feel strange.”
“Maybe it’s the baby,” Dana suggested. “You ought to get to a hospital.”
“NO,” Jennifer said quickly. The last thing that she wanted was for her friends to know what she
had been hiding the last two months.
“I mean no. Just give me a minute. I’m just dizzy, I’ll recover.” She then sat back up and was
about to walk forward to the parking space for her car. Once again however she lost her footing
and had her friends hold her up. She gripped her stomach and felt such tremendous pain that she
had to kneel down. “Oh my god, Jennifer, you’re bleeding,” Dana said. “Libby call 911!” Dana
said to her friend. Libby was checking a text message when Dana pushed her. “Libby!”
Libby looked at her friend terrified. “Oh sorry,” she said as she dialed.
The EMT’s carried Jennifer through the hospital on a stretcher. She accepted the drugs but resisted
any attempts for an emergency C-section. She told the workers that she wanted to wait until she
was in the hospital. The on-call emergency room doctor, Dr. Patterson, a young handsome male doctor looked at the chart. “Let’s see what we have here.” He checked Jennifer’s abdomen then her cervix. His hands moved rather slowly inside, much slower than Jennifer was used to from a doctor. She definitely couldn’t ignore the grin that he had. Jennifer was crying and in hysterics as the doctor put his hands on her abdomen. “Hmm that’s strange,” he said. “How many months are you?” “Four,” Jennifer replied. By her side, Dana was sobbing and Libby was stone faced but clearly pale and terrified. “I’m not detecting any movement,” the doctor said. “Is it dead already?” Jennifer asked. “Well there’s only one way to find out,” Dr. Patterson said as he put petroleum jelly on her. He then turned on the ultrasound and looked closely at the image. All he could see was the woman’s uterus. Not only was there no movement, but there was no baby. “Mrs. Minkus, there isn’t anything there,” he said. “You’re not pregnant.” Jennifer felt as if someone had slapped her. Libby and Dana gaped at their friend in wordless surprise. “Yes, I am,” she said. “I have skipped my period for four months now. I’ve gained weight. I’ve even done a pregnancy test and it came out positive. What about the blood? I am clearly losing my baby! Now do something!” “Mrs. Minkus, what you are experiencing is a phantom pregnancy,” the doctor said patiently. “Sometimes women’s bodies can go through the stages of pregnancy even right down to the skipped periods but unfortunately they—you—are not carrying a baby. The blood is simply a period. Perhaps because of the menstrual cycle being stopped for that time, it’s coming back with a vengeance in a way. I wish I could say otherwise but there is nothing there.” “Then your ultrasound is faulty,” Jennifer declared. “I will get a second opinion!” Libby and Dana held onto their friend. “Jennifer—“Libby said. “Have you been to a doctor at all, Mrs. Minkus?” Dr. Patterson asked. “Yes, two months ago,” she sulked. “What did the doctor say?” Patterson asked. Jennifer sighed. “She couldn’t see a fetus alright? She was wrong too!” Libby glared at her friend. Dana just trembled in shock. “Jennifer you mean you were never pregnant?” Dana asked. Jennifer rolled her eyes at her friend’s grasp of the obvious. “And you knew that you weren’t,” Libby said. “That’s why you didn’t want to go to a doctor at first or let them deliver it in the ambulance.” Jennifer looked closely at her friends. “I was pregnant and I miscarried. That’s what happened. The baby is dead. That is what we will say.” She glanced at her friends and the doctor. Dr. Patterson held up his hands. “Mrs. Minkus, I’m not going to lie if I’m asked.” Jennifer looked closely at the doctor. “You are a very handsome man, single?” The doctor shook his head. “No, I’m married. I just don’t always wear my ring when I’m at work.” “Would your wife like to know how you touch your female patients?” Jennifer asked. “She would know it was a part of my job,” Patterson objected. “Really touching women’s cervixes slowly with that grin like you were getting off on it,” Jennifer asked. “That’s all a part of your job. I’m sure the Medical Board would be very understanding as well as my attorney.” “Mrs. Minkus,” Patterson warned. “You wouldn’t be able to tell them—“ “I would if I had to,” Jennifer said. “All you have to do is change the medical report to say miscarriage instead of phantom pregnancy. But if you don’t, I wonder how many other women would come forward with the same story as me.” Dr. Patterson did not look like someone whose patient was telling a lie. He looked like someone who was guilty of doing that exact thing and was found out. “I will change the medical report,” the doctor agreed. He then left the room to comply with his patient’s request. “What about us?” Libby asked. “We know what we saw or rather what we didn’t see.” “You two won’t tell Stuart anything except what I tell you to say,” Jennifer said stone faced
looking at her two friends. Dana gave a bitter laugh. “Come on, Jen. We’ve been your friends since high school. You can trust us.”

Jennifer smiled sweetly. “Sure I can, Dana. But just in case you get a short memory, I just want to make sure. Do you think Ethan would like to know how often his wife takes speed and that she has anorexia? You are so thin and jumpy it would be a matter of time before he finds out.” Dana’s eyes quivered and she shook nervously. “After all it’s difficult to be the perfect wife, mother, and attorney, the woman who ‘Has It All.’ You have to have something to help you keep up with that busy schedule don’t you? Now did the speed come first then the anorexia or was it the other way around? No matter, I’m sure they went hand in hand.” Dana was shivering terrified looking more like a small girl frightened of the dark than a high powered attorney. “I’ll bet Ethan doesn’t know anything about it does he or does anyone?” Dana shook her head as Jennifer continued talking. “Of course if Ethan and the kids did know, your perfect life would come crashing down around you when they realize that you just aren’t ‘wife and mother material.’”

Jennifer then turned to Libby. “And as for you. Would Brian like to know how close you are to your real estate partner, Joshua isn’t that his name? He also would be very intrigued that it’s not good contacts and sales skills that gives you the ability to make more money than he does. It’s that you and Joshua like to embezzle money from your customers and the firm. You also like to offer property deals in locations that for some reason don’t seem to exist. Oh no, next Mother’s Day, Brian and the twins may be visiting their mother in a prison cell!”

“You have no proof for any of this,” Libby said coldly but clearly her friend had touched a nerve. “Oh but I do,” Jennifer said. “All anyone would have to do is look at Dana and I’m not completely blind. Whenever Dana goes to the bathroom to take her little friends, I like to save a few just in case of insurance. Anyway, all anyone has to do is count the bites that she eats or doesn’t eat as it were. I also had some added leverage from you. Remember last year when that man was interested in one of your properties? Well, he was an actor friend of mine and did me a favor. Now, I have paperwork, phone calls, and text messages between you and Josh including the ones that you made less than a few hours ago! It pays to have a computer geek husband when you can learn how to reroute calls in your own home.”

Libby looked at the very nervous Dana. She was clearly about to cave. Libby wasn’t quite ready. “What about all of the things that you have done? We could tell about Alexander and the others-Hell we even helped arrange some of them-and about the drinking. We could even tell Stuart and the police that you just blackmailed us.”

“All of that is ancient history,” Jennifer said. “Everyone knows about it and I’ve changed my ways and am starting over. I’m not blackmailing you, such an ugly word isn’t it? Blackmailers usually want money or some other prize. I’m just asking for a conspiracy of silence between us. That Stuart thinks that I had a miscarriage. It is the truth, isn’t it?”

Dana and Libby exchanged glances. Jennifer knew what their answers would be. Those rules didn’t just work on her husband and son after all.

Stuart ran inside the hospital room to see his wife collapsed on the bed surrounded by her friends. She was too hysterical to say very much over the phone. She just begged her husband to come home right away. Feeling a flashback to when Farkle was born, Stuart left immediately for LAX and met the helicopter as soon as he reached JFK.

Jennifer’s face was drawn and tear stained. Stuart held onto his wife and hugged her tightly. “It’s alright, Jennifer,” he soothed. “It’s alright. What happened?”

Jennifer was about to talk but couldn’t form the words. Libby spoke up for her. “She felt funny a few hours ago and she almost collapsed. She was starting to bleed.” Libby’s voice dropped. “I’m sorry, Stuart. She lost the baby.” She turned to Dana. “Isn’t that right, Dana?” Dana nodded. “Yeah it happened so fast, but it-um-she rather is dead. We did all we could.” She quickly jumped on the story. “I’m really sorry, Stuart.”

Minkus winced as he held his wife again. He turned to Jennifer’s friends. “It’s alright, I’m glad that Jennifer wasn’t alone. It’s neither of yours fault. These things happen. You’re good friends to be
there for her.”
Dana turned away as if she wanted to say something but didn’t. Libby held onto her friend by the shoulder. “I guess since you’re here. We’d better leave you two alone. Our husbands are probably wondering where we are. Come on, Dane.” Libby was about to head out the door when Dana lingered. “Dana?”
Dana continued to look shaken and disturbed. “Right, okay,” she said. “I’m right behind you, Libby.” She awkwardly turned to Jennifer. “I’ll hope you’ll be alright, Jen.”
Jennifer sighed. “I hope so. Thanks for being there for me, girls. I appreciate it.”
Libby and Dana both turned from their friend leaving the couple alone.
“Is there anything that you want Jennifer?” Minkus asked. “Where’s Farkle?”
Jennifer slapped her forehead. “Oh fuck, I forgot all about him! He must be worried sick!”
“I’ll go tell him in person,” Stuart asked. “He isn’t at home is he?”
Jennifer shook her head. “I don’t think so. I think he’s at the Matthews.”
Stuart held onto his wife until he could release himself from her to tell Farkle personally. “Don’t worry, Jennifer,” he assured her. “It will be alright. Maybe we’ll have another one and if not, we already have a great kid.”
Jennifer nodded, the sob coming through her throat. As her husband left, Jennifer lay in bed feeling a dull and numb satisfaction in knowing that she had gotten her way once more. She tried not to think about the baby that she never carried, but now she felt that she had lost.
Don’t ever make Mother mad or sad and never ever tell Father.
A year later, Farkle had learned rather quickly how to behave with his parents. He knew that his mother never recovered from the death of her daughter. They didn’t have a funeral or memorial for her. Minkus suggested it, but Jennifer told her husband that it wasn’t necessary; that they couldn’t really say anything about a baby that never really lived and anyway the hospital had already taken care of her remains. One rule Farkle learned right away: Never talk about the baby, because it would make his mother cry. Sometimes his father would cry too, but he would cover his face with his hand and pretend like he hadn’t been crying.
Farkle himself felt sad. He would have liked to have played with his sister, talked to her, share long car rides with her, even given her Rexy to sleep with. His father just said that he would have to hold onto Rexy a little longer. But Farkle realized that he couldn’t tell his parents about her, because it made them sad, so after a while he just tried to stop thinking about the baby. Farkle’s sister was never born so there was no point in bringing up someone who never really existed, that’s the way he began to think about her.
Even after the baby died, Farkle sometimes found his mother inside the room that would have been the baby’s now converted into a separate bedroom for his mother. She would stare at the wall, look far away, and cry. His mother and father now slept in separate bedrooms. They no longer shared a room except once in a great while.
Whenever his mother looked like that, Farkle would try to do something nice for her like make an art project or create a collage on his computer for her and then give it to her. Sometimes she accepted it with grateful tears in her eyes, but more often she would glance at it and then throw it away.
Jennifer also didn’t hesitate to yell and say nasty things about her son when Stuart wasn’t around. Farkle learned right away to walk gingerly through the house and to follow the various rules: don’t speak too loudly, don’t chatter too much about things that Mother didn’t understand or care about, don’t trip or break things, don’t interrupt Mother when she was on the phone, if he had to watch TV don’t turn it up too loudly preferably watch it in his bedroom at a low volume, don’t have those scruffy friends over especially “the Matthews brat and the white trash girl”, and especially if he got hurt by Mother never ever tell his Father about it. So many rules that it was hard for Farkle to keep track of them all but they all added up to the most important rule: don’t ever make Mother mad or sad.
Things were different when his father was home like now. He was as close to his father as ever and he always made everything okay. Where Farkle always felt frightened that he was breaking the
house rules with his mother, he always felt accepted by his father. Even Mother wasn’t as mean when he was home and Farkle felt like he didn’t have to be afraid of her because his father would either stand up for him, comfort him after she got mad, or when Farkle didn’t tell his father, he would somehow make the bad feelings go away just by making Farkle feel special and loved. Right now was an especially good time: Report Card Day. Farkle side-stepped the Art Deco furniture to approach his parents. Personally, he thought the Art Deco stuff was kind of ugly but he knew better than to tell his mother that. He showed his report card to his father and he looked at it with a wide grin. “All A’s congratulations Farkle,” he said proudly.

“So what else is new,” Jennifer muttered uninterested while filing her nails.

Minkus held the report card in his hands mentally counting in his head. “Do you know what that means?”

“What?” Farkle asked.

“That means that you have a total of 160 A’s in school,” Minkus said.

Farkle’s mouth dropped open in surprise. “Really?” he said. “How many did you have?”

“699 from elementary all the way through high school,” Minkus said with pride. “That means that together you and I have-?” He prompted.

“859,” Farkle added quickly. The two high fived as Minkus signed the report card with a proud flourish. “We should celebrate by going out to dinner.”

“Of course one less A than the valedictorian,” Jennifer said smugly.

The father and son stopped their celebration. “Well yes,” Minkus recalled. “We all have our drawbacks.”

“Was the valedictorian smarter than you?” Farkle asked.

“She just made one more A than me,” Minkus told his son. “We were about equal in intelligence.”

“Are you going to tell him who that valedictorian was?” Jennifer toyed with her husband.

Stuart gave his wife a smirk but chose not to say anything knowing that she was just going to egg him on into an argument.

“Who?” Farkle asked.

“None other than your little friend Riley’s mother,” Jennifer said. “The Midget with the Hair.”

“Mrs. Matthews?” Farkle guessed.

“Yes that’s true,” Minkus said. “But it was good because at least she was a friend, it made the competition more fun between us sort of like a game. Like when you and I play chess or farkle.”

“You can spin that story however you want now,” Jennifer said. “I seem to remember some nerd complaining at graduation about ‘being beaten by one lousy A’ Very mature commendable attitude.”

“I was 18,” Minkus said. “I think I’ve grown up a little since then. I’m sure you have too.”

Jennifer dropped her nail file. “What is that supposed to mean?” She accused.

Minkus hesitated. “Well I’m sure you don’t feel about Cory Matthews and Shawn Hunter the way you did then?”

Jennifer stood up. Farkle gulped. Uh oh, he thought knowing that his mother was going to get mad again. “Why should I feel anything for that idiot who talked badly of me in front of my boyfriend and then said boyfriend went from one girl to another like trophies and when Libby, Dana, and I tried to show his girlfriend how he really was, somehow we were the unreasonable ones? Why should it bother me?”

Minkus held up his hands. Farkle hid behind his father in fear of the upcoming battle.

“I’m sorry I mentioned it. Never mind, forget it. It’s old news.”

“Well I’m right aren’t I?” Jennifer said. “Aren’t I?” She pounded her fist on the table.

“Yes of course,” Minkus sighed. “Cory should never have talked about you and Shawn treated you badly. You are wonderful and you are always right.”

“Always right,” Farkle stammered.

Jennifer sat back and returned to filing her nails. “Good, just want to be sure about that.”

“Umm you want to go out to dinner?” Minkus asked his family.

“I don’t feel like it,” Jennifer said. “You two can if you want.”
“Are you sure?” Minkus asked.
“Whatever, just go,” Jennifer said.

Minkus then took Farkle’s hand. “Come on, I think your Mother wants to be alone anyway.”

“Yes please,” Jennifer insisted as her husband and son left.

The next quarter when Farkle presented his report card, it was a different story. He had received a B in P.E. It felt weird. He had never gotten anything lower than an A before. Maya told him that it wasn’t worth getting upset about. “Hey I got a B in Math last time and my Mom took me out for pizza,” she encouraged.

“But I make all A’s,” Farkle said. “Father and I always like to keep count of how many A’s I make.
“So you can count the B’s,” Maya suggested. “It’s not that big a deal. It’s still a good grade.”

Farkle said. “Well my Father is in London right now. So he won’t have to know.”

“You can give it to your Mom then,” Maya said.

Farkle didn’t want to say that would be worse. Both Maya and Riley’s mothers were nice. As far as he could see, they never yelled or hit their daughters when they were wrong and they never got into fights with their husbands or at least Riley’s mother didn’t. In fact when Mr. and Mrs. Matthews fought, it was usually a loving teasing fight that indicated the still loved each other and always made up afterward. They were always good to Riley and her baby brother, Auggie. Farkle met Maya’s mother and thought that she was nice and pretty, but he never met Maya’s father. Maya said he was gone and even if he was here she would never let him meet her friends. Farkle understood. She probably had her reasons as well.

Then again Farkle’s mother didn’t care as much about her son’s grades as his father did, maybe she would be more understanding.

Jennifer read the report card at first without commenting until she got to the Physical Education grade. “What is this, a B,” she asked.

Farkle hung his head in shame and nodded. “I’m sorry,” he said.

Jennifer shook her head. “Don’t apologize to me,” she said. “You can apologize to your father when he gets home. He will be very disappointed with you.”

Farkle nodded as his mother continued. “No, he won’t like this at all. He’s always going on about your A’s, and how he wants you to love learning. In fact he will just hate it! He has such high expectations of you! How will he feel when they are dashed?”

Farkle cried. He didn’t want to know.

Jennifer continued. “If I were you, I wouldn’t show this to him. I wouldn’t even tell him. He would never want to speak to you again! You don’t want him to think that you’re a failure do you?”

Farkle shook his head. “No, I don’t want that. You don’t think that I’m a failure do you, Mother?”

Jennifer held up the report card. “Well this says it all doesn’t it? Of course, I love you Farkle, the failure that you are. I love you for this. I can’t really say the same for your father. In fact tell you what, I’ll sign the report card and you give it to your teacher. We don’t have to tell your father at all and it will be our little secret.”

“Okay, Mother,” Farkle said. “I’m sorry that I failed.”

“Well you will just have to do better next time instead of being such a little nothing,” Jennifer said as her son walked into his room.

Farkle waited on the computer turning on the Skype icon. It was about time. Even though London was six hours ahead of New York and it was 1:30 in the morning there, it was just about time for Farkle and Stuart Minkus to read together. The Stories of Edgar Allen Poe lay at Farkle’s lap and he knew that his father had a copy of The Westing Game with him.

The icon appeared and Farkle could see his father’s face appear. He was seated in a hotel room.

“It’s 7:30 do you know where your mother is?” Minkus asked.

Farkle forced a laugh. “Hi Father, how’s London?”

“Just fine,” Minkus said. “I had tea with the Queen of England and later I’m hanging out with Charles and Camilla, and William and Kate. Then I’ll stop by the Prime Minister’s.”

“Really?” Farkle said knowing that his father was putting him on.

“No, mostly been doing business and trying to avoid the rain,” Minkus said. “How’s your
“Mother?”
“She’s okay,” Farkle said not wanting to repeat what she said earlier.
“And school—isn’t it Report Card Day?” Minkus asked his son.
Farkle looked downward. “No, that was yesterday,” he said quickly. “Mother already signed it and I gave it to my teacher.”
“Oh well that’s okay,” Minkus said shaking his head. “I’m so jet lagged, I lose track of days. How did you do?”
Farkle blinked. He didn’t want his father to think that he was a failure and a nothing like his mother did. It was best to keep him happy. “All A’s as usual,” he said. “Making it a total 166 and ours are 865.”
“Good son, congratulations,” Minkus said with pride. “I always know that you can do it. Now let’s get some reading done. I want to see who gets The Westing inheritance.”
“I bet its Turtle,” Farkle said. “I like her, she’s smart. She knows the stock market as well as you do.”
“I don’t know,” Minkus said. “My money’s on Angela and Sydelle. They’re a lot cleverer than most people realize. Sydelle’s idea of copying the will in shorthand and Polish was pretty smart and I think Angela’s a lot more than a pretty face.” The two of them continued to discuss the merits and demerits of the various Westing heirs in the book before Stuart began reading to his son.
“You notice Father,” Farkle said as Stuart finished reading for the night. “Each one was pretending to be something that they weren’t.” He counted off on his fingers. “Mrs. Wexler was pretending to be an heiress, Angela was pretending to obey her mother, Otis Amber was pretending to be goofy…” He continued to name the others and how each one pretended or lied in front of the other heirs.
“That’s true Farkle,” Minkus said. “That was part of the mystery. Sometimes people don’t want to show their true selves. They go to great lengths to hide their secrets. Sometimes they lie, sometimes they make other people lie for them. Sometimes they become so good, they lie to themselves.”
“So they can feel better about themselves?” Farkle asked.
Minkus shrugged. “Sometimes, I think they also get to the point that they begin to believe what they say. In their mind, what they say becomes the truth and any arguments to the contrary become lies to them.” Farkle gulped realizing how close to the truth his father’s words actually were.
The next story that Farkle read was “William Wilson.” The story got to him as he read about a man who recognized his own evil double in the mirror, a cruel conniving double who was always ahead of him. As Farkle read, he looked at his own reflection in the mirror. His mother’s words came back to haunt him. Did his reflection show a failure and a nothing? Was that who he was? Was that who his mother saw or was he really a failure and a nothing and the reflection was the smart kid who got all the good grades? Was he, like the Westing heirs and William Wilson, pretending to be something that he wasn’t just to fool the people around him? Was he lying to himself so much that it became the truth?
“Farkle are you alright?” Minkus asked his son.
Farkle looked at his father. He knew whatever he was feeling, he couldn’t tell his father. He couldn’t let him ever be disappointed in him, let him see the failure and the nothing inside. “I’m fine, Father,” he said. “I think I lost my place. There it is.” He continued to read until he came to the end of the story. The father and son wished each other good-night as they turned off the Skype and Farkle shut his computer down before he fell asleep.
Pretend that everything is okay, especially when it isn’t.
Even though Stuart Minkus couldn’t count on his wife’s love and affection anymore, Minkus now had only two things that he valued more than anything, two reasons to get up in the morning: His business and his son.
As Jennifer became more and more volatile and unpredictable, even two years after her failed pregnancy, Minkus used his work as a refuge and a hiding place. It was something that he was good at, something that he can control. He could control how much the profits came in, the sort of technologies that came out, how he and his employees behaved in front of clients and towards each other. He could go to conventions and trips and return with a satisfaction that things were alright
and worked in his favor. Most importantly while at work, if anyone asked if things were alright at home, he could simply say that everything was fine and then begin the meeting. Everything was fine was what he was used to saying to people when they asked about his home life. He couldn’t let people pry into his personal life if they had suspicions. He knew what would happen, Jennifer would once again have the upper hand. She would tell everyone that he abused her and they would believe it. What accusations of abuse favored the father over the mother? Almost none, that Stuart could see.

He would lose the company that he worked hard for, because her family would play right into her hand. Most importantly, he would lose custody of Farkle. Divorce proceedings always favored the mother and the Minkus family would be no exception. His little boy would be at the mercy of his mother and would no longer have his father to protect him. If people pried into their private life, Minkus learned one hard and steadfast rule: Pretend everything is okay, especially when it isn’t. Never let anyone into the Hell that was often lurking at home: not his parents (though they often just told him to “man up and stick it out” and often didn’t care anyway), not his co-workers, not the authorities, not the Matthews, no one was to know how bad things were at home.

Minkus reminded himself of this when he returned from his business trip to Helsinki, Finland to investigate the Finnish involvement in technologies. He had scored a successful merger weighing offers between two attractive cell phone companies and had left the deal successfully selecting the right one to work with. He usually returned from a long plane ride on a Sunday so he could sleep the whole day to get his internal alarm clock back in order and not be so jet lagged when he returned to work, but this time Jennifer was in a rather persistent mood. It was odd because usually she was out on the weekends shopping or hanging out with her friends. In the holiday weekends, this was Labor Day weekend, she was often to be found in their Hamptons vacation summer home. This time she was home and was poking at his arm as soon as he entered his bedroom. “Stuart, Stuart,” she kept saying like a pesky small child. Ironically, Farkle let his father sleep whenever he returned. He usually spent those days at the Matthew’s or in his room doing his own activities. Of course it was systematic of Jennifer’s behavior over Farkle’s: Farkle often put other people’s needs before his own, whereas Jennifer always put her needs over other people’s.

Stuart gave his wife an exhausted look. “What?” he asked hoping that she would make it quick so he could finally get to sleep.

“I need your help,” Jennifer said. Stuart sighed. What was it this time?

“What happened?” Stuart asked mentally knowing the answer was going to be yes whatever she asked for.

“I need to borrow your credit cards,” Jennifer said sounding like a child who had been caught shoplifting. Minkus rolled his eyes. “How much over the limit are yours?” He knew that he would pay for it.

“300,-” Jennifer hesitated. Okay that wasn’t too bad, but Jennifer continued. “-000.” “Dollars?” Minkus asked.

“No Wal-Mart Gift Cards,” Jennifer said sarcastically. “Yes dollars!” “What did you buy, Tiffany’s entire stock for the next thirty years?”,” Minkus asked.

“Do we really have to do this?” Jennifer asked severely. Stuart reached into his wallet and handed his wife the credit cards rather than continue the argument. He was so beaten down and exhausted by her demands, sometimes it was much easier to give in and give her whatever she wanted rather than deal with the later fight and rages that would come.

She grabbed the cards and put them in her purse. “You know if you allowed me to go into your savings I wouldn’t have to-“

“No,” Minkus said putting his foot down on at least that issue. After that incident years ago when Jennifer’s lavish spending had caused his grandfather’s eviction, Stuart did not trust his wife with their savings. He put them into a separate bank and did not tell Jennifer which one. She would no sooner find it, then the savings would be gone. Privately, he also squirreled away the savings.
because if he ever had the courage to file for divorce from Jennifer, then he would have enough to support himself and Farkle without the Bassett’s money.

“It would make me very happy,” Jennifer prompted.

Minkus smirked sarcastically at his wife. “Clearly where are my priorities? Why would a little thing like our son’s college education get in the way of something important like a sale at Bloomingdale’s?

“It’s at Sak’s,” Jennifer said testily. “And anyway what’s the big deal? All that kid does is study, most colleges would like that and accept him right away.”

“Because I don’t want Farkle to begin school like I did, a poor scholarship student always being judged and disregarded by the academics,” Minkus said. “And he shouldn’t have to with a multi-millionaire for a father. If I can afford to pay for him to go, then I’m going to. He deserves to have the best opportunities in life.”

“So he gets the best of everything and I don’t,” Jennifer said. Stuart couldn’t believe that his wife was envious over her own son! She sometimes acted like a spoiled older sibling upset that the new baby was taking her place in her parent’s affections.

“When have I ever not given you anything you wanted?” Minkus asked. “I let you redecorate the apartment in that Asian style that you wanted. We visited Italy and Germany last year with Farkle. I am letting you use my credit cards. Enjoy, spend, use them to your heart’s content, run up a huge bill that I’m sure I will end up paying for. Just don’t gamble on our son’s future in the process.”

Jennifer rolled her eyes and gave a snide expression. “Fine, you probably have more in these than you do in your savings anyway,” she said before she threw her ring at her husband and faced him.

“I love you, Stuart, don’t you love me?”

Stuart sighed feeling like a robot repeating a command that his programmer gave him. “I love you and I would be nothing without you.”

Rather than argue further, Minkus just sank into bed feeling the welcomeness of sleep as his body adjusted to the New York hours.

The next evening, Jennifer had been out shopping and Minkus returned from work to see his son working on what looked like an art project. “What’s that for?” Minkus asked. “It’s nice.”

Farkle was so wrapped up in the project and being home alone that he jumped when he heard his father’s voice. Farkle no longer had nannies to watch him. Minkus had three reasons for this: 1) At 10, Farkle was getting older and was much more responsible and could look after himself 2) Since he spent a lot of time at the Matthews technically he was being supervised anyway, so there was no point, and 3) They couldn’t find anyone to work with the family because, no one wanted to work under Jennifer. Stuart wondered if there was a picture of Jennifer with a “no” circle in every domestic agency in New York. Maybe the fired nannies and housekeepers like Inez, Mrs. Brown, Sophia, Jordan and the others used it as a dart board. A woman came three times a week to clean the apartment, otherwise Farkle was pretty much kept to his own devices after school. Luckily, Stuart hadn’t any complaints. He was quiet, well-behaved, and studious.

Farkle looked down at the project. It appeared to be a homemade card with a pop-up illustration of a bouquet of blue and pink flowers and butterflies. “No, it’s for Maya,” Farkle said. “We had Father’s Day,” Minkus nodded remembering that Farkle bought his father a star that said “Urseus Major.” “Maya was sad because her Daddy left her a long time ago so I thought I would make her a card to cheer her up.”

Minkus sat down next to his son. He nodded. Farkle had told his father about Maya’s home life and Minkus could not help but be sympathetic for the young girl. He never met Maya and only knew Riley by sight, because they never came to the Minkus home. Farkle always went to Riley’s apartment. But he had heard plenty about Farkle’s ladies over the years and how they were always chasing his son because they were in love with him (Minkus had a feeling that wasn’t true, but played along with his son’s fantasies rather than dash them). He also knew that Riley had a sunshiny personality and a bright smile that always made everything okay and that Maya was a tough and sometimes mean girl, but could always be counted on to defend her friends.

“That is so amazing Farkle,” Minkus said admiring the pop-up illustration. “How did you learn
“From a website on the Internet,” Farkle said modestly. His face fell. “Why would Maya’s father leave her? Why do grownups do that?”

Minkus shrugged. “I don’t know. I don’t know Maya’s parents so I don’t know what they were going through. But sometimes people just don’t get along and it’s better for them to be apart rather than together. Between you and me—and don’t tell Maya or her mother I said this—if her father left because he found someone else then he probably wasn’t worth sticking around. No one should leave their spouse and young child especially not for somebody else.”

“Didn’t Great-Grandpa Ginsburg leave Grandma Minkus?” Farkle asked. Minkus looked at his son quizizzically and he shrugged. “I once asked her about him and Grandma said that he was a ‘shiftless lay about who left his family behind.’ That isn’t how you described him.”

“Well I got to know your Great-Grandpa a long time after that,” Minkus answered. “That’s how come I know. Your Grandma felt abandoned by him and she carried a lot of that anger with her, obviously still does after all this time. Great-Grandpa Ginsburg certainly felt sorry for what he did because he befriended me, but for my mother, his daughter, it was too late. The damage had been done.”

“I hope Maya doesn’t become too damaged,” Farkle said.

“People are different,” Minkus answered holding his son by the shoulders. “One thing in her favor is Maya has a good friend who is making her a nice card.”

Farkle nodded. “Could I buy something for her? You know something to cheer her up with the card?”

Minkus nodded. “What do you have in mind?”

Farkle shrugged. “I don’t know what do you give Mother when she’s sad?”

Everything in New York at times, Minkus wanted to counter. “Well don’t go by what I give your mother. It’s a bit different with adults. We sometimes have and want things that are a bit more expensive than what someone your age would want. Does she like jewelry?”

“Not really,” Farkle said. “I mean I’ve never seen her wear any.”

“What about candy?” Minkus asked.

“Not special enough,” Farkle said. “I always give her candy.”

“Flowers?” Minkus asked.

“Maya would say something like flowers die why bother,” Farkle answered.

Minkus looked at the card considering. “You know, she may be happy with this. These are flowers that won’t die. Once when I was a bit older than you, I gave a girl an origami flower and she kept it with her.”

“Mrs. Matthews?” Farkle asked.

Minkus nodded thinking of how he traded a future with a girl who liked paper flowers to a girl who wanted every material good in front of her. This was it and there could be no turning back, no matter how much he wanted it to be so. “Sometimes women like what you give them as long as it comes from your heart, whether it’s bought or made. It will make them very happy because you thought enough to give it to them.”

“Mother doesn’t seem very happy. Do the things you give her not come from your heart?” Farkle asked.

Minkus wasn’t sure how to answer his precocious son. Was Jennifer unhappy in her marriage because she demanded too much or because she sensed that Minkus did not give them to her from his heart instead more of through acquiescence? Wasn’t that love, that he wanted to see her happy? Was he merely trying to buy her love and happiness when she was dissatisfied with the man? Wasn’t it too late to wonder about these things anyway? Twelve years of marriage and it was too late for regrets.

“Like I said your mother and I are different,” Minkus said lamely. He tried to change the subject.

“What do you want something to eat? I’m getting a bit hungry.”

Farkle nodded and he and his father walked into the kitchen to eat. Minkus mentally went through the latest business reports over the Helsinki deal as he pulled into
the parking garage of their apartment. He noticed the big commotion in front of the apartment, but
paid it no mind until he saw that it was an ambulance and a very familiar looking figure was being
carried into it. “Farkle!” he yelled. He ran up to the EMT as they carried his son inside. “What
happened?” He could see that his son was awake but was crying in pain. “I’m Stuart Minkus and
that’s my son! What’s going on?”

Jennifer walked out of the apartment almost in a confused daze. She gulped and began to cry.
Minkus looked at his wife and shook her. “Jennifer what’s wrong?” She at first wouldn’t respond
and he shook her again. “Jennifer answer me!”

“It seems your son fell down the stairs and broke his leg,” the paramedic answered.

“It was an accident,” Jennifer said slowly. “He just tripped.”
Stuart glanced at his wife warily but turned to the paramedic. “Can I ride with him?” he asked at
the same time Jennifer did.

“Listen sir ma’am, we don’t have time to argue about this,” the paramedic said. “Mom you go with
him. Dad you wait here,” He pointed at Jennifer who entered the ambulance.

“I’ll follow,” Minkus said already heading for his car.

When he approached the emergency room, Jennifer had already been seated watching her son get
treated with a cast on his leg. She shushed her son. “Shh, don’t worry Farkle. I know it hurts now,
Honey but the pain will go away.” Farkle whimpered as Minkus wordlessly held his son’s hand
and sat down next to him.

A woman in a white coat and business outfit underneath approached them. “Mr. and Mrs. Minkus,
I’m Elizabeth Davies, the hospital administrator. I act as a go-between with Family Services.”

“Are you accusing us of-“Minkus asked suspiciously.
Dr. Davies shook her head. “No, just with child injuries we like to ask a few questions to make sure
that everything’s on the up and up. There are no accusations involved, unless there’s a reason for
it.” She turned to her clipboard. “Now can you tell me what happened, Mr. Minkus?”

Minkus shook his head. “No, I can’t. I was coming home when I saw the ambulance.”

Dr. Davies nodded and wrote something down. “Mrs. Minkus?”

“I was in my apartment when my son was going to his friend’s home. I heard him yell and I ran
outside and saw him on the stairs holding onto his leg.”

“So by your own admission it was just the two of you,” Dr. Davies said. Jennifer nodded and the
woman continued. “Well there are no injuries that indicate any other physical altercation.” She
turned to the boy. “Farkle, why don’t you tell me what happened?”

Minkus tensed. Had Jennifer beaten Farkle? He couldn’t let his son stay with a woman who
physically hurt him when he wasn’t home. He looked at his wife. The expression on her face
showed nothing but worry and concern. He knew that Jennifer could put on a performance that the
best actress would envy. So he knew that he wouldn’t get anything from her. Farkle’s face paled
probably from the pain. He looked from his father and mother not showing any fear of either
parent. He caught his breath. “It hurts,” he whimpered.

Minkus held onto his hand trying to get his son’s mind off the pain. Maybe they could do one of
their word or number games that they always liked. “Farkle, what’s 2 squared,” he asked.

“4,” Farkle answered tensely.

“And 4 squared,” Minkus asked his son.

“16,” Farkle said.

“And 16,” Minkus asked.

“2- um-256,” Farkle answered ignoring the pain in trying to solve the problem in his head.

“And 256?” Minkus asked.

“65536,” Farkle said after thinking awhile.

After a few seconds of silence, Minkus then answered his now calmed son. “Are you ready to
answer her questions now?” he asked.

Farkle nodded. “I was going to my friend Riley’s apartment and I was running in the hallway. I
know I shouldn’t have done it and I’m sorry. But my shoe was untied and I tripped over it and fell
down the stairs.”
Dr. Davies considered. “Well in absence of any witnesses or any further injuries, it seems to be just a childhood accident,” she said and closed her clipboard. “Be more careful and no running in the hallways from now on, young man.”

“I’m sure that Farkle’s learned his lesson,” Minkus replied.

“Yes Ma’am,” Farkle answered.

“Thank you,” Jennifer shook the woman’s hand.

Minkus looked desperately at his son then at the doctor. “Dr. Davies—he began. It was on the tip of his tongue. He wanted to say it all: My wife yells at my son and calls him names. She hurts me too at times. Please I’ve been in an abusive marriage for twelve years. Help us get out! If not me, then please help Farkle get out! All of those words were ready to tumble out of his mouth at once. He held his son’s hand and felt his breath catch his throat. Jennifer gave him a quick savage look. All pretense of playing the concerned mother was gone and in that second, she became a hateful adversary full of rage and vengeance. The look quickly vanished and she was once again the anguished mother fretting over her child.

Minkus swallowed and turned to the administrator. “Thank you,” he said hollowly. “Farkle will be just fine. Everything will be okay.”

“I’m sure it will be Mr. Minkus,” Dr. Davies said with a handshake before she left the family alone.

A few days later, Farkle was seated in his bedroom his leg propped up. For their nightly reading, Stuart and Farkle had been on a Shakespeare kick and were going through all the plays. This time father and son were reading Hamlet and reenacting all of the parts. After their “performance,” they settled down to play farkle, the dice game that Farkle learned was the origin of his name. They were tied with their points.

Farkle looked down at his cast. He went to school with it and some of the kids like Riley and Maya had already signed his cast. Maya even drew a few pictures on it like a rainbow and a sunny day and Riley put a “purple healing kitty” with a nurse’s cap to help Farkle feel better. “Oh by the way, Father,” Farkle said. “I forgot to tell you. I gave Maya the card before I broke my leg. She liked it and gave me a hug.”

Minkus smiled. “That’s great son,” he said. “I’m happy for you. Maya sounds like a really nice girl. So does Riley.”

“They are,” Farkle said. “They’re not only my ladies. They’re my best friends.”

Minkus grinned as he rolled the dice again as Farkle looked downward. “1500 points count ‘em and weep son!”

He didn’t noticed Farkle’s somber expression until he heard a slight sniffle. “Farkle,” Minkus said in surprise. “It was just a figure of speech! If you get this worked over the game we won’t play it anymore.”

Farkle shook his head. “No, Father I lied when I talked to the doctor.”

Minkus put the dice back in the cup and sat closer to his son. “I was afraid of that. Your mother hit you and knocked you down the stairs didn’t she?”

Farkle shook his head quickly. “No, no. That was the truth, I really truly did break my leg running down the stairs and I really hadn’t tied my shoes, honest! What I lied about was why I was running.”

“Why were you running?” Minkus asked.

Farkle sniffled. “I asked Mother if I could invite Maya over, you know to cheer her up. Mother said that she didn’t want that ‘white trash brat’ in her house. I said that Maya was one of my best friends and that I just wanted to make her happy. Mother said that the only reason that Maya and Riley are my friends is because I’m richer than they are and that they don’t really like me. She said that no one really likes me and I could prove it by asking them myself! She also said if I wanted to make her like me then I would leave her alone! I was crying and I tumbled down the stairs.” He continued to cry as his father rubbed his back in comfort.

“Farkle you know that’s not true,” Minkus assured his son. “If Maya only liked you because you’re richer than she is, would she have liked the card? If Riley did, would she let you come over to her
house so often?” Farkle shook his head. “You know what you’re mother says isn’t always true. She just has her bad days and says things that she doesn’t mean.”

Farkle nodded. “While you are at work she said that too and that she was sorry that I got hurt.”

Minkus’ heart sank. How long was this going to stretch? What if Jennifer’s words caused an even greater accident when Minkus wasn’t home? What if she did beat her son? Minkus could protect Farkle when he was at home, but what would happen when he wasn’t? “Listen to me, Farkle,” he said. Farkle nodded listening as his father continued. “When, I’m home I will protect you. Whatever your mother says, I will defend you. If she hurts you, I will take it for you. I will fight her no matter what. I will accept every snide comment, every sharp blow, every hurt, and every erosion to your confidence that she gives you.”

Farkle’s eyes watered. “But what if you’re not there?” He asked.

Minkus nodded. “That is most important of all. I want you to do me a favor. When she gets like that, I don’t want you to stay and listen to her. If it’s late at night or you are unable to move very far like now, go to your room and lock the door until she cools down or until I knock on the door and tell you it’s alright to come out. If it’s after school or the weekend, go to Riley’s house and stay there until I come and get you or text you to tell you that it’s alright. Mr. and Mrs. Matthews will look after you until then.”

“I thought you didn’t like Mr. Matthews,” Farkle asked.

“Well I didn’t,” Minkus answered truthfully. “But that doesn’t mean that he isn’t a good person. I know he’ll look after you if I can’t. They said that you can come over anytime right? Well you can. Climb the window into Riley’s bedroom if you have to.”

“I do that sometimes,” Farkle agreed. “I sometimes go through the fire escape and climb through her bay window.”

“Well make that your special entrance,” Minkus said.

“What if Mr. and Mrs., Matthews ask what’s going on?” Farkle said.

“Well I’ll tell them that my hours will be different and that your mother won’t always be around so it’s better if you are watched by someone.” Minkus reasoned.

“Okay,” Farkle nodded.

Minkus squeezed his son’s shoulder tightly and held him close. “You know why I’m doing this don’t you? I’m not like Maya’s father. I will never leave you and I will never let anything bad happen to you. No matter what, I will protect you.”

Farkle relaxed in his father’s arms. One thought struck him. “But if you’re taking all of the bad things that Mother says and all of the hurts, who’s going to protect you?”

Minkus kissed his son on the top of the head. “Don’t worry about me. I’ll protect myself. It’s more important to me that you are safe. Everything will be okay, Farkle, I promise everything will be okay.” He held onto his son repeating his assurances that everything will be okay. He realized that he wasn’t just telling Farkle this. He was trying to tell himself.
Chapter Summary

Farkle makes a new friend and Minkus considers the difficulties of his career path

The Lives of Genius
A Boy/Girl Meets World Fanfic
By Auburn Red
Chapter Fifteen: Welcome to Seventh Grade Pt. I: Of Friends and Tyrants (Stuart Minkus Age 34; Farkle Minkus Age: 12)
Author’s Note: This is the first of the chapters that will be set directly during the Girl Meets World seasons. This and the next chapter will take care of the first season and the next one (or two) will be set during season two. They are similar in tone to the “Grandfather Genius” and “Education Blues” chapters in that they will refer to various events in their universe. This chapter in particular will refer to “Pilot,” and “Girl Meets Friendship,” with references to “Girl Meets Smackle,” and “Girl Meets Crazy Hat” thrown in.

Oh and the canon seems to imply that Rachel is not Lucas’ mother because if Eric still talked to Rachel for years then he would have mentioned it to Lucas when he first met him (I guess), but I just loved the idea so much and as my sister pointed out so few of the Boy Meets World original cast have children, it makes sense for at least one other to have children besides the Matthews and the Minki (and possibly Angela before too long).

Farkle kicked the leaves on the subway dejectedly as he entered the subway. He made his usual small talk flirting with Riley Matthews and Maya Hart, but now that new kid Lucas Friar was listening. He couldn’t ignore how Riley looked at him, talked to him. He was handsome, athletic, sure of himself, everything that Farkle wasn’t. He didn’t have to act smart to win friends over. Lucas was the type who just did without probably even thinking about it. Farkle didn’t like him and he didn’t like the way Riley looked at him!

He and Maya put together the light display of the Burning of Atlanta and Sherman’s March to the Sea. Of course Maya started her “No Homework Revolution,” and rather than standing up for his friend, Farkle fainted. What a good impression! He was losing Riley to a better guy and losing Maya because of himself. Was this what his father said about friendships change and people changed? Could he live through middle school without Riley and Maya in his life?

Alright maybe Farkle couldn’t decide which one he liked better Riley or Maya, but he always figured that they would be there. They were the Terrific Trio. What would happen when the trio fell apart?

Farkle unlocked the door warily. What kind of mood would Mother be in today he asked himself before he entered. His father was on a business trip to Shanghai in trying to get a new office installed there so Farkle was at the mercy of whatever mood Mother would be in. He could hear soft talking in her bedroom and guessed that his mother was on her cell phone. Farkle listened in through the door and could hear his mother say, “Well if you talk like that, I’m going to have to get rough with you.” Farkle felt sick. He didn’t like the sounds of this. Was she having those talks with his father? He knew that they sometimes slept in separate rooms, but they still occasionally slept together. Maybe they were in one of their reconciliation periods.

Jennifer continued. “Now you know how I like it, Greg.” Farkle’s eyes practically popped out. Greg? His father’s name wasn’t Greg! Maybe it was some sort of weird pet name for him?
“I can’t wait to run my fingers through your long thick black hair,” Jennifer said in her saucy voice through the door.

Farkle stepped backwards. Okay Greg definitely wasn’t his father that was for sure. The truth hit him fast: His mother was having an affair! He tried to block out the words with his ears and walked into the kitchen.

Farkle was confused. Did his father know? Was it his duty to tell him? He knew that his mother wouldn’t appreciate the effort that he was trying to be honest. She would probably threaten and silence him. A strong acrid smell and a smoke alarm ringing broke into his thoughts. Farkle grabbed a chair to turn off the alarm. When it wouldn’t turn off by hand, he removed the batteries. Farkle ran into the kitchen and saw a tea pot melting on the kitchen stove. His mother must have been making tea when she got her “important” call and forgot about it. Farkle sprang into action as the smoke and flames emerged. First he put on an oven mitt and grabbed a fire extinguisher to put out the fire. When the fire was extinguished, he picked up the tea pot and lay it in the kitchen sink. He turned on the water to let the smoke and steam dissipate. He involuntarily coughed as it entered his nose. Finally, he cleaned up the remains from the extinguisher and sprayed room cleaner around the kitchen. Finally, he placed new batteries inside the smoke alarm and put the smoke detector back in its original spot.

He figured that he’d better tell his mother about this. He knocked on his mother’s bedroom door, but she was still on the phone. “Mother,” he said. When she didn’t answer, Farkle opened the door. “Mother!”

Jennifer looked up annoyed at her son. “Excuse me, I will have to call you back. I’m being interrupted by a pest!” She hung up the phone and walked off the bed and slapped her son. “You little shit, can’t you ever leave me alone? You act like a clinging leech!”

I’m sorry that I had to save your life, Farkle thought bitterly. Instead, he said. “There was a kitchen fire! Your tea pot melted.”

Horrified Jennifer ran into the kitchen and saw the remains of the tea pot cooling in the sink. “This was an heirloom from my Great-Grandmother! Can’t you do anything right?”

“But it wasn’t my fault,” Farkle begged as his mother slapped him hard and it hurt.

“Are you saying that it’s mine,” Jennifer demanded. “You destroyed it, Farkle!”

“I’m sorry,” Farkle said as he began to cry.

Jennifer held up her hand. “Just go and…be a nothing somewhere else!” She commanded. Farkle didn’t wait to be told twice. He left the apartment and walked around the village. He wondered if he should visit Riley but he sighed. She was probably talking to her new friend Lucas, he thought bitterly, Mr. Perfect. He just wanted to be alone for a little while.

Stuart and Jennifer sat at dinner as Farkle returned from his walk. His father looked as he often did from long trips, tired and jet lagged. His mother however looked more pleasant and happier. “Hello Mother, Hello Father,” Farkle said.

“Hello Farkle,” Stuart said at the same time his mother said, “Hi Honey.”

“We thought we’d eat without you,” Jennifer said pointedly. “I hope you don’t mind.”

Farkle shook his head and glanced at his father who rolled his eyes. “No, I don’t mind,” he said as he washed his hands and sat down. He noticed that his father had a split lip that he tried to cover up with his mouth. “Are you alright, Father?”

“I’m fine son,” Minkus said. “The car door caught me right on the lip as I headed for home.”

Farkle looked towards his mother. She looked stone faced showing no emotion, but Farkle knew that his mother had hurt him. This wasn’t the first injury that Farkle’s father explained away in the past couple of years. He was even hospitalized once for a cracked rib that Jennifer gave him after a fight, but Minkus just told the doctor that it was from a mugging gone wrong.

Farkle knew as his father promised that he was taking all of the harsh words and hurts for him. But what was it doing to Stuart? If he couldn’t fight his wife back except verbally where was he putting all of that anger and frustration?

Farkle opted to change the subject. “So how was your trip Father?”

“Pretty well, I think,” Minkus said. “We have a good handle on a Shanghai office and Jessie told
me that The Science Foundation wanted to speak to me. They are interested in using Minkus International for their technologies.”

“Congratulations, Father,” Farkle said. “Now there will be other competitors,” Minkus said. “So we have to put together the proposal to end all proposals.”

“I’m sure if anyone can do it Father you can,” Farkle said.

Jennifer shook her head annoyed. “I have some good news today. I managed to arrange a visit to Einstein Academy. It’s a week from this Friday.”

Father and son looked at each other. “I thought we discussed this. Farkle wanted to go to John Quincy Adams.”

“Yes but you know how much potential he has,” Jennifer said. “He can do much better than at that public school.”

Minkus turned to his son. “Farkle, do you want to go to Einstein?”

Farkle was about to speak when Jennifer interrupted him. “He gets no say!”

Minkus glared. “Is your name Farkle?”

“If it were, I would have requisitioned for a name change a long time ago,” Jennifer muttered loud enough for her husband to hear.

“I think if anyone should decide where he goes to school it should be Farkle himself,” Minkus said. “Now son do you want to go?”

Farkle shrugged. Originally he didn’t want to go because he wanted to be where Riley and Maya were. But now that Riley had Lucas and he wasn’t sure what Maya felt about him, maybe he should. “I don’t know maybe after we visit.”

“That sounds like a wise decision,” Minkus said.

“I suppose but Farkle you do want to be a winner in life don’t you?” Jennifer motioned her husband forward. “Stuart can I talk to you a minute?” Stuart sighed and followed his wife into the bedroom. “Why are you undermining me?” Jennifer asked as she pushed her husband towards their mirrored closet.

“I just think that Farkle is capable of making his own decisions!” Stuart snapped. “He likes going to public school and he has friends there! Why should he go anywhere different if he doesn’t want to?”

Jennifer laughed. “You want him to go to public school? Mr. ‘My Son Deserves The Best of Everything’ suddenly gets cold feet? You always encouraged his academic knowledge before. You let him go to that stupid Summer Enrichment Program where he learned to collect bugs and look at stars!”

“Because they were things that he liked to do,” Stuart reminded his wife patiently. “He has never expressed an interest in going to Einstein! Why all of a sudden do you want him to go there? Your opinion used to be that you didn’t care where he went as long as he went to school and left you alone!”

“Well the best families send their children there and why not our son,” Jennifer said crossing her arms defiantly. Minkus figured that it was more about status than any pride in Farkle’s achievements. “Besides he will have the best educators there, much better than- well whoever that John Quincy Adams manages to dig up as an instructor.”

Minkus scoffed. “Is it because Cory Matthews is going to be his teacher this year?”

“What are you talking about,” Jennifer glowered but Stuart could tell that he had touched a nerve. “I don’t know do you want him to stay at John Quincy because Topanga Matthews’ daughter is going to be there?”

Minkus winced. He wasn’t sure if Jennifer ever really knew that he had once had feelings for Topanga or that she in her usual paranoia believed that she and her husband were having an affair. Either way Jennifer knew how to strike a blow that hurt. “Is it?” Jennifer screamed ready to hit her husband again.

“No, all I know is that Farkle has friends at John Quincy Adams,” Minkus said. “If he wants to go Einstein Academy, he will go there but if he doesn’t then he stays where he is!”
“Fine,” Jennifer said. “Now if you don’t mind. I would rather be alone!”
“I’ll leave you alone,” Minkus “Enjoy drinking your dinner!,” he mumbled.
Even before he left, he could see Jennifer’s reflection through the vanity. She was pouring a drink in a glass and giving her husband a smug look. Minkus could hear the familiar clunk of his wife’s wedding ring being thrown at the closed door.
Minkus knocked on the bedroom door. As he expected, the door was locked. Farkle let him inside the room. At his table lay out the game of Risk. Instead of reading out loud to each other, father and son had unofficial discussions. Sometimes they read the same book and formed their two-man book club to discuss the themes, plot, and symbols. Sometimes they discussed current events around the world or other important topics. They usually did this while playing a mean game of chess, or farkle, or lately they had taken to playing Risk.
“Did you fight again?” Farkle asked.
“You know how she is,” Minkus said. “She has her bad days.”
“You shouldn’t fight her when you come right back from a long trip,” Farkle suggested. “You’re too tired and you usually say a lot of stuff.”
“I know,” Minkus agreed. “Maybe it won’t be so bad. After all Mr. and Mrs. Smackle’s daughter goes to Einstein.”
Farkle frowned. “I don’t like Isadora Smackle.”
“I thought you two went to the Summer Enrichment Program together,” Minkus said.
“Well we kept competing with each other,” Farkle said. “If I found one lizard, she had to find two. If I saw Jupiter through my telescope, she had to find Saturn all the way to Pluto. We kept correcting each other’s essays. Mine were much better of course! She’s not my friend. She’s more like my arch nemesis!”
“So the wedding’s off huh?” Minkus said with a grin. Farkle gave his father a “get serious” look.
“I’m sorry son. I’m just teasing. Well I don’t want you to turn it down because of one student being there that you don’t like. I’m just suggesting that you keep your options open.”
“I might as well,” Farkle said. “Riley doesn’t like me anymore anyway.”
“Why does Riley not like you,” Minkus said. Farkle told his son about Lucas and about the incident with Maya.
“I thought that maybe I would be with one of them,” Farkle said.
“Well you still can,” Minkus suggested. “You could be friends.”
“So Riley wants to date Mr. Texas and I get the consolation prize of being her friend,” Farkle glowered. “I’d rather not all the same!”
Minkus winced. Those words echoed the exact same thing that he said to Topanga years ago at the Science Fair. What did he get in return for rejecting her offer of friendship? Years of loneliness of playing the “what if” game. He knew that he was only slightly in the Matthews’ lives because their kids were friends. What he would have traded for years of friendship and closeness because he was too stubborn to remain their friend.
“Farkle friendship is not a consolation prize. If Riley and Maya still want to be your friends, let it happen. Don’t spend your life rejecting friendship when it’s offered.” Farkle lowered his head and Minkus tapped on the game board. “Come on, let’s play.”
“Are you sure?” Farkle said. “Don’t you want to get some sleep first?”
“Son right now, it’s early in the morning in Shanghai and I’m wide awake. I’ll sleep in all day, I promise.”
The two put together their armies as they faced each other. “Okay the Farkle Nation now has control over this country!” He said with delight.
“But that was my best stronghold,” Minkus protested.
“Let’s face it the old empire must make way for the new revolution,” Farkle said in delight.
“The old empire,” Minkus repeated teasing his son.
“Don’t worry Father there will always be a place for you in the Farkle Nation,” Farkle said gladly.
“Oh what maybe advisor to the emperor? Perhaps Chancellor or even the Hand of the King?” The two had been reading Game of Thrones and discussed the political and power struggles found in
the fantasy series.

“Nice try Tywin Lannister,” Farkle said. “You will be coffee boy!”

Minkus grimaced. “I see after being your father, raising you for years, giving you a home, food, clothing, I get to pour your coffee!”

“Okay fine, ‘Head Coffee Boy,’” Farkle said.

“Yes well I wonder how your revolutionaries would manage their coup d’état if they find out their leader has been grounded for a month!” Minkus struck back.

Farkle was stunned. It was time for the dictator to negotiate. After all even Napoleon and Julius Caesar had fathers. “Okay tell you what? You can own this little part of the world.” He put one of Minkus’ men on a small desert country.

“Oh wow, Death Valley thanks son!” Minkus said in mock enthusiasm. “It’s what I’ve always wanted!”

Minkus and Farkle laughed. “Father what do you think makes a good leader?” Farkle asked.

Minkus shrugged. “I suspect it’s making sure that the people under you are doing their jobs properly and are getting them done without interference. It’s about making sure that everything runs and works properly. They used to say that Benito Mussolini made the trains run on time after all.”

“Well Farkle wants to be a great leader and they all better follow me or else,” Farkle said pounding the table.

“You just be careful with that ego, Farkle,” Minkus said to his son. “You don’t want it to get burned. After all dictators had a tendency to lose their friends and their lives.”

Minkus pounded his fist on his office table in frustration. Dr. Prendergast the representative from the Science Foundation had given his employees a list of instructions on how they wanted the technologies to be and he made increasing demands about what he expected them to contain.

Minkus faced four of his designers and looked at their examples. “I asked you to make improvements on designs but you seem to have actually achieved making them worse than before!”

He faced the Asian-American man and the transgender brunette woman facing him. “Mike and Christine, the wiring looks like what we would have rejected in 1995! The connections are a mess and this is outdated! Do you have any idea how to create something actually in this century?” He then turned to the blond woman and African-American man. “Ali, Lonny, these apps are pathetic. I have tried five times to get on and nothing happened! If I can’t do it, I doubt our clients would!”

The hardware designers, Mike Chu and Christine Monte and the software designers, Lonny Overton and Ali Gold glanced at each other apologetically. “We’re very sorry, Mr. Minkus,” Christine said in her husky low voice that while soft still retained traces of the male voice that she once had.

Minkus put his hands together. “Look I know we have all been working long hours on this proposal. It’s been rough for everybody, but I wouldn’t be like this if I didn’t know that you could do much better than this. I want to see improvements by tomorrow!”

He watched as his employees left. “I quit better jobs than this,” the normally perky Ali Gold muttered to Lonny.

“Suddenly unemployment is starting to look really good right now,” Lonny muttered back.

“You may just get your wish if you don’t do your jobs,” Stuart commanded.

Eddie and Jessie arrived with their flow charts and notes. They watched the unhappy designers leave the office after the royal chewing out. “Some more satisfied employees of Minkus International,” Eddie quipped.

“Eddie would you like to be one of them?” Stuart glowered. Eddie and Jessie both gave their boss a look. “Come on you guys. I’m not making them do anything that I’m not doing myself! I’ve been putting long hours too. I missed my son in Romeo and Juliet, missed his debates. I’ve been trying to get this project going to make Prendergast’s constant suggestions that he keeps changing! ‘These apps are too confusing. This exterior is not durable enough. The Internet moves too fast or not fast enough!’” He quoted the representatives’ constant demands.

Jessie held up her hand. “We are all under pressure because of this deadline, Mr. Minkus. We
understand!"

“We just think that you could temper that with a little understanding of your own,” Eddie said.

“The designers aren’t machines. They just work on them. Clients come and go. But us the people
who are here, we’re forever or at least until we’ve had enough and decide to move on.”

Stuart sighed. His frustrations on this project had been mounting. If that wasn’t enough things were
awful at home as usual. Maybe the more that he was taking on Farkle’s hurts the less he was able
to vent out his own anger. Maybe like Jennifer he was taking his anger out on those who didn’t
deserve it.

“Let’s get on with the business meeting,” Minkus said annoyed.

Farkle headed towards the subway station lost in thought. He had conceded the mock election to
Lucas Friar. He felt badly about having to sling mud against Riley to get people to vote for him.

But he wanted to win. His mother always told him that he had to be a winner for people to like him.

He needed to be in first place. His father told him that to be a good leader that he had to get people
to follow him. He wasn’t a leader. He wasn’t a good businessman. The whole thing with the
muffins proved that. He couldn’t make anyone like him. Maybe the truth was that he was just as
lousy a friend as he was an actor.

While he didn’t mind visiting Einstein Academy and the program seemed to be fine, Farkle ended
the visit with telling his parents that he wanted to remain at John Quincy Adams. His mother didn’t
like it of course and his father was pleased but he could tell that he was distracted by the Science
Foundation proposal. So his decision was rather a non-event.

His mother had been away for the weekend. Before she left, he saw her gather up her things and put
a row of condoms in her purse. Farkle realized that his mother was going to spend the weekend
with a man other than his father. He wondered if it was the Greg that was on the phone.

When Farkle’s eyes widened at the discovery, his mother said icily. “You won’t tell him anything
will you? He wouldn’t believe you anyway!”

Farkle shook his head. “No Mother I won’t,” he promised. His father was also busy working on the
Science Foundation proposal putting away long hours at the office. So Farkle was going to be
home alone most of this weekend. It was nice to be alone with his thoughts, but he also had a lump
in his throat thinking about how lonely it would be.

Farkle was so wrapped in his own thoughts that he didn’t hear Lucas call him until the taller boy
approached him. “Hey Farkle, wait up,” he said.

“Hi Lucas,” Farkle answered. “I’m not going to Riley’s.”

“I know,” he said. “I wanted to talk to you.”

“Why?” Farkle said.

“Well thanks for conceding the election for me,” Lucas began.

Farkle shrugged. “It was no big deal.”

“You didn’t sound like it was a big deal,” Lucas said. “I could see that you wanted to win.”

“You were the best person for the job,” Farkle said wondering what Lucas wanted and really didn’t
feel like talking to him. He remembered the video that Riley and Maya made of Lucas’ friends and
thought maybe Lucas was just lonely in a new place. He knew that he would be. He was actually
relieved that he decided not to go to Einstein Academy and have to go through the painful process
of making new friends.

“I was just wonderin’ would you like to come over?” he asked. “My Mama is taking the day off
and sometimes she makes more food than we can eat. My Daddy is in Texas so it will just be the
two of us. If you want, you can come over.”

Farkle thought. “Really you want me to come over?”

“Sure,” Lucas said. “Why not? Riley and Maya are both of our friends. I like them and I got the
feeling that you didn’t like me.”

“No,” Farkle said. “Not really I guess. Well Riley and Maya have been my friends for years. I
guess I was afraid of losing them.”

“I can understand that,” Lucas said. “You coming or not?”

Farkle nodded and fired off text messages to his mother at home (or with her lover for all he
knew), but got no answer. He then fired one to his father who said that he wanted both Lucas and his parent’s names. Lucas answered his full name and his mother’s name, “Dr. Rachel McGuire-Frier” he answered. “My Dad’s name is Benjamin Frier but he won’t be home anyway.” After a few seconds, Minkus texted back telling his son that it was fine with him. A tall red-haired woman met her son and his friend at the door. “Mama this is Farkle,” he said. “He’s my friend and I wanted to invite him over.”

“Well it’s nice to meet you, Farkle,” Dr. Frier said. “Thank you Dr. Frier,” he said shyly. “You can call me Rachel,” the woman said. “All of my son’s friends in Texas did. So you might as well keep it going.”

“No but thank you anyway. I was always taught to be respectful with adults,” Farkle said. “Suit yourself, Sweetheart,” Rachel said. She turned to Lucas. “Hon, I decided since you weren’t able to go to Texas I thought you and I could have a barbecue on the roof! I’ll bring our little grill up there and we can have some ribs!”

Lucas smiled. “Mama that’d be great!” He said. Lucas led Farkle to the closet and put his backpack inside. Farkle remarked at the African tapestry that hung in the Frier living room. “That is neat.” The tapestry showed a landscape with various African animals made in traditional art. The whole house was plainly decorated with wood and needlepoint decorations. It was very comfortable and homey.

“My Mama got it when she was in the Peace Corps,” Lucas said. “She visited Africa when she was in college and worked with kids there. They were so grateful that they made that for her. If you look closely it has all their names.”

Farkle looked closely. Yes he could see various names stitched into the tapestry. “That’s great!” “Because of that Mom became a pediatrician when she returned to the states,” Lucas said. “She’s not always home because of her hours but she likes taking care of kids. She’s one of the best.” “Ah you’re prejudiced,” Rachel teased her son. “Farkle would you like anything to drink? I made some lemonade.”

“Sure that’d be fine,” Farkle agreed. He accepted the drink with thanks. “Thank you,” Farkle said he turned to Lucas. “Are your parents divorced? You said that your Dad’s still in Texas.”

Both mother and son’s faces fell as if Farkle touched a nerve. “Oh I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said anything-“

Rachel shook her head. “No, it’s alright. We’re not divorced. We’ve been married for fourteen years now.”

“My Dad works in an oil refinery and the job keeps him in Texas most of the time,” Lucas remarked. “My Mom found a good offer in New York and she decided to take it. But my Dad comes up and sees me or I go down and see him whenever we get the chance.”

“Do you miss it?” Farkle asked. “This isn’t my first time in a city,” Rachel said. “I actually went to college in Philadelphia for a while so I’m used to it. I wasn’t sure how Lucas was going to take it though.”

“Sometimes I still do miss Texas,” Lucas answered honestly but then he smiled. “Less now that I’ve got some friends.” Farkle smiled. Despite himself he liked Lucas and his mom. They were the type of people that made instant friends with anyone. He could understand now why Riley and, despite her teasing, Maya liked him. He was beginning to as well.

“Hey Farkle, would you like to spend the night?” Lucas asked. “Barbecues can sometimes take a while especially when they’re cooked right.”

“Well I’ll have to ask Father,” Farkle answered. “But I bet its okay.” “You know for a dictator you’re one of the friendliest,” Lucas said. “Dictators don’t have friends remember?” Farkle said reminding his new friend of the words that he said when he conceded. “Well you’ll be a good one then,” Lucas said.
Farkle grinned as he texted his father. He knew that he made the right decision in staying at John Quincy Adams and that he was not part of a Terrific Trio. Instead he was part of a Fantastic Four. Minkus waited inside his office as he prepared for Mike, Christine, Ali, and Lonny’s presentations. They had better get it right this time. He felt his cell phone vibrate. He picked up the phone and read the message from Farkle asking if he could spend the night at Lucas’. Minkus said it was alright. After a few seconds, Farkle answered back, “U No Father. I don’t want to be a dictator anymore. Reg. Mussolini: He didn’t make the trains run on time. The engineers did.” Minkus turned off his cell phone as his designers entered. They looked worn and completely terrified. “Alright, let’s see what we have here.” He looked at the hardware and software components. “They look-‘The four designers tensed. They were afraid of what their boss was going to say. “-Very satisfactory.” There was a unanimous sigh throughout the room as each one demonstrated their contributions and the capabilities that the technologies will produce. “I am very pleased with it. I think that this is exactly what Dr. Prendergast asks for.” “For now,” Mike Chu said dourly. There was a tense moment as Mike stammered realizing he spoke out loud. “I’m sorry Mr. Minkus.” Minkus smiled and laughed. “No, it’s okay. We all need to lighten this tension. I think we can safely call it a day.” “What if Dr. Prendergast doesn’t like what we’ve done?” Ali asked her girlish voice quivering. “Well do all of you?” The designers warily nodded. “So do I,” Minkus agreed. “If he doesn’t, he doesn’t. The important thing is that we know we did our best. I’m very pleased with all of you. Thank you for your work and for putting up with me.” “That was the hardest part,” Lonny quipped. Minkus agreed. “I shouldn’t have treated you so harshly and I apologize. You all do excellent work here. You are some of the best designers and if I don’t say it enough, it’s not because I don’t think so. Sometimes I forget how important you all are.” “We understand Mr. Minkus,” Christine said. “I can’t speak for all of us but I am pleased that you gave me this opportunity. Not too many people would if you know what I mean.” Minkus understood. He knew what Christine was referring to that he was taking a chance hiring a transgender in such a key position. Still Minkus recognized Christine’s talent and knew that she was just as capable of hardware design as anyone else. “Okay I’ve been playing tough boss for a little while now,” Minkus said. “I am going to now play the role of nice boss. Since you four have been working hard, I am not only going to let you go early. I am giving you all tomorrow off.” The four designers exchanged glances. “With pay?” Lonny asked. “Yes with pay Lonny,” Minkus said. “You all earned it.” The four cheered with delight. “Thank you Mr. Minkus,” Ali said. “You’re welcome,” Minkus said. “Now get going all of you before I change my mind!” The four designers left the office delighted and talking happy and excited. Eddie and Jessie looked at each other and grinned glad that their boss still had his humanity.
Chapter Summary

After an infamous bullying incident, Minkus connects with some people that he never thought he would and he and Farkle make do on a long-ago promise.

The Lives of Genius
A Boy/Girl Meets World
Chapter Sixteen: Welcome to Seventh Grade Pt. 2: Recalling the Past, Fixing the Present (Stuart Minkus 34-35; Farkle Minkus Age 13)
Author’s Note: This chapter will refer mainly to the episodes “Girl Meets 1961” and “Girl Meets Flaws” with some slight references to “Girl Meets Maya’s Mother” and “Girl Meets Demolition” thrown in.
Also it is very important that you readers are aware that the first two chapters of my previous “Minkiad” story, “Unhappy in Its Own Way,” will be referred to as well in passing. Think of this as a prequel/midquel/sequel to “Unhappy.”
Stuart Minkus was talking on his cell phone to Dr. Prendergast from the Science Foundation while his son was raising quite a racket rummaging through the living room. The client was complaining about the software designs. “I’m sorry, Mr. Minkus,” said Dr. Prendergast. “But the proposal is not suitable. I think The Science Foundation is going to have to go with someone else.”
“It’s exactly what you asked for,” Minkus objected.
“I don’t know Mr. Minkus,” the astrophysicist said. “It’s a bit too pedestrian.”
Pedestrian, Stuart wanted to gasp. What did they want from him? “These are our best technologies created by our best employees. May I add that this is the fourth time that you have rejected our proposal and wanted improvements?” Minkus knew not to get too mad when a client didn’t like their proposal. His job was to shut up and give them what they wanted.
“I’m sorry Mr. Minkus,” Prendergast. “But I talked it over with the committee and we decided to go with another company.”
The man’s rejection, not to mention the noise that Farkle was making, put Minkus’ nerves on edge. He sighed bitterly. “Well if that’s how you feel about it.” He said. “I suppose there is not much more that we can say.” Dr. Prendergast hung up and Minkus sank down on his desk feeling rejection. He felt sorry for his designers. They had worked hard on this and were going to be disappointed. Oh well they could always move on to other projects, but to Minkus this felt like a failure.
Minkus rubbed his forehead. Why was he feeling more and more like Sisyphus pushing the proverbial rock these days? When he was younger, this was what he wanted to do. He wanted to work with computers and someday be a millionaire. He was going to be the next Steve Jobs or Bill Gates. When someone is younger they never think about the price tags to those dreams such as pleasing difficult clients, arguing with partners particularly when said partners were in-laws, and becoming trapped in an unhappy marriage. Sometimes he wondered was all of this, the apartment, the helicopter, the money, the lavish parties worth it? Why wasn’t he happier with his life? He remembered how he behaved at Career Day, the previous week, all smug and proud: I own Minkus International. I have a helicopter and she chose you referring to Topanga and Cory Matthews. He winced feeling like an idiot going on as if the summation of his life was the big company and helicopter. He envied Cory and Topanga, not because he wished that he still had her.
But they seemed genuinely happy with their lives and career paths. But then again for all he knew maybe there were times when Cory came home complaining about the students or Topanga said that if she ever saw another legal brief, she was going to scream. But further at least when they went home stressed about work, the other would always be there to provide comfort and support. Minkus didn’t have anyone to lean on for support or comfort. The issues that he had with his career often multiplied when he came home to an often empty bed and a screaming match with his wife. By the end of the day, he was often too preoccupied and burnt out to sleep.

Minkus broke from his thoughts at hearing his son move things around. Annoyed and curious, Minkus left the office and called his son. “Do you mind? I was on the phone with an important client!” He said sharper than he intended.

Farkle faced his father terrified. “I’m sorry, Father,” Farkle stammered.

Minkus winced realizing just there how much he sounded like Jennifer. “Farkle, I’m sorry,” he sighed. “I’m just under a lot of pressure. It wasn’t a good call.”

“Did I cause it to not go well?” Farkle asked.

Minkus shook his head. “No not you. It was ruined long before then.” He noticed that the closet was a mess with clothes and boxes strewn out. “About as ruined as the closet. What are you doing in there?”

“Mr. Matthews gave us an assignment in history class—” Farkle began.

“To mess up the closet?” Minkus inquired wryly.

“No,” he said. “We are supposed to research our grandparents or great-grandparents anyone who was involved in the 1960’s. I was trying to find any pictures of either Grandma and Grandpa Minkus or Bassett.”

Minkus put his hand to his chin. “The ‘60s huh? Well Grandma and Grandpa Minkus were both alive through it, but they were small children then. Grandma was born in ’57 and Grandpa in ’60. Grandpa and Grandma Bassett were a bit older, born in ’53 and ’55 respectively. But if you want the poster boy for involved in the 60’s you should choose Great-Grandpa Ginsburg. In fact, have I ever showed you his windows?”

Farkle looked confused. “How are windows going to help me with this project or is it like Windows Vista?”

Minkus shook his head. “No, let’s clean up and I’ll show you.” Together the father and son moved the stuff back in the closet and Farkle followed his father into a storage closet. He unlocked the door. “I put these in here with the holiday decorations in case your mother decided to throw them out. You know she doesn’t like talking about my grandfather.” He flipped on the lights then reached the top shelf.

“Yeah I always wondered why that was,” Farkle asked.

“Well I was close to my grandfather,” Minkus explained. “But towards the end of his life he had a lot of health problems, like early on-set Alzheimer’s. He became disoriented, absent-minded, you know all the symptoms. Honestly, I think he frightened your mother. Also, she thinks that he was a failed businessman and you know how important status is to her.”

“Why did she think that he was a failed businessman?” Farkle asked.

“I’ll explain that when I find them,” Minkus said as he continued to search.

Because of his tall height, Minkus managed to reach through and move the boxes without too much trouble. Some dust got caught in his nose. His nose itched as he sneezed. He accepted Farkle’s “Gesundheit,” as he pushed two Christmas light boxes aside. “Aha here it is!” He pulled out a box marked “Old Photographs.” Farkle noticed that the words “Old Photographs,” had been crossed out and the words “Christmas Lights” in his father’s handwriting were put in their place. Underneath the words were two smaller letters “G.” “W.”

“Grandpa’s Windows,” Minkus interpreted the initials. “You know how your mother hates to string Christmas lights? I figured that she wouldn’t find them.”

Farkle smiled. “That’s pretty smart,” he said. “But why does it say ‘Old Photographs?’”

“That was a mislabeling from your grandmother,” Minkus said bitterly. He then led his son to the sofa as he opened the box.
Farkle glanced through. “But these are old photographs.” He stated the obvious.
“Nope to Great-Grandpa Ginsburg they were windows into people’s souls,” Minkus explained.
“Remember how I told you that Grandpa was smart? Well we used to play word and number games. We even invented our own secret language using words that had different meanings than most people knew them.”
“Like in Alice Through the Looking Glass,” Farkle said. “When Humpty Dumpty said that the word “glory” meant a “nice drop down argument” or when he was explaining what all the words in “The Jabberwocky” meant.”
“Just like that,” Minkus said. “That’s where you got your name from.”
“I thought you said it was based on the dice game Farkle because Great-Grandpa always liked to play it,” Farkle said.
“Well it was more than that,” Minkus said. “The reason that Great-Grandpa liked to play it was because he always won. Besides being a genius for words, he was also brilliant with numbers. He could look at a math problem and would instantly know the answer in his head, like a human calculator. He also was knowledgeable in probability theory so that gave an advantage in playing farkle. He could guess how many points that the numbers would add up to and would quite frequently be right. He also said that he liked the word because he had this thing for portmanteaus. So to him the word “farkle” was a portmanteau of “fire” and “sparkle.” He knew that ‘a sparkle would create a fire.’ So in our secret language a ‘farkle’ meant ‘a joyous occasion’ and ‘a happy surprise.’ “
Farkle smiled. “So I’m a joyous occasion and a happy surprise?”
“Absolutely,” Minkus said to his son. “You also have fire and you sparkle.”
“Great-Grandpa sounded like a lot of fun,” Farkle observed.
Minkus nodded. “He was someone that I turned to when I didn’t have a lot of friends or wasn’t close to my parents.” Minkus touched the windows closely. It had been some time since he had seen them. Some time since he thought about his grandfather and what he meant to him. He absently ruffled his son’s hair lost in his memories.
Minkus and Farkle continued to look through the windows as the father explained some of the pictures to him and how his grandfather loved to take photographs of the café patrons. He pointed out some of the people featured some noted like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, Miles Davis, Abbie Hoffman, Edie Sedgwick, folk singer Jacqui Benton and her hologram scientist Emmett Benton, superscientist Jonas Venture and his late wife, and some not so notable but still important like Michael Ginsberg, Peggy Olson, and Stan Rizzo.
“How come Great-Grandpa isn’t in any of these pictures?” Farkle inquired.
Minkus chuckled. “Actually, funny thing. Your grandpa liked to take pictures but he never liked to be in them. He always said that ‘who would want to look at a face like this?’ I think he felt that the people who were in them were more important than who took the pictures.”
Farkle looked through the pictures and pulled out the unmarked one. “Are these more café patrons?” he asked.
Minkus explained about Rosie McGee, May Clutterbucket, and Merlin Scoggins. “I never knew why they never returned to the café. Grandpa didn’t either. Privately I think that he may have been in love with Rosie or May or both and had always hoped that he would see them again.”
“This was in the early ‘60s’, “Farkle said. “After he and Great-Grandma were divorced.”
“Yes 1961, I think” Minkus said. “They were divorced in 1960 when Grandma was three. I guess he was about 20 or 21 when he took that picture.”
“He must have been lonely to think about these girls that he never saw again,” Farkle said. “He really took care of this picture.” Minkus looked closely at it. Farkle was right. It was framed and the glass showed signs that it had been constantly cleaned and polished as though Ginsburg wanted to continue making the girls who had left his life beautiful.
“It makes sense,” Minkus said. “It was right after his separation so he was probably awkward and nervous. These were probably the first women that he had feelings for after his wife.”
“Why did they get separated,” Farkle said. “He could have stayed and been happily married.
Maybe Grandma Minkus wouldn’t have been so angry with him.”

“Or maybe they would have been unhappily married and constantly fighting and she may not have liked that either,” Minkus offered. “From what I gather and what Great-Grandpa told me, he and Great-Grandma more of had a marriage of convenience than anything else. They were both orphans and they married at 17 more out of loneliness than any love. Even after they had their daughter, Nonnie or Nancy as she likes to call herself now, they realized that they were too different. He wanted to be more involved in music, art, politics, and live in the city. Great-Grandma wasn’t like that, she wanted a husband who was like Ward Cleaver and had a regular job and live in the suburbs. Of course after they split up she married a man who fit that need for her and became a second father to Grandma Minkus. I think she wanted to be normal and he didn’t.”

“He is the one who said ‘normal is overrated,’” Farkle said.

“Yes he is the one who coined that phrase,” Minkus said. “He wasn’t perfect. He walked out on his wife, barely acknowledged his daughter until she was an adult, because he believed that they “tied him down.” He was extremely disorganized in his thinking and his actions. He would go off on these tangents that I think only he understood, and sometimes I even wonder that. He would do these crazy things like smoke marijuana in front of me when I was little. He got in trouble for that once with my parents. He unfortunately was not a good businessman.”

“How so?” Farkle asked.

“Well he worked at and eventually owned the Café Hey but it closed down in 1967,” Minkus explained. “Partly because tastes changed and that couldn’t be helped. People weren’t going to the Village to hear folk music. They began to go to the bigger venues and festivals to hear their favorite rock and roll singers. Grandpa couldn’t compete with that. But the other reason could have been helped. For someone who was really brilliant in numbers, ironically he was very careless with money. He often gave it away. He was also a bad judge of character. He lent money out to people who never paid him back and ran off with it. Eventually he went broke and had to close the café down because he couldn’t keep up with the payments.”

“So was Mother right that he was a failed businessman?” Farkle asked shyly.

“No,” Minkus said. “His business closed down but he wasn’t a failure. He loved every minute. He loved getting to know the people. He was always optimistic, enthusiastic about everyone and everything. He had such a curiosity about the world and was confident in who he was. He loved to read and discuss about anything on his mind, literature, politics, philosophy, anything. He also loved being around creative and talented people, even dabbling a bit in poetry and dancing. Sound like anyone we know?”

“Me” Farkle asked as his father put his arm around his son and gave him a tight squeeze.

“I see so much of him in you,” Minkus said. “It’s like I’m seeing Grandpa all over again. He never became a millionaire or was famous. He had to string along at odd jobs until he moved across the street from us. But he was someone who to me was the wisest greatest man who ever lived, because to him everyone and everything was important. Discovering that was what made him happy.”

“I wonder if Rosie, May, and Merlin ever had someone that loved them as much as you did Grandpa,” Farkle thought.

Minkus tapped the picture. “They probably got married, had children grandchildren even by now. I always thought that Rosie looked familiar, she was very lovely.”

“So is May,” Farkle said. “Rosie has dark hair but you can tell from her smile that she loved everyone around her. May is blond but she has a darkness about her like-” A thought struck him. “Wait a minute!” He held up the picture. “Father may I scan the picture for a minute on my computer?”

Minkus was confused. “Sure? What do you want to do with it?”

“Trust me,” Farkle said. “I’ll be right back.”

Minkus waited patiently and bemused as he looked through his grandfather’s windows. He heard his son call his name. Minkus warily walked inside his son’s bedroom. The boy was seated by his
PC and showed two pictures side by side. The first Minkus knew well. “Father these are Rosie McGee, Merlin Scoggins, and May Clutterbucket, you know.” Minkus nodded as Farkle put the picture and scrolled another one. “This a picture of my friends, Riley Matthews, Lucas Friar, and Maya Hart that I took yesterday at the bakery.” He flipped from one picture to the other and said. “See a resemblance?”

Minkus sank down on the bed next to his son’s chair. All this time the answer had been staring at him in the face. Now he saw why Rosie McGee looked familiar. “I’ll be dammed,” he whispered amazed. “All this time I never knew that I had a picture of Topanga Lawrence’s grandmother! I can’t believe that I never saw it for myself.”

Farkle nodded. “And if I’m right, Merlin is Lucas’ great-grandfather and May is Maya’s great-grandmother! One time years ago four people met and years later their descendants became friends.”

The father and son smiled. “Your great-grandpa was right all along. Those pictures are worth something to somebody. Farkle, you just did what I have always wanted to do what I dreamt of especially once after a particularly intense math problem.”

“What?” Farkle asked.

“Son, you just invented time travel,” Minkus said proudly.

Farkle walked through the hallways ready for class when Billy Ross called him over. Farkle couldn’t imagine what Billy could possibly want. It wasn’t like they were friends or anything. Really, Farkle didn’t feel like being bullied today. He had a particularly intense confrontation with his mother before he left for school. She had once again criticized his clothing saying that he looked like a toddler with those “ridiculously loud turtlenecks. When are you ever going to grow up, Farkle?” she demanded. Farkle just accepted the angry words and walked out the door.

“Hey Farkle,” Billy said. “Turn the brights down man!” He said as he threw a basketball in his direction. It hit him square on the head.

“That’s the closest thing to bright that you’ll ever get,” Farkle said dryly.

The athletic seventh grader charged at the boy and pulled him up by the shirt. “What did you say, Squeak? What did you say? Why do you wear those stupid turtlenecks anyway?”

“Because I like what I wear,” Farkle said. “It says who I am.”

“Well who you are is a complete geek,” Billy said. “You have no business walking around acting all cool and like you have friends. Everyone knows you’re the biggest nothing in the whole school!”

If it had been any other word, Farkle may not have thought anything of it. Alright maybe it would still bother him. But Billy said it, Billy said that Farkle was “nothing.” What his mother always called him. His mother’s words came back to haunt him: Why are you such a little nothing? Maybe if you weren’t such a useless nothing you would have friends….Now Billy’s words echoed his mother perfectly. Tears filled his eyes. His mother believed he was nothing. The people at school believed he was nothing. How could he be otherwise? He couldn’t bear those words instead he put his hands to his ears to silence the repetition of “nothing” in his head. He was so proud of himself for recreating the pictures of Riley, Lucas, and Maya’s great-grandparents and now the words crashed into him making him realize that he was nothing.

He reached into his backpack and pulled out his microphone for his computer class. He glanced around him to see if anyone even Mr. Matthews was watching then he sneaked into Mr. Matthews’ class and placed the microphone on his desk. Sighing with relief that he could still hear the lectures even if he didn’t want to be in class with people who pretended to be his friends when they weren’t. How could they be friends with a little nothing like him? He was about to stand up and leave the room when he felt a hand on his shoulder. Farkle jumped in surprise. “Mr. Matthews,” he said. “I know I’m early. I’m working on an experiment.” Farkle turned around to see Janitor Harley Keiner peering down at him. “Oh hi, Janitor Harley.” He said remembering him from when he and Lucas worked in the janitor’s office for their electives.

“Come on, kid,” Harley said. “Looks like you need an ear.” Farkle then followed the janitor out of the classroom and inside the storage closet.
Minkus walked through the hallways of John Quincy Adams Middle School timorously. He should be pretty good at finding his way around the campus by now since this was the third time in over a month that he had visited. The first was for Career Day, the second was when Cory had arranged a parent-teacher conference with Minkus over Farkle’s behavior, and now. This time Minkus had a different mission. He was heading to reunite with the former school bully, Harley Keiner not for a confrontation or even a smug gloating like he always envisioned. Instead he was planning on thanking him.

Minkus walked down the school hallway when he heard a familiar voice call his name.

“Minkus,” Minkus turned around to see Cory walking towards him. “Lila, our secretary told me you were here. How are you?”

“Fine Cory,” Minkus said.

“Do you have a minute?” Cory asked realizing that the hallway might be a bit too public.

Minkus looked towards the double doors but he nodded. “Um Sure.” He followed Cory inside the classroom.

Over 24 hours ago, Cory Matthews and Stuart Minkus had been inside the classroom discussing Farkle’s recent experience in being bullied. In that room, Minkus had awkwardly confessed a lifetime of secrets of his parent’s neglect and indifference, his unhappy marriage, and Jennifer’s abuse towards Farkle all to the last person that Minkus ever thought that he would tell. He would never know why he told Cory Matthews all of these secrets. Perhaps he was so tired of holding them in that he needed to tell someone. Perhaps because of how kind the teacher had been towards his son all year as his teacher and even earlier as the father of one of Farkle’s closest friends. Perhaps Cory’s simple recall of the bully’s words that Farkle was “nothing” hit so close to home that Minkus couldn’t help but recognize the echo from Jennifer’s words towards her own son.

“I need to see how you’re doing,” Cory asked. “I told you that I would give you 24 hours to seek help for you and Farkle and if you didn’t, then I would call DFS. I couldn’t call myself a good teacher if I didn’t carry that promise out. I have to know, did you seek help?”

Minkus nodded. “Yes Cory we went to the support group that you spoke about. If you need witnesses to that effect you can talk to–“He bit his lip in thought. He knew from personal experience that people didn’t always like to admit that they were being abused at home. Should he admit that Katy and Maya Hart were also members of the abuse support group? Maya was Cory’s daughter’s best friend and he figured that her mother was a fairly good friend of the Matthews.’ It certainly wasn’t his business to tell something that Cory didn’t know. “-I mean we went.”

“That’s all,” Cory said. “I’m not interrogating you. If you say you went, I believe you.”

“I appreciate your help and advice, Cory,” Minkus said. “Anyway, Jennifer and I talked last night–”More like screamed and fought as she broke a vase, threw her ring at me, and I grabbed her keys to keep from her from driving but yes in between that we talked, Minkus thought. Instead he spoke again. “She is planning on quitting drinking and we are going to see a marriage counselor. I think she really wants to change.”

Like she ‘successfully’ quit drinking before and promised that she would change before and I once again believed her, Stuart mentally translated.

Cory nodded. “Good, good.” He hesitated before speaking. “Do you believe that she will?”

“I want to believe her,” Stuart said. I have to believe her, Stuart thought. If I don’t, I won’t have anything left to believe in.

“Well that’s good enough for me,” Cory said. He shook Stuart’s hand. “I meant what I said. You and Farkle can talk anytime you want.”

“Thank you Cory,” Minkus said. “Farkle will. I won’t need your help for anything.”

“You’re not in this alone, Minkus,” Cory said.

Minkus stood up and looked at his feet. “I have spent a lot of time feeling like I was alone. I thought that I wasn’t alone with Jennifer, then somehow I ended up lonelier than ever. Then Farkle came into my life and everything changed. It’s my job to take care of him. It’s the most important job in the world for me and it’s my responsibility to do it. Mine, no one else’s. It’s not easy for me to ask for or accept help from others. I don’t think that I can.”
“Well if you change your mind don’t hesitate to ask us for help,” Cory said. “Because Topanga, me, the kids, even Shawn will be here if you need it.”
“I don’t think that I will,” Minkus declared. “But if I ever do, it’s nice to know.” He said with a smile as he left the classroom.
Minkus walked towards the janitor’s closet and rapped smartly on the door expecting Harley Keiner. The door opened and Stuart almost fell over. He would never have recognized the tall intimidating bully that was a part of making Minkus’ high school years miserable. Instead of the greasy haired muscular thug, facing Minkus was a balding paunchy mustachioed middle-aged man. He had more of the appearance of an older man who tried to be tough but was really a softy, a teddy bear. Maybe he was never as fearful as Minkus had remembered. “Yeah?” he said. Minkus involuntarily stepped back remembering the voice. Okay, maybe he was.
“Excuse me you’re Harley Keiner, the school custodian?” Stuart inquired.
Harley gave the other man a sarcastic grimace. “No, I’m Harley Keiner, the school superintendent.” He said. “They only give me this closet and make me carry a mop so I can renounce my worldly goods as I take my vows of teacherhood.”
Stuart clenched his teeth. “Yes, I probably asked for that.” He said. “If you have a minute, I would like to speak with you.”
Harley looked at him suspiciously. “Do I owe you money?”
Stuart Minkus shook his head. “No.”
Harley didn’t look any less welcoming. “Are you a Fed or a cop looking for that son of a bitch druggie, Joseph Epstein who ran out on my sister, Theresa, because I hadn’t seen him in years! But when I do--” He clenched his fists together.
Minkus again shook his head. “No.”
“Are you here on behalf of Yancy because I’m doing a good job here even if that-“ He looked to the right and left as though he was being spied upon before he continued. “-pencil pushing fancy pants doesn’t think so.”
“I’m sure you’re doing an excellent job,” Minkus said. “But no, I’m not.”
Harley broke into a big smile and waved him inside his closet. “Then I have a minute. Step into my office,” he said.
Minkus stepped inside the closet as Harley invited him to have a seat. Minkus looked around for a place. He shrugged when he saw an empty bucket. He overturned it and was about to sit down when it wobbled a bit, standing on top of some cans of spray paint that Stuart hadn’t noticed before. As Minkus sat down, the bucket toppled over and Minkus fell on his bottom with the bucket falling on its side.
“Whoa, you okay?” Harley asked as he helped the multi-millionaire to stand. “Be careful where you put things around here.” He moved the bucket to a clearer spot in the closet and set it down once more on its front.
“Sorry,” Stuart said. “I guess I literally did kick the bucket.”
“And lived to tell about it,” Harley joked. Stuart smiled as he sat back down. He was amazed that he and Harley Keiner of all people would be able to share a joke between them. “So you aren’t a teacher because I haven’t seen you around but you do look familiar, don’t I know you from somewhere?”
Minkus nodded. “Actually that’s what I wanted to talk to you about. I’m Farkle Minkus’ father.”
Harley nodded. “Oh yeah, Farkle he’s a good kid. I guess it’s about that stuff the other day.”
Minkus nodded. “Yes, he told me yesterday what you did to help him. He said that you let him stay here after he had been bullied.”
Harley said. “I think the kid just needed a place to chill, you know get away from it all.”
“A place to just ‘be’,” Minkus said quoting his grandfather’s words. He cleared his throat. “Anyway, I wanted to thank you in person for helping him. He really appreciated it and so do I.”
The two shook hands.
“Hey, I look after all my kids,” Harley said. Minkus smiled.
Harley waved his finger at him. “Wait Minkus, now I remember you! You’re Stuart Minkus! We
were in school together, why didn’t you say anything?” He asked.

Minkus shook his head almost laughing. Harley acted as though the two were old friends who lost touch and had met at a class reunion. “Well it wasn’t important and I didn’t want to recall those days.”

“I don’t blame you,” Harley said gravely. “I can’t say that I looked at them fondly either. I’m sorry for being such an asshat then.”

Minkus held up his hand. “It’s alright. What you did for Farkle more than made up for it.”

“Yeah well I spent too many years being a meanie and a troublemaker,” he said. “I even spent some time in the pen. Had trouble finding work.”

“So you went into custodial work,” Minkus inquired.

Harley scoffed. ‘I’m a janitor, no need to give it a fancy title. It’s what I do, but I look after the school. I got plenty of friends, okay most of them are bite-sized. It’s a good job. If Cory Matthews hadn’t given me this chance, I would have probably been dead or in prison.”

“Cory is a good person for doing that,” Minkus interjected. Harley nodded.

“I like what I do,” Harley said. “How many people can say that?”

Minkus thought. Could he really say that he liked what he did? Well he enjoyed certain aspects of it, designing the technologies, creating the innovative ideas, being hands-on with the creations that MI poured out to the public. He liked reading and hearing about the various technologies that other experts were working on and wondering how he could top it or improve upon it. But there were aspects that he hated. He didn’t like having to meet the expectations of so many people: the investors, the clients, the partners, and the other stockholders, the general public. He didn’t like being the one to take the blame when things went wrong. He didn’t like being a ventriloquist dummy or a marionette jerked around by the Bassett family as they made all of the final decisions. He didn’t like having to constantly put on a show of being in the public eye trying to act the role of “The Big Business CEO” who cared only for profit. He didn’t like caring solely about whether an item carried the highest profit margin and how much money he was going to get from the bottom line.

He didn’t like giving generalities to the public that he controlled his home life as well as his business. More and more he was beginning to feel like an automaton with his business devoid of any feeling or inspiration that drew him to the business in the first place.

Minkus tactfully said. “Well it sounds like you have a good life, many would envy that. Of course you have done quite a bit for the kids, not just cleaning the school though it does look nice.” Harley smiled at the compliment. “You did a lot for Farkle and I’m glad that you took that time for him.”

“He needed it,” Harley pursed his lips. “If you’ll forgive me for saying so, that kid has a lot of issues let me tell you. We even talked about some of them.” Minkus nodded as Harley continued.

“And it probably ain’t my business, but in my experience if a kid would rather be in the janitor’s closet than be in class or go home, then he don’t want to go home. There’s a reason that he don’t want to go home.”

Minkus was silent. Was it this obvious in front of everyone that Farkle was unhappy at home? First Cory during the parent-teacher conference and now, Harley had figured out the Minkus family problems in just a few minutes’ conversation. Was Farkle talking about them in school or was Minkus just not as good at hiding things as he thought he was? Was Minkus wasting too much time and energy hiding secrets that long should have been out in the open? If that was true, then Stuart Minkus was no longer sure that he had the energy to hide it anymore.

Harley continued as if Minkus’ silence had confirmed what he said. “I’m guessing that since you, his old man, is here sitting on a bucket talking to a complete stranger who for all he knows could chop off his head with an axe—Minkus looked up in surprise, but noticed the teasing grin on Harley’s face, he calmed down ‘—just to thank him for helping set his kid straight. Then said kid don’t have problems with his paternal figure. I’m thinking that the problems are with his Mom.”

“He told you,” Minkus guessed.

Harley shrugged. “I suggested that I would call his Mother to come and get him and he was pretty insistent that I not do that. He thought that maybe she would be too ‘under the weather’ to pick him
up or would be too angry when he got home. Since I know what that’s like, I opted not to.”

“You had a mother like that?” Minkus asked understanding the former bully’s bitterness.
Harley nodded and shrugged. “Ancient history,” he said bitterly. “Can’t undo the past right?”
Minkus shook his head. “Only thing that you can do is fix the present.”
“I don’t think I’m doing a good enough job of either,” Minkus said more to himself than to Harley.
While he and Farkle had attended the abuse meeting that Cory recommended, Minkus choked
when it was his turn to speak. He couldn’t even finish introducing himself and poor Farkle had
been so nervous that he threw up. If they couldn’t even survive a few minutes conversation relating
their history of abuse in front of strangers (and in Farkle’s case his friend, Maya) then what made
Stuart think that he had any business in leaving Jennifer and making a new life for them?
“There’s still time,” Harley suggested. “You could leave her and take Farkle with you.”
Minkus shook his head. “No, I can’t. I have my reasons, I mean—it’s not that simple. I just-as much
as I want to-No, I don’t want to! I just I can’t.”
“Sounds like Farkle isn’t the only one that the Mrs. did quite a number on,” Harley said.
Minkus laughed. “I’m sure you think that I’m a spineless wimp and as a man I should be able to
stand up to her. If I don’t, I’m either whipped or have been castrated. So, I deserve what I get!” In
short, what Minkus had been telling himself for years.
Harley shook his head. “No, that wasn’t what I was going to say at all. I think that you’re sticking
around because you want to take everything that she does, so she doesn’t go after the kid. That
takes a lot of guts to protect your boy from someone like that.” There was something lost in
Harley’s words, something indicating that he was speaking more from personal experience than
from abstract notions. Minkus remembered that Harley mentioned earlier that he had a sister and
that his mother was an alcoholic. He had a feeling that Harley had more than his fair share of guts
in protecting someone.
“I’m nothing without her,” Stuart said. Just then he couldn’t help, but wonder: He was constantly
worried about Farkle’s self-worth and how Jennifer’s negative words and
actions affected it. Had his own self-worth been eroded a long time ago and he never noticed or just
chose to hide the disintegration of his self-esteem behind the public façade of a successful wealthy
businessman? A façade that cocooned, imprisoned, and lately had been choking him? It seemed
the higher he climbed and the more he bought, the more worthless he felt inside. No wonder
Jennifer couldn’t love him.
“I doubt Farkle thinks so,” Harley said. “When he was here, he talked a lot about you. Come on the
kid looks like you, acts like you. You two apparently even shop in the same store.” He looked at
Minkus’ white turtleneck and blue blazer. Minkus gave a slight laugh looking at his clothes. “If I
didn’t know any better, I’d swear that you perfected cloning or he was a robot.”
Minkus shook his head at the ludicrous suggestion. “Anyway, Farkle don’t think you’re nothing,” Harley said. “That’s got to mean something.”
Minkus smiled. “It does and it means something for you to tell me that.” He said. “Anyway, things
are improving somewhat at home so maybe Farkle won’t have to go through this anymore.”
“Maybe,” Harley said clearly doubting. “If it doesn’t, don’t wait too long to change things. Don’t
let Farkle grow up never trusting people, getting himself in trouble. If he does that, someday he’ll
have to carry a mop and talk to someone’s old man inside the janitor’s closet. That kid loves you,
let him continue to.”
Minkus smiled bitterly. He looked at his watch. “I have to go,” he said. “Thank you again for
helping my son and those words. I really appreciate them.” He shook Harley’s hand as the janitor
walked him out of his closet.
About a month later, Farkle met his father at the apartment door. “Father, I want to show you
something.”
“Okay, what did you do?” Minkus asked playfully. “What did you do and how much does it cost?”
“Nothing, but you’ll love it believe me,” Farkle said. He took his father’s hand like a small child.
Laughing and confused, Minkus followed his son into the bedroom.
“Look what I did,” Farkle said. He then flipped on the computer and showed various pictures all that Minkus recognized. Farkle first showed them in regular format and then showed them as a slideshow.

“You created digital copies of Grandpa’s windows,” Minkus said awed. He was amazed. Yes there were May, Merlin, and Rosie; Michael, Peggy, and Stan; and many others. Farkle nodded. “I thought of what they said at the group last month in how we want to get past the bad things in our lives and create something wonderful instead. I remembered the ‘60s project and I thought why stop at the picture of Rosie, May, and Merlin? Maybe I could create something wonderful with them.”

A thought struck Minkus. It could take a while all summer in fact, but in the end it would be worth it. “You know I think that we can do more with this. Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” Farkle looked into his father’s eyes and nodded.

In a surprisingly peaceful summer as far as the Minkus marriage was concerned, Stuart and Farkle were able to work on their secret project. Farkle even managed to work on it while his parents went for a romantic get-away to the Virgin Islands and finished a surprise for his father on top of it. Farkle was so busy working on this project that he didn’t notice that Maya and Riley had gotten in trouble with a salesgirl who tricked them into buying expensive clothing. After Farkle heard about it, he offered to pay for the clothes but they told him that it was alright and taken care of.

Finally on August 1, the project was ready. Minkus and Farkle stood facing their audience: Cory, Topanga, Riley, Lucas, Rachel, Maya, Shawn, Jennifer, and Harley. Katy unfortunately had to work an extra shift at the Nighthawk Diner. Stuart said that it was fine and he would stop by to show her the fruits of their labor.

Minkus put down the view screen that he rented for the occasion and he flipped on the Internet icon on his laptop. “Thank you all for being here. I know that we haven’t always been close, but Farkle and I felt it was important that we share this with all of you. Farkle would you like to say a few words?”

He sat down as his son stood. “When Mr. Matthews gave us that assignment about the 60’s, I learned quite a few things. I learned about my family and I learned that people are connected in more ways than they ever knew. As many know I made a digital copy of the picture of our great-grandparents, but after a time I learned something about making something great and lasting. The pictures that my great-grandpa saved were also of people who were someone’s wife, someone’s grandparent, someone’s relative. Maybe lots of people knew them, maybe only a few. So Father and I decided to create a memento to not only Malachi Ginsburg but the patrons of Café Hey.”

Farkle flipped on the web address. “Ladies and Gentlemen, Stuart and Farkle Minkus present The Malachi Ginsburg Café Hey Digital Library.

Farkle showed a digital library filled with the pictures taken by his great-grandpa. Photos appeared of various patrons with metadata explaining each person and their contributions. Some were greatly detailed like the information about Bob Dylan including links to his official site. Some like Michael Ginsberg had very little (But in Michael’s case Stuart managed to receive copies of advertising campaigns that he, Stan, and Peggy worked on and displayed them as well as their copies). Farkle and Stuart also showed the various indexes including alphabetical, subject, and chronological lists. Much of their summer activities were spent tracking down information and research on every patron and asking for permission to post the pictures. Surprisingly nearly every permission was granted.

Cory and the rest all smiled with pride. “Wow, Minkus this is terrific,” Cory said.

“Thanks Cory,” Stuart said.

“I never thought that I would see my grandmother again,” Topanga said with tears in her eyes.

“You even put ‘The Girl With The Long Blond Hair’ on it,” Riley said referring to Rosie’s poem. She almost cried as she saw the authorship “By Rosie McGee, Continued by Riley Matthews.”

“Well it’s the best way to remember her and you,” Farkle said.

Rachel Friar gave her son a squeeze. “God you look so much like your Great-Grandpa Merlin.” She said. “He would be so proud of you.”
“You think so Mama?” Lucas asked. I know so,” Rachel remarked. She even sang a bit of the song lyrics that was posted that Merlin wrote.

“Look you even got some Tweets and messages already,” Cory said. He read one out loud: “StanRizzo: #StillStudly: Yep still look as good as ever. Can prove to the ladies at the home that I was hot stuff even then! PeggyOlsen:#Liar: Have actual footage of pants on fire! :D LOL! #FineTribute: It’s a fine and moving tribute to all of us. Good to see that Michael, Stan, myself, and others will be remembered. Thank you, Mr. Minkus!” Cory looked up with pride at his favorite decade. “The Sixties, Man!”

Minkus smiled at the acceptance from Michael’s friends knowing that he had finally done his second cousin and grandfather proud and had finally honored his promise to remember them.

“You two Eggheads did really good,” Harley said.

“We did really well,” Farkle corrected.

“Yeah you did both,” Harley said.

“Good job guys,” Shawn said. Both Farkle and Minkus accepted his thanks.

“But it’s not over yet. Father this is a surprise for you,” Farkle said as he pushed the main library index and opened a new page. Minkus saw a page that described Malachi Ginsburg. Instead of a photograph, displayed was a portrait. Minkus had tears in his eyes as the picture showed the man that he remembered looking younger with brown hair and wide blue eyes. He was dressed in his beatnik clothing and beret and still had the far-off but intelligent and curious look that Minkus remembered all too well. “But how-?” He asked. Then he saw the signature and acknowledgement: Portrait by Maya Hart.

Farkle smiled shyly. “Remember when I asked you what Great-Grandpa looked like? I told Maya the description and she drew the portrait.” He explained. “Why shouldn’t he be seen too? Happy birthday.”

Minkus smiled touched. “This is the best birthday present that I ever had. Thank you Farkle and thank you Maya, you have quite a talent.”

Maya shrugged bashful. “Well he wouldn’t leave me alone until I did it, so I figured you know why not?”

“It’s quite good,” Minkus said.

Jennifer had been subdued throughout the presentation but she looked at the pictures somewhat fondly. “You both did an excellent job. I’m proud of you.”

“Thank you Mother,” Farkle said accepting his mother’s rare words of encouragement.

“You’re welcome Honey, excuse me,” she said as she stepped out of the bakery.

Minkus picked up his laptop. “Would you excuse me for a minute? I have to show a private audience.” He followed his wife out the door.

Jennifer looked around. When she realized that she was alone, she reached into her purse and pulled out a brandy flask. She had tried to hold herself in all summer, she really did. That time when she had been drunk and Stuart put her in bed, she told him that she wanted to stop drinking. She tried cold turkey, just to stop but it was getting harder and harder.

Jennifer felt her anger building and tried to keep it in. She felt the medicine that she took was just holding back rushing water. She stopped taking her anti-psychotic several days ago. Her throat felt parched and she felt the irresistible pull of a drinking calling her.

She knew that this was a special occasion for her husband and son and that she shouldn’t take it away from them. She should be happier. Her and Stuart’s marriage was going fine with minimal arguments. They enjoyed their trip to the Virgin Islands. Above all at home was a letter from the editors of Avenues magazine saying that they were interested in photographing their home for their latest article on upscale New Yorkers.

But she also felt frustration that once again the two of them shared something that she wasn’t a part of, that didn’t involve or include her. Through their efforts to honor Malachi Ginsburg, Jennifer Bassett-Minkus had once again proven to be a footnote in the lives of her husband and son. She felt like they were ganging up on her in their “us against the world” mentality. Of course she was the
world.
She couldn’t resist any longer. She took the brandy flask and swallowed the contents. It wasn’t anything vulgar like brandy or whiskey. She always preferred her fine wines and champagnes. In fact this was Bordeaux. The flask was just convenient to carry in her purse. She took another satisfactory long drink when she heard some footsteps stop. Jennifer turned around and saw her husband look at her with despair and resignation, not like someone who was furious but like someone who knew that she couldn’t keep her promise. Jennifer was about to speak and managed “Stuart I—”
Stuart did not respond. Instead he held onto his laptop and turned his back on her. Stuart shook his head in anger as he thought of Jennifer. Once again she proved that she couldn’t keep her promise. What was wrong with her? What was wrong with him that he kept having to take it? He winced in frustration. What was it going to take for his wife to get clean? What was it going to take for him to finally admit that Jennifer was a lost cause? He opened the door to the Nighthawks Diner. It seemed to be a slow evening with very few customers. Katy greeted him as he entered. “Hi Stuart, how are you?” she called to her fellow support group attendee. “What can I get you?”
“Well what do you recommend?” he asked.
“Our special of the day is Tuna Melt,” Katy said.
“I’ll take that then,” Minkus replied as Katy nodded putting the order in the kitchen. Katy then headed back to the counter. “So I hear there was some big to-do. I’m sorry I couldn’t make it.”
“That’s alright,” Minkus said. “If you like I can show you.” Katy was intrigued and looked as Minkus opened the Digital Library. “Wow,” Katy said in amazement as Minkus gave her a quick sketch of his grandfather and the pictures. “That is wonderful! It’s a moving tribute.” She smiled as she saw her former grandmother-in-law. “Even if it didn’t work out between me and my husband, I always did like his Grandma May. She was a very sweet sad woman. You could tell that there was so much that she wanted to do but never got the chance.”
Minkus nodded. “You could tell that she was very talented. But there’s also something else that you might be interested in.” He then showed the portrait of his Grandpa Ginsburg. “You’ll never believe who drew this. It was Maya.”
Katy’s mouth dropped open. “My daughter Maya?” She said.
“The very same,” Minkus said. “She has a talent. You should do what you can to encourage it.” Katy’s head hung low. “There’s not much I can do with it. I mean no Art School will accept a girl whose mother works here.” She indicated the diner as she handed Stuart his finished tuna melt. “Well who says that you have to do it financially for now,” Minkus suggested. “There are plenty of scholarships. Even now you can do it in small ways like give her art supplies, or let her take the time to practice drawing. Even hang a few pictures on your wall. My son, Farkle, has a landscape of hers and he loves it. You should let her go on doing what she loves.”
“She loves it?” Katy asked.
“From the way she looked when she showed me that portrait, I would be a fool to suggest otherwise,” Minkus said.
“It’s a hard thing doing what someone loves,” Katy said. “I love acting but I still can’t seem to get very far in it. Instead I’m stuck here. Do you love what you do?”
“I love aspects of it,” Minkus replied honestly. “Some of it is difficult. Sometimes I feel if it wasn’t for Farkle, I would have given up a long time ago.”
“Well you have a gift for it,” Katy said. “You had to have a technological mind to put together this tribute to your grandfather.”
Minkus hung his head. “I never thought of that. Thank you Katy! I have just been having a lot of second thoughts about my life and my career.”
“Well the world would lose a very talented technology designer if you gave up,” Katy remarked. “I think the world would probably lose a very talented actress and artist if you or Maya gave up,”
Minkus pointed out. “Do you want to hear a bit from my last audition,” Katy asked. Minkus nodded.

Outside the window, Jennifer drank some more from her flask glaring at her husband and the other woman. She knew that she had to be the famous Wendy Waitress who called once! Stuart claimed that she was simply that horrid Maya’s mother but Jennifer could clearly see more than that! The two were smiling, talking, and laughing. Clearly, they were having an affair!

Jennifer drank until the flask was dry. After all she did to remain sober, her husband was clearly having an affair of his own. Well she wasn’t going to take this, she was going to make him suffer. She took a deep breath and sighed. She had other things to look forward to for now, such as the Avenues article. For now they had to at least act like a perfect loving family. After that who knew where things would fall.
Chapter Summary

Post Chapter 4-5 of "Unhappy In It's Own Way." Farkle wakes from his suicide attempt from "Unhappy" and he and his father go through further difficulties.

The Lives of Genius
A Boy/Girl Meets World Fanfic
By Auburn Red

Chapter Seventeen: Unhappy Family I: Life After Life (Minkus Age 36; Farkle Minkus Age 13)
Author’s Note: This is the first chapter that follows up the events of my previous fic, “Unhappy in Its Own Way.” This deals with the aftermath of Farkle’s suicide attempt and the termination of Minkus’ relationship with his in-laws.

Also, since the events of “Unhappy In Its Own Way” pre-date many of the events in the canon we are going to see the canon events in a new light or re-interpretation in the next few chapters (Such as different motives for the creation of “Donnie Barnes: Regular Guy,” different pairings, etc). Be on the lookout for references to among other episodes, “Girl Meets Yearbook,” “Girl Meets Farkle,” and the upcoming “Girl Meets Money,” with different twists to their storylines.

Melody Starr is an original character though her name was inspired by Melanie Moon, a St. Louis based newscaster. (Isn’t creating names fun that way? D). Claire Ferguson, the head of the protesters is none other than the abused girl that Shawn helped in the BMW episode, “Dangerous Secret.” Also the kids get into a discussion about some New York based characters from two popular animated series from the ‘90s!

Farkle’s eyelids felt heavy as he struggled to open them. He could hear his father’s voice from far away calling his name. He thought that he heard him crying but that couldn’t be right. His father never cried openly. He also thought that he heard other voices. Perhaps Mr. Matthews or Riley’s Uncle Shawn. But for awhile he couldn’t see anything. Everything was a dark void.

He adjusted to the dim light. He was inside a bed that didn’t look familiar and was surrounded by machines and tubes. He felt a weight on him as if someone was lying on him. Farkle turned his eyes towards his father. Stuart had been sprawled across him. His father’s hand was lying on his and his arm was draped across Farkle’s body. His father’s head was next to his. Farkle felt tired and wounded like he had been hit. Where was he? What happened? Farkle then looked at his arms and saw the bandages covering them. Some vague memories were beginning to push into him, but he couldn’t force them into his head. He felt blank and vague like a tabula rasa, a…nothing. A lump formed in his throat.

“Father,” he said hoarsely.

Stuart Minkus looked up at his son’s voice. Farkle could see that his father looked terrible like he hadn’t slept in days. His clothes looked rumpled and his hair was in disarray. He was unshaven and haggard. Farkle couldn’t explain why but he felt guilty about the way his father looked then.

“Farkle,” he said smiling through his tears. “How are you feeling?”

“I don’t know,” Farkle said. “I feel tired and groggy. I think something happened but I-‘He tried to force the memories to come, but they couldn’t. Some images flashed through his mind. He remembered his mother speaking harshly. He remembered the sound of running water and then-nothing.

Minkus held his son’s hand tightly. “Don’t force it yet. We need to talk, but I want to tell the
“The others?” Farkle questioned. He looked outside the emergency room as Minkus left to speak to Cory and Topanga Matthews, Shawn Hunter, Katy Hart, Riley Matthews, Lucas Friar, and Maya Hart. It must have been something bad for all of those people to be there. He must have done something bad. Even from his hospital room, he could tell that the expressions on their faces showed worry, concern, but relief that he was awake.

Farkle lay in bed, despite having awoken, felt sleep overcome him. He must have slept for a long time, because the next thing that he saw was the sunrise peering through the window. His father still sat by his side, but he had dozed off on one of the chairs with his hand touching Farkle’s lightly. Farkle still couldn’t make his mind focus on the reason that he was in the hospital in the first place. He tried to retrace his steps. He woke up in bed…He could hear his father and other voices but the voices sounded far away and he could only see darkness……Something sharp cut against his skin and some small things went through his throat. Nausea overcame him just then, “Father,” he called sounding like a small child.

Stuart instantly woke up hearing his son’s voice and he held onto his son. “It’s alright, Farkle. I’m here! It’s alright!” He hugged his son tightly despite the tubes making the position awkward and uncomfortable.

Farkle looked at his right bandaged arm. His left hand rubbed against his throat. “I-I tried to kill myself didn’t I?” he asked. “I swallowed pills and I cut myself!”

Minkus winced. “Yes you did, but you’re here now and you’re alive.” He kissed the top of his son’s head fiercely, someone who wasn’t ready to let their child go. “Don’t ever do that again. I was so afraid that I was going to lose you.” Stuart’s tears streamed down his face and sprinkled into Farkle’s hair.

Farkle sobbed. His father was admitting weakness and despair. He had always seemed so intelligent and strong and now here he was showing all of his vulnerability. It was all Farkle’s fault. Maybe he should have finished the job when he had the chance.

“I’m sorry,” Farkle cried. “I’m sorry! I was so selfish and stupid! It feels like I’m nothing!” All of the words came out between sobs.

“Farkle you are not nothing,” Minkus said to him. “You are my everything.”

Suddenly a far away memory came to Farkle. Words that he could barely recall but seemed to be present entered his mind. He could hear someone; he thought it might have been Shawn Hunter talking to his father. Then he heard his father say, “He is the only person that I truly loved without any thought or analysis beforehand. After he was born, I held him and he looked up at me with those big eyes and that innocent face I said, ‘I love you, more than anything, I love you.’ It kills me to see him lying here like this! He’s not nothing! He’s everything to me, everything!”

“You said that before,” Farkle guessed. “You told Mr. Hunter that I was everything to you. I think I heard you.”

“Yeah it’s true and I won’t let you go,” Minkus said. “I am not letting you go.” He said determined as he lay his son down.

Farkle looked around and remembered the people in the waiting room. He felt a curious absence and knew what it was or rather who it was. “Mother isn’t here is she?” he asked.

Minkus hung his head. “No, Farkle she isn’t.”

He then remembered his mother standing over him and yelling, no not yelling speaking very softly and cold. “You are nothing! I wish you were never born! You know what no one wants you! Why does your father spend so much time at work? To get away from you! Do your friends want you? They only like you because you’re richer than they are! Your teachers would love to see the back of you! They’re the lucky ones! They get to be away from you, but no! I get stuck with you! Why don’t you just kill yourself? It would save us all the trouble!”

He had attempted suicide to honor his mother’s request. She would be better off if he weren’t born. He realized that his mother must hate the sight of him. “She told me to kill myself! It would save everyone the trouble of being stuck with me! I couldn’t even do that!”

Minkus held his son’s hand so tightly that his knuckles turned white. I swear I am going to kill that
bitch, Minkus thought to himself angry at what that woman had driven her son to. What kind of mother would do that? No, Jennifer wasn’t a mother to Farkle. A mother loved and cared for their children. They were there when their child needed them to kiss their fears, to encourage them when their spirits were low, to say that they were proud of their child and their child made them happy. Topanga Matthews, Katy Hart, and Rachel Friar were mothers to their children. Jennifer Minkus just gave birth to Farkle. She was no more a mother to him than Fluffy the cat was.

But then again what kind of father was Stuart to continuously put his child in danger? A father should protect their child from danger, make sure that their child was never hurt or be made to feel like he was anything less than the best. For years Stuart had willingly put Farkle in Jennifer’s hands all because he was too weak, or too spineless, or too preoccupied with himself and his stupid job to challenge her! He could have left anytime, should have left her long ago.

This was the end result: his son, his only real reason for being, was lying in a hospital bed with cut arms, a throat that may be damaged because of swallowed pills and who knew what else. He should consider himself lucky that Farkle didn’t die. Stuart could never live with himself if he did. All of the excuses that Minkus had told himself for years about why he stayed with Jennifer disappeared and evaporated at the sight of Farkle lying there.

“Farkle, I am so sorry,” Minkus said. “I will not allow her to do this to you anymore!”

“You keep saying that Father,” Farkle said sadly. “She still keeps saying all of these things! She says that she will change and that she’s sorry and she does it again! It will never stop! She will never change!”

Minkus nodded. “I know and we can’t live with her anymore.” I’m not even sure that you should live with me; Minkus thought sadly but didn’t want his son to feel worse. “It’s time that we have to let her go.”

“But father what about the business?” Farkle asked. “What about the things that she could say about you?”

“I don’t care about the business, son,” Minkus said. He didn’t want to admit that Farkle’s grandfather and Uncles Teddy and Thomas had already pulled out their stocks. Considering how sensitive the boy was right now, he would probably blame himself for Minkus’ financial decline.

“Your mother’s family can do their worst to me! Whatever she says and does to me, I will fight it! All I care about right now is you and making sure that you are safe. If that means that your mother can no longer live with us then that’s what is to be.”

Farkle was about to say something when two figures arrived. One was a nurse and the other was Dr. Friar. Rachel checked her records and smiled. “Well good to see you’re awake, Farkle,” she said. “I happen to know that someone very special to me was worried about you.” Rachel had been working the night shift when Farkle was in the hospital. Lucas had texted her saying what had happened. She expressed her concern, promised that she will pray for him and his family and that she would certainly look in on Farkle and give a full report to her son.

“I’m sorry Dr. Friar,” Farkle said hoarsely thinking about how worried Lucas, Riley, and Maya must have been.

April, the nurse and Dr. Friar checked the boy’s vitals. Dr. Friar listened to his heartbeat. It sounded slower than normal, but that was to be expected with the medicine. His pulse was faint but steady. “Do you have an appetite yet?” Rachel inquired.

Farkle shook his head. “I’m not hungry.”

“We are starting you on intravenous feeding for now. Slowly, you will move back to solid foods when your body adjusts,” Rachel said. “How does your head feel?” Farkle rubbed his head. It did actually begin to feel sore. The sunlight bothered him and he squinted to cover it up. “The light bothers me.”

April shut the shades and asked. “Is that better?” Farkle nodded but felt nauseous again. He tried to hold it in but his throat built up. He gasped and Stuart held up the bedpan for his son and patted his hair. Despite the buildup, Farkle didn’t throw up very much just some mucus. He surmised it was because he hadn’t eaten any solid food, there wasn’t anything in his stomach to throw up.
“Well you have migraines,” Rachel said. She turned to April. “April, could you get him some—” She checked her records to make sure that the boy wasn’t allergic to any over the counter medication. “-Excedrin?” The nurse nodded as she left to retrieve the meds.

Rachel sat next to the father and son. “How have you been doing emotionally?” She asked.
“I feel terrible,” Farkle said. “I’m sorry for what I did and everything.”

Rachel continued to write in her records. She then asked a few more questions about his behavior. Farkle told her about the gaps in his memory, the panic attack when he finally did remember, and how he now felt blank and numb.

“Stuart will you come to my office?” Rachel asked.

Stuart sat across from the pediatrician. Her office was colorful with the typical diplomas and medical books. Plenty of toys, colorful pictures and handwritten thank you notes from various children decorated the office. A photograph of Lucas and a tall rugged looking man that looked enough like Lucas that Stuart assumed to be his father sat on her desk.

Rachel opened her prescription pad and wrote something down. “I am writing a prescription for Paxil and one for Trazodone. Paxil of course is an anti-depressant, everyone knows that one. Trazodone is—”

“-An anti-anxiety, I know,” Minkus said remembering that was the same anti-anxiety medicine that he had taken when he was younger and put in a psychiatric hospital.

Rachel looked at her patient’s father quizzically, but then continued as she handed him the prescription. “Stuart I know that we don’t know each other that well, but our sons are best friends and we both know some mutual people.” She paused. “I went to college with Cory and Topanga Matthews, and Shawn Hunter.”

Stuart smiled wryly. He remembered from the celebration for his grandfather’s digital library that Cory, Shawn, Topanga, and Rachel had spoken to each other like they were old friends. “Does it seem like everyone seems to know them?”

Rachel nodded. “Yeah that’s weird isn’t it? So I’m going to level with you as a friend and a mother not just as a doctor,” Rachel said. “I know that DFS has already investigated your family so I won’t bother with that.” Minkus gave her a confused look. “Lucas and Cory told me. Cory told me that in absence of Farkle’s mother that as his father I should be with my son and make any decisions towards his care.” He handed the written report to Rachel showing that he still had custodial rights towards his son in case of any challenges, at least temporarily. “I even had the right to have his life support turned off.”

Rachel shook her head. “The intensive care doctor should never have suggested that so quickly. It’s an agonizing decision. I usually prefer to give people, parents especially, a couple of days to decide, unless it’s inevitable.”

“To him it was,” Minkus said. “Farkle had very little chance to survive less than 10%, but against the odds he did.”

Rachel nodded and thought of her Christian faith. “Someone was certainly looking out for him.” She absently held onto the small gold cross necklace that Lucas gave her for her birthday.
“Well I don’t know about that,” Minkus said honestly. “But I am relieved that he’s alive.”

Rachel smiled, but then her smile faded. “From what I understand of what has been going on, it’s going to take a lot more than psychiatric medicine for Farkle to get through this. He’s been abused and quite possibly abandoned by his mother. Have you heard from her about her whereabouts?”

Minkus shook his head. “I don’t know where Jennifer is. I suspect that she’s with her parents but I can’t be sure about that.”

Rachel continued. “This is going to be a long uphill battle both physically and mentally for him. He
has developed migraines, stomachaches, and if you listen his voice is hoarser than it used to be. It’s because of the damage that the pills did to his larynx. Those scars will remain on his arms forever. He clearly has depression and anxiety disorder. His self-esteem has taken a huge hit and it may be a long time before it gets repaired. The worst part about this is people who have attempted suicide before have a good chance of trying it again.”

Stuart put his hand to his mouth to block his emotions that were beginning to emerge. He knew the statistics about potential repeat suicide attempts of course. But the fact that Farkle could try it again shook him the way that no statistics ever could. “Are you suggesting that he should be institutionalized, for how long?”

“I think that he should at least remain in the hospital for a few more days,” Rachel said. “But he is going to need a therapist. He is going through so much right now that he needs someone to talk to.”

“Well I will try anything to help my son,” Minkus said. “Short of leaving him alone with Jennifer.”

“Well that’s good,” Rachel said. “Now I’m going to give you some free advice. One: get that bitch out of your life! I’m sorry for being so blunt, but don’t let her do this to Farkle.”

“Done,” Minkus said. “Or in the process of being done. I won’t let her hurt him. If it means that I have to file for divorce then so be it. But I don’t want her to continue as she is either. She’s mentally ill herself and she has a drinkin- no, she’s an alcoholic.” He paused realizing what a large step those words alone were. “It took a long time for me to say that. I can’t let the mother of my child continue to destroy herself.”

“You’re a good man, Stuart,” Rachel said. “She definitely needs some counseling and a reality check. More than likely you will have to arrange an intervention to get through to her. I don’t think anything else will work at this point.”

“Cory and Topanga suggested the same thing,” Stuart said.

“The other bit of advice is about you,” Rachel said. “Take it however you want. But I have seen what domestic abuse does to not only to the children but also the abused parents. It would do you some good to see a therapist yourself.”

Minkus shook his head. “Thank you, but I’m fine.”

“Really?” Rachel said sarcastically. “How long have you been married to Mrs. Minkus?”

“Almost 15 years,” Minkus answered.

“You don’t believe that in that time she could have possibly done some damage to your psyche as well?” Rachel asked.

“Maybe she has,” Minkus said wearily. “But I’m not the one lying in that bed. Farkle’s important not me.”

“Funny you should say it like that,” Rachel said. “No you’re not the one who is lying in the hospital bed recovering from a suicide attempt. But you are probably the one who has been lying to friends and relatives about your wife’s behavior. You are probably the one who has been pumped and hit and by now has been tip-toeing around her so she doesn’t strike you or your son. You probably believed her every time she has told you that you were broken, worthless, pathetic, whatever insult that she has given you. Has she stolen your money or withheld sexual favors from you, maybe even openly admitted her own affairs?” Minkus’ long face gave her the answers. “I thought so. Is she possessive of you often acting suspicious around your friends, particularly females? Has she convinced you that if you leave her, she would either find you or manipulate the authorities into siding with her? Does she play the ‘I’m sorry card’ over and over promising that she will never do it again?” She stopped speaking for a long time. “You work enough in hospital emergency rooms in Africa and North America; you get very familiar with the symptoms of domestic abuse.”

Minkus was silent for a long time before Rachel asked. “Stuart, be honest. How do you really feel about yourself?”

Minkus sighed. “I feel like a failure. I failed in everything! My marriage is nothing but a lie that has been going on too long! My business is in the process of falling apart because of my inability to run it by myself! I have knowingly prostituted myself and my talents to my in-laws so they could make me a millionaire! My son is barely alive because I couldn’t protect him! I don’t deserve to
have that boy in my life!” His own anxieties and failures multiplied in his words to the doctor. He was exhausted. “If you take away the good grades that I made, the million dollars, the fancy home, the technology company, the beautiful but troubled wife, and that wonderful sweet boy, I’m left with me—” He sighed. “A complete failure, a nothing!”

Rachel took Stuart’s hand in a friendly gesture. “When you take away all of that stuff, all of that exterior, that’s when you find out where your true strength lies.”

“I could never stand up to her,” Stuart said. “She hurt him for so long and I just let her! I could never strike back as much as I wanted to. I was too weak to fight her. What kind of true strength is that?”

“A person isn’t strong because they can hit or punch someone or fight them with words. Just like someone isn’t weak because they hold back in a fight,” Rachel said. “Something I’ve had to tell my son. You’ve had endurance to weather this unhappy marriage for so long and you have the strength to be there for your son. I think that he kept you going.”

Minkus nodded. “After Farkle woke up, I knew that I couldn’t let him suffer like this anymore and I didn’t know how to stop it.” Stuart said, “All I knew is that I couldn’t face Jennifer on my own. I was so desperate that when I saw Cory, Topanga, Shawn, Katy, Riley, Maya, and Lucas out there I asked them to help us. I can’t even stand up to my own wife!”

“Don’t look at it like that, Stuart,” Rachel said. “Look on it as that you have tried to fight Jennifer on your own. You thought that’s what made you strong. But you have become a better and stronger man and father because you admitted that you need help. No one should ever have to go through this alone.”

Minkus felt lighter after he spoke to Rachel. He was glad that Farkle had friends who cared enough about him to be with him in the hospital. He was also glad that Cory, Topanga, Shawn and Kat were with him as well in the emergency room and that Rachel was here talking to him. He had misjudged them for so long misjudged them and himself as someone who was incapable of close friendship and was better off alone.

“Thank you Dr.-Rachel,” Stuart said. “I think for the first time, I don’t feel alone.” He sighed. “What I would have given if I had realized it sooner.”

“There’s still time,” Rachel reminded him.

Farkle sat in the hospital room watching the TV as Stuart checked his text messages.

“Eddie wants me to come back to work,” Minkus said. If there is a work, he thought. “For a few hours at least. He even writes that he’s sorry under the circumstances but he wouldn’t have talked to me if it wasn’t so important.”

“You should go, Father,” Farkle suggested.

Minkus looked over at his son. “Are you sure, Farkle?”

Farkle nodded. “I’ll be fine on my own, Father. I can’t do anything here with everyone watching me.” Minkus’ face fell. “Too soon for a comment like that, huh? Anyway, you’ve been with me for the past three days. Now that I’m awake, you should go home and get cleaned up and some rest.”

Minkus drummed his fingers on the bed post as he considered. “You’re sure?” Farkle rolled his eyes and nodded. “Well the Matthews said that they will be by later and I think Maya and Lucas are going to be with them as well. Dr. Friar said that she will look in on you and that therapist is going to see you today.”

“See,” Farkle said. “There will be enough people being watchdogs. I don’t need another one. You have to be working don’t you?”

Minkus sighed and gave his son a kiss on the forehead. He held his son’s hand. Farkle noticed that his father got into the habit of lingering his hand on Farkle’s wrist as if to cover the bandage with his own hand. Perhaps he did it as a constant reminder of what they had been through. “I am just a text message away and I will leave a message at the desk to tell them to notify me immediately if anything happens.”

“I don’t think anything will,” Farkle said. He nodded at the TV. “Except me being bored by The View.”

“Okay,” Minkus said. “You’ve taken your meds?”
“Yes Father,” Farkle said.
“You feel alright?” Minkus asked.
“Yes Father,” Farkle said testily.
“You aren’t nauseous or have any migraines?” Stuart asked.
“No Father,” Farkle shot back annoyed. “You know there are people with white lab coats here that
know about this stuff. Occasionally they stop by.”
“Alright, alright,” Minkus said. “I’m going, okay, I’m going. I’ll also get some stuff from home.”
“Don’t forget to feed Fluffy,” Farkle said referring to the Minkus family Persian, a spoiled
pampered cat who was used to fine dining and exquisite care from her wealthy owners.
“Mrs. Perkepsian has been feeding her,” Stuart answered. “But I’ll get her home.”
After about an hour, Farkle was left on his own. He turned up the TV when he saw the news
report. A brunette female news anchor sat in front of the camera with Stuart Minkus’ picture in the
corner. “Embattled Minkus International CEO, Stuart Minkus
has been removed from his own company citing recent allegations against him for domestic
violence. Here is our own Melody Starr with the latest.”
A blond newscaster stood in front of the skyscraper that Farkle knew well. “In a closed door
session, Stuart Minkus once called a rising star in the technology world has been edged out as CEO
of the company which bears his name. Minkus had been recently charged with domestic violence
towards his 13-year-old son, Farkle and his wife, Jennifer. Minkus’ father-in-law noted
financier/investment banker, Edward Bassett headed this session requesting Minkus’ removal.”
On the screen, Farkle saw his Uncle Teddy appear with the caption Edward Bassett Jr.: VP Bassett
Industries/Brother-in-law. “It is deplorable how this man treated my sister. Bassett Investment has
always prided itself on respecting good wholesome family values and we cannot associate
ourselves with someone who has such a reputation.”
Farkle’s Uncle Tommy next appeared with the caption, Thomas Bassett: VP Bassett
Industries/Brother-in-law. “No, this isn’t revenge at all. This is a message that one cannot buy their
way out of trouble. There are consequences for actions and Mr. Minkus is going to face them.”
Melody Starr reappeared on the screen. “Others will agree. Outside the office is filled with
protesters including domestic violence advocates.”
On the screen Farkle saw a blond woman who looked like an older version of the girl from the first
Jurassic Park film. Her caption read Claire Ferguson: A Safe House Center Non-Profit Director.
“We cannot allow someone to get away with abuse because he is wealthy,” Claire said. “If we get
our way, he will never make another computer again.”
“I am returning all of the computer games that my kids play,” said another woman whose name
read Emily Dennis, Child Abuse Advocate. “I will not have anything associated with that monster
in my house.”
Melody Starr returned to the screen. “Bassett is considering possibilities for Minkus International’s
new CEO as well as a name change. Neither Mr. Minkus nor his associates have returned our calls.
This is Melody Starr for Channel 5 news. Back to you, Donna.”
Farkle flipped off the remote and threw it at the TV. He covered his ears to block out the
accusations against his father and lay his head on the pillow. Tears filled his eyes. Why did he
wake up from his coma? Why was he ever born in the first place?
Farkle turned away from the TV. If only he could fall asleep and never wake up. He looked at the
tubes that were tied to him. He glanced at the tubes that fed him intravenously. Maybe if he cut one
of them, he could be deprived of nourishment and fluids. By the time anyone realized what had
happened, it may be too late and he would be too weak to care. He tested the tube looking for a
weak spot. Unfortunately, he didn’t have any sharp objects, no butter knives, no needles nothing.
The only thing that he had was his fingernail. Thinking that it was better than nothing, Farkle
gently rubbed his nail against the edge of the tube.
“Hey someone worked hard on that,” a voice said. Farkle looked up to see a dark haired man in his
late twenties dressed in a lab coat. Strangely enough he looked familiar to Farkle.
“It’s not what it looks like,” Farkle stammered.
“Oh because it looks like that you are planning on cutting the wiring so you don’t get fed,” the doctor said concerned. Farkle looked downward not wanting to confirm but acknowledging the guess. “I’ve run into a few patients with eating disorders and death wishes who have tried the same thing.”

Farkle removed his finger from the tube and lay back down. “What’s so great about living anyway?”

“Now what makes you say that?” the doctor said. “You’re alive, that’s the important thing. Why don’t we talk about it?”

“Are you the therapist?” Farkle asked.

“Yes, that’s what I’m here for,” the man said.

“I don’t really feel much like talking,” Farkle said turning his head.

“Come on kiddo,” he said. “You can talk to an old friend.” An old friend? Farkle looked closely at the therapist. “Farkle don’t you recognize me? Thanks to you and your dad I learned that 2+2=5 right?”

Farkle’s eyes widened in surprise. “Jordan?” He asked finally recognizing his former nanny.

“The very same,” Dr. Jordan Miller said with a smile. Jordan and Farkle hugged.

“You were the nanny that I remembered the most,” Farkle said. “Mostly because you were the last one.”

“Well look at it this way, your dad saved the best for last,” Jordan teased. He then became serious. “So what’s the deal with the tubes?”

Farkle shrugged. “I don’t know. I just feel so weak and alone!”

“Why?” Jordan asked.

“You remember my mother?” Farkle asked. Jordan nodded. He remembered Mrs. Minkus clearly. After she had returned from the psychiatric hospital, the first thing that Jennifer did was fire Jordan. She called him a “faggot” and said that she didn’t trust him being alone with her son.

“Need I say more?”

“How do you think that your mother sees you?” Jordan asked.

“She tells me that I’m useless and that she wishes I were never born,” Farkle said.

“How does that make you feel about yourself?” Jordan asked.

“That she’s right,” Farkle said. “I mean I couldn’t even kill myself and it wasn’t for lack of trying.”

“Well I for one am glad you didn’t,” Jordan said. “I would never have reunited with one of my favorite kids. I’ll bet your dad is glad that you didn’t.”

“I don’t know about that,” Farkle said.

“Come on, I know your dad,” Jordan said. “You know your dad. He would fall to pieces if anything happened to you.”

“That’s it,” Farkle said. “He is going to pieces because he has me! I’ve seen the news! I know what people have been saying about him that he beats me and my mother and calling him a monster! None of it’s true, none of it! But this is happening because of me because of what I did or tried to do! He isn’t even CEO of his company anymore! My Grandfather and uncles fired him! He’s lost so much and it’s all my fault!” He gulped with his tears. “Why didn’t I just finish it?”

Jordan patted the teenager on the back. “Because if you had, your father would have lost much more than his job. You and your father will get through this, but only if you do it together. What about your friends?”

“What about them?” Farkle asked thinking of seeing Maya, Riley, and Lucas sitting in the waiting room surrounded by Mr. and Mrs. Matthews, Ms. Hart, and Mr. Hunter.

“Wouldn’t they be devastated if something happened to you?” Jordan asked.

“I don’t know maybe,” Farkle said. He pictured in his head Riley sobbing, Maya trying to hold back tears but looking lost, and Lucas trying to be strong but definitely shattered. Yes Farkle knew that they would miss him. “I’m sorry that I put them through this. I’m sorry to put anyone through this even my mother. But I can’t stop feeling this way. What’s wrong with me?” Where was the confident Farkle? The Farkle who always came up with ideas? The Farkle who believed that Maya and Riley were deliriously in love with him? The Farkle who would rule the world? “I can’t stop
hating myself.”
“It sounds to me like you still need a lot of help, Farkle,” Jordan said. “You’re alive and that’s
good. But we need to work through how you feel about yourself. We need you to find happiness in
being alive. Now off the top of your head can you think of at least five people that are glad to see
you alive?”
Farkle considered. “Father, Riley, Maya, Lucas, and Mr. Matthews. Can you be an honorary six?”
“Sure I’ll accept the title,” Jordan said with a grin. “Now off the top of your head can you think of
good things that they have said they like about you?”
Farkle thought. “Well let’s see Mr. Matthews always says that I’m one of his best students and that
he loves Farkle Times. Lucas says that he wants to see what I will do with the world if I take it
over. Maya says that I’m unique and should be proud of myself. Riley says that I’m a good and
loyal friend. Father says, well Father says that I’m everything to him.”
Jordan nodded. “There that’s a start. Why don’t we talk a little more about those feelings?” Farkle
continued to talk to therapist.
Minkus parked his car in front of the Minkus International building. He tensed as he saw the crowd
gather in front of the building. He had returned to his apartment to shower, shave, change his
clothing, pick up Fluffy, and possibly check for any signs that Jennifer contacted them. When he
could find none, he returned to the office. He crept through the grounds hoping that the large
throng of reporters and other people would ignore him. No sooner did he turn round the corner
then he saw several cameras and flashes practically blind him and several reporters call out his
name at once, “Mr. Minkus, do you have any comments?” “Mr. Minkus how do you respond about
the domestic violence charges that have been filed against you?” “Mr. Minkus where is your wife,
Jennifer?” “Mr. Minkus what is your son’s condition?” “Mr. Minkus do you think it’s wise that
you were permitted to be with your son in the hospital?”
Minkus ran past the reporters saying, “No comment.” “No comment” as he ran through. Several
protesters marched around him carrying pickets that said things like “Fire the Beater!” “Justice For
The crowd chanted, “Minkus Must Go!” “Minkus Must Go!”
“Wife Beater!” yelled a blond woman who Minkus guessed was the ring leader of the crowd.
Insanely, Minkus thought that she looked familiar. Did she go to high school with him? “Child
Abuser!” She yelled through a bullhorn. The protestors joined her in chanting verbally. One
younger man broke through the crowd and ran up to Minkus and spat directly on his blazer.
“Mr. Minkus,” Melody Starr asked. “How do you feel about this public display?”
Minkus wanted to shoot back saying that his feelings for being spat upon would probably be the
same as most people’s, but he chose not to give them a sound bite. Instead he said more loudly,
“No comment.” Then ducked inside the building.
The elevator moved him to the 30th floor where he met a strange dark haired woman polishing her
nails. “Yeah?” she asked annoyed.
Stuart was surprised. Jessie should be on duty. Had she been unable to go to work with the throng
surrounding the building? Had she handed in her notice? Of course Minkus couldn’t really blame
her. Who wanted to work with a company that was losing almost half of its stock and its clientele?
Though he was disappointed. He would have thought better of her, especially since Eddie told him
that Jessie said that she was willing to stick around. He supposed that a verbal agreement didn’t
exactly hold water.
“Is Jessie here?” Stuart asked.
“Who?” the woman asked.
“Jessie Goloff, the office manager,” Minkus said.
The woman still looked blank and then she thought harder. “Oh I know who you’re talking about”
She said snapping her fingers. “The fat lesbian!”
“Yes Ms. Goloff,” Minkus corrected. “More than likely your supervisor?”
“Yeah she don’t work here no more,” the woman said.
“Does Eddie Giatti still work here?” Minkus asked.
In answer to his question, Eddie opened the office door and said, “Sydney will you tell me-?” He then glanced over to Stuart and ran towards him. “Stuart, about freaking time!” Eddie then led him to the office as if hurrying him along. “Come on, I’ve got a lot to tell you and I have to do it fast! How’s Jr.?”

“Fine, he woke up finally,” Minkus said still confused with the weirdness going on. “They have him on medication.”

Eddie slammed his office door so hard that Stuart sank into the chair. “Stuart, this is unreal!” He indicated the brouhaha outside.

“Yeah no kidding,” Minkus said. “This is about the arrest? I’ve been released because of the bail bond and the charges are completely erroneous. I still have custody of my son!”

“Do you think they care about that outside?” Eddie asked. “Mr. Bassett called in a few favors from the media. He wants the media to paint you as public enemy number one. I mean you would have to be a member of ISIS to get more heat!”

“And the protesters?” Minkus asked.

“They’re just mad on their own,” Eddie said. “That head, Claire Ferguson has a lot of clout in various organizations and she has organized them against you. They want to find a villain.”

“And I’m it,” Minkus guessed. “They probably played into Edward’s hand without knowing it. Even without the stock and the business going on, we should be able to carry on despite all of this!”

“We?” Eddie asked, his face paled. “You didn’t hear?” Then he realized what a dumb question that was. If his kid, should he ever have one of course, was in the hospital from a suicide attempt, Eddie wouldn’t be able to keep up with the news either. He blamed himself. He should have given Stuart further news about what was going on. “Of course you didn’t. I’m out, Stuart. I’m just here to clean my desk and ‘not cause trouble.’” Minkus looked around realizing that Eddie had a cardboard box on his desk.

“They fired you,” Minkus guessed. “Jessie too.”

Eddie nodded. “Apparently, to them we made a really stupid mistake.”

“What was?” Minkus asked.

“We defended you,” Eddie said. “They told us that people like us couldn’t be trusted to be loyal. They also found out that I was searching resumes for people who were willing to stay with the company after the Bassets pulled out.”

Stuart lowered his head. “I’m sorry, Eddie. I should not have put you through this.”

Eddie shrugged. “I’d have done it anyway.” He put his photos and Mets memorabilia in his box. “Unfortunately, they removed Jessie and I because they wanted to remove the last links of loyalty to you. You want to guess why?”

“Well I have a feeling that I’m not being promoted,” Minkus said dryly wanting to hide his growing dread.

“It was a unanimous meeting one that I wasn’t allowed to be in,” Eddie said throwing his hands up. “And they decided-“

“To make a few changes,” an unwelcome voice said. Minkus stood up in fury at his father and brothers-in-law standing in Eddie’s office. “Giatti, I think that your usefulness has ended.” Eddie was about to say more but instead gave Stuart an apologetic look and picked up his box. He purposely pushed the Bassett twins stepping on one’s foot and shoving one in the elbow so his funny bone banged against the wall. “Oh I’m sorry boys,” Eddie said dryly. “Did you each feel that?” He asked before he left.

Minkus stifled a grin at his former VP’s exit, then faced his in-laws. “Edward-“

“-Mr. Bassett to you, Stuart,” Edward shot back. “Do you really think that I would let you stay married to my daughter?”

“I thought according to your church we had to,” Minkus said referring to the Catholic restriction against divorce.

“The way people feel about you now, I would get dispensation from His Holiness himself to end the marriage,” Edward replied. “I warned you that if you ever hurt my daughter that you would
wish I killed you. I don’t make idle threats nor do I bluff.” He nodded at one of the legal
representatives.
Eugene Bassett and his allies stepped forward. “The Minkus International stockholder’s have voted
unanimously to have Stuart Minkus removed as Chief Executive Officer of Minkus International, a
subsidiary of Bassett Investment, effective immediately,” Eugene said handing Stuart the
paperwork.
“You can’t do that,” Minkus hissed. “You removed your stocks from the company. You no longer
have any say over who gets removed and who doesn’t. We signed a contract!”
“No we have every right,” Bassett said. “The contract said that in the event of termination of
partners that Bassett Investment retained all rights to any properties, goods, and services therein.
The business will continue to be under Bassett Investment, but you will no longer be a part of it.
You still get the earnings that you made from your 63% but if I were you, I would liquidate it into
cash for all of the good that it will do.”
“You may not have that for very long by the time Jenny is through with you,” Teddy smirked
turning to his twin brother who laughed along with him.
“If I were you, I would consider a new career, one more inclined to your background,” Tommy
added. “Like dishwasher”-“-Short order cook”-“ Teddy added”-“Transient”-“ Tommy added
“And how will you manage without a CEO?” Minkus interrupted asking Edward. “Who are you
going to get to control the daily operations around here?” He pointed at Teddy and Thomas.
“These two who think that Facebook means sticking your head in a copy of Dr. Seuss?” Teddy and
Thomas smirked at their brother-in-law.
“I think that we will find someone,” Edward said as he opened the door further.
“Someone like me,” another familiar and unwelcome voice said. Minkus glared as he recognized
the newcomer. He was older, his dark hair had thinned, and he gained a bit of weight but Minkus
could recognize his former partner, Alvin Meese anywhere. “That wasn’t such a challenge now
was it?” Meese said dryly quoting Minkus’ earlier words when Minkus had promoted Eddie Giatti
in Meese’s place.
“Alvin,” Minkus said not believing it. That tore it. Everyone in the world who hated Stuart Minkus
was now in this room. He turned to the Bassetts. “You are bigger fools than I ever imagined. You
are aware he has served time for white collar crime?”
“My sentence was commuted and I got time off,” Alvin said. He turned to the Bassetts. “Plus
thanks to some friends on the outside, I managed to get good legal representation.”
Edward motioned to Meese. “While Mr. Meese has made some mistakes, he is completely
rehabilitated and what better show of solidarity would there be than to allow him to continue in the
company that he was unjustly removed from?” He patted Meese pointedly on the shoulder as
though he were already replacing Stuart Minkus as a son-in-law as well.
Stuart glared at his father-in-law. “You selected him specifically because of our history because I
let him go!”
“Now, Stuart that would be petty and vindictive,” Edward waved his finger at Minkus. “There is
no place in business for such actions. The fact is Mr. Meese has served this company admirably
and is familiar with the terrain. I think he will serve our purposes.”
Meese smirked. “And just think I didn’t have the screw the boss’ daughter to do it!” Upon
Edward’s glare, Meese gulped.
“What world could you ever replace me,” Minkus declared to Meese. Meese was about to say
something but thought better of it.
“I will fight you every step of the process!,” Minkus said to the men who had gathered to challenge
him.
“And you will lose, Minkus,” Bassett commanded. “You had better vacate Minkus International-”
“-soon to be Meese International,” Meese said dryly. “Saves a bundle on the monograms doesn’t
it?”
Minkus looked from one to the other and glared. “Fine, I will take my technologies and start
somewhere else!”
“Ah, that’s another thing,” Edward said. “Eugene tell him.”
Eugene showed an added proviso to the contract. “All technologies are now the properties of Bassett Investment and Min- uh Meese International including the MIMS device, the Farkle phone-“
“...That phone is named for my son,” Minkus objected.
“I think it’s due for a name change,” Meese said
“And all software and applications therein,” Eugene continued as if uninterrupted.
Minkus was silent for a minute as Edward spoke. “So all of the technologies you created now belong to us. You have no technology, no contacts, no clients, and no stockholders. You only walk out of here with what money remains in your former holdings and your name.”
Minkus shook his head and felt his whole body shake with anger. “You are sons of bitches you know that?”
“Be careful Minkus,” Edward warned. “Would you like to add abusive language to your growing list of charges? I can bring the police here just like that!” He snapped his fingers. “I think that lawyer that my princess says that you slept with won’t get you out of that. I think it’s about time for you to go.” He was about to leave the office with his sons, lawyers, and Meese when Minkus fiercely followed him.
“You are doing this out of revenge for Jennifer,” Stuart asked bitterly. “Why don’t I tell you some things about your ‘Princess?’ Did you know that she continuously abused Farkle verbally and at times physically? That she abused me as well? Did you know both Farkle and I had attended abuse support group meetings to deal with the problems at home? That Jennifer had been arrested for drunk and disorderly conduct or how about that she attacked me and threatened suicide in full view of several employees? That her psychiatrist has listed her condition as borderline personality disorder?” Edward continued to walk away arguing that he didn’t want to hear such things. But Minkus continued. “That Farkle has been in the hospital because your precious princess has him convinced that he is nothing? Do you want to know why he’s in the hospital? Do you know any of that or do you just choose not to know?” Edward refused to answer. “See Edward I think that you have that crowd out there stirred up because you want me to be painted as the villain instead of Jennifer. She would never win otherwise!”
“I think you’ve said enough, Stuart,” Edward hissed. “I think it’s time for you to leave and only because you are the father of my oldest grandchild prevents me from calling security to have you escorted out!”
Stuart glared at the men and could find nothing further to say. He left the building. Only when he saw the skyscraper through his rearview mirror did Stuart Minkus allow himself a chance to feel the loss.
Stuart appeared at the courthouse for the domestic charges. Topanga told him that if done right, it wouldn’t take long. Besides Farkle was being watched by Cory and Riley, so he was being looked after. Minkus told her the details of his removal from office including showing her the contract while they waited for the hearing to begin.
Topanga read through and whistled. “It looks pretty cut and dry, Stuart,” she said. “As a lawyer, I will say that they have every legal right to do what they are doing. But as your friend, I will say ‘what assholes!’”
Minkus was surprised. He had never heard Topanga swear before but he had to agree. “I can’t do anything, say that I was coerced by my wife’s pregnancy to sign the contract?”
Topanga winced and drew in her teeth. “I wouldn’t bring that up, Stuart. For one thing you only have Jennifer’s word that she manipulated you into getting her pregnant, something that she later denied according to your own admission. A judge would walk through that accusation. For another thing on a personal note, do you want Farkle to suffer more emotional damage than he already has? How do you think that he would react knowing that his mother may have only wanted a child to trap his father and dare I say it, a father who was not even sure that he wanted the child in the first place?”
Stuart shook his head. “No I can’t put him through that. You’re right. But what about the
“technologies even the MIMS? That was clearly made before I started the company.”

“Unfortunately when you patented it, it was after the Bassetts funded the project,” Topanga said.

“All copyrights are theirs.”

“Now I’m thinking that I should have gotten a prenup,” Stuart said dryly.

“They would have found a way around it,” Topanga said. “Prenuptial agreements aren’t as bound as most people think they are.”

“So I’m beaten,” Minkus said. “I wonder what filing for unemployment’s like when you still have plenty of money.”

Topanga touched her friend by the shoulder. “Don’t think of it that way, Stuart. The way I see it, you have two options. 1) You could fight this and take it to court and I will be more than happy to represent you and fight to the end. But the stakes are pretty high and you will probably lose. 2) You take what you have and start a new business.”

Minkus rolled his eyes. “With no clients, no technologies, and no funding? Even some of the most successful businesses have had to file for bankruptcy lately. Who’s going to work with someone who has this reputation behind them?”

“Well you have successfully run Minkus International for 16 years,” Topanga reminded him. “You have a sharp business mind and you are determined. You’re almost as smart as me.”

“Oh right,” Minkus said sarcastically. “I don’t know, Topanga. It was fun when I was 18 and starting out, but I’m not that ambitious naïve kid anymore. By the time my business turns a profit, I will be a grandfather. Plus I was only successful because of my in-laws, you know it. I know it.”

Topanga looked closely at her friend. It was strange. She had always thought of Stuart Minkus as someone who was confident, even conceited and arrogant in his successes. It never occurred to her that underneath that exterior was a man who could feel this down about himself. “You know Stuart, I don’t think that you are giving yourself enough credit for your successes. Well I know one thing, you have to at least try. No one is going to let you keep Farkle if you aren’t employed. You won’t have a shot at keeping him.”

Minkus nodded. As always, it came back down to his son. He thought of Topanga’s suggestion. He had money. The earnings from his share of the company that the Bassetts so far let him keep could be transferred into assets. Plus he still had his savings account while he and Jennifer were still together, so he had some capital. As Eddie demonstrated when the Bassetts at first pulled their stocks, he had some loyal employees. Eddie was one, Jessie was another. Maybe he could get some technicians. Eddie mentioned that Christine Monte, Lonny Overton, Mike Chu, and Ali Gold were willing to stick with the company. Of course that was when it was understood that Minkus would still run Minkus International without his in-law’s support. Would they be willing to work with him in an even riskier venture? Now where would he get an office and who would their clients be? He was so caught up in his thoughts that he didn’t pay attention to Topanga until she poked him on the shoulder. “Well let’s worry about that later. Right now, we have got this hearing and afterward I want you to meet someone.”

Minkus listened as Topanga finished her deposition to the judge. “Your honor these charges are completely false. Mr. Minkus simply acted as any parent would in defending his child. He pulled Mrs. Minkus off his son and she fell and hit the side of her face. He has never had a single charge of violence made against him previously until charges were filed against her.

Mrs. Minkus on the other hand has had two previous counts of public drunkenness and disorderly conduct and has been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. But most importantly, Mrs. Minkus isn’t here. She has been a no-show as her child has lain in the hospital and she isn’t here to defend herself. However Stuart Minkus has barely left his son’s side. I ask you, your honor if that isn’t a good parent I don’t know what is.” She then sat down.

Judge Martin, a large African-American man thought it over. “Will the defendant please stand? You too Ms. Matthews.” Topanga and Stuart both stood. “In light of the fact that the only bruise that Mrs. Minkus had was slight resulting from a fall and lack of no further evidence has been provided that Mr. Minkus had behaved in an abusive manner towards his wife. Also in light of Mrs. Minkus’ own absence from court, I will declare Mr. Minkus not guilty of domestic violence
Stuart breathed a sigh of relief and shook Topanga’s hand. “Thank you Counselor,” he said. “You’re welcome Stuart,” Topanga said with a laugh. “Now that’s one battle over. We still have many more to go.” She nodded at someone and motioned her forward. “In fact here’s someone who can help us with the next battle.”

A woman with dark curly hair appeared and shook Topanga’s hand warmly. “Good job, Topanga.” “Thanks Elena,” Topanga said. “Stuart this is Elena Ditillo, she’s an interventionist counselor.” “Ms. Ditillo,” Stuart said. “Please call me Elena,” Elena said. “Topanga told me some things about your marriage.” Stuart nodded. “My wife needs help and I’ve tried everything to get her to change. But she keeps falling back and doing the same things over again.” “I understand, Stuart,” Elena said. “It’s hard to watch someone you care about have such issues. But that’s what I’m here for. You, Farkle, and I will discuss the various steps that we can go through to help her.”

“Oh okay well I’m ready whenever you are,” Minkus replied. “Good, if you have time we can meet in my office later today at 5:30 to begin an intake interview,” Elena said as she handed him her business card with the address.

Stuart looked at the card. “Farkle—” he began.

Topanga held onto her friend’s shoulder lightly. “Don’t worry, I’ll talk to Cory and Riley. They will be willing to watch him a bit longer if they have to. I’m heading over there myself.” Minkus nodded and shrugged. “Well alright then, let’s get this over with.” He said as he followed Elena out the courthouse door as Topanga spoke to her husband on her cell phone.

Three days later, Farkle was discharged from the hospital. He had been eating solid foods and his medicines seemed to be working. He had been seeing Jordan on a regular basis and was scheduled to continue seeing him outside the hospital. Stuart and Farkle had even begun having sessions with Elena who discussed with them the various steps and possible outcomes of the intervention process. Because of that, Dr. Friar said that Farkle could finally return home.

Farkle was surrounded by his closest friends and his father as they wheeled him through the hallway and into the apartment. Fluffy meowed at the commotion that interrupted her from her nap. Farkle was gently led into his bedroom and with assistance from Lucas and Shawn, moved to sit on the bed. “How are you feeling, Farkle?” Cory asked.

“Still tired and woozy, like I’m not all here,” Farkle said. He looked down at his bandaged arms. In the hospital, he had picked up the habit of covering up the bandages with the edges of his long sleeves. He did this now for several seconds. When he began to wear regular clothing again, he was going to make a mental note to wear long sleeves only, even in summer. He didn’t want people staring at his scars and asking what had happened to him. How was he going to get past this in gym class? Maybe Father could talk to the coach? Thinking of school—

“Am I still able to attend classes like we discussed?” Farkle asked. Since he was still supposed to be out of school, Farkle suggested that he take the classes the same way that he did while sitting in Janitor Harley’s closet. He would leave the microphone at his desk and observe the classes through his laptop. Riley even offered to carry the microphone with her to all of his subjects.

“Yeah, are you certain that you want to do this?” Cory asked.

“I don’t want to get too far behind,” Farkle answered.

“The important thing is for you to get some rest, Farkle,” Minkus said. “We’ll just take it one step at a time alright?”

Farkle nodded as Fluffy entered the bedroom confused at the commotion and wondering how the attention was moved off of her. She then jumped onto Farkle’s lap. The Persian kneaded her claws into her teenage master’s pajama bottoms and bathrobe, circled and lay back down.

“Vintage Fluffy behavior. She always has to be the center of attention,” Minkus teased fondly petting the cat as she lay on Farkle’s lap.

“Oh we’d better take the wheelchair back to the hospital,” Topanga said.

“I’ll take it,” Minkus offered. “I have some things to do in the rest of the house. Can you guys watch Farkle until I come back?”

“Farkle is not a three-year-old Father,” Farkle said.

“I know son,” Minkus said. “But it might do you some good to be with your friends again.”

Farkle shrugged. “I guess.”

“Well if you’re tired Farkle we can always come back some other time,” Lucas suggested.

“No, it’s okay,” Farkle said. “You, Riley, and Maya can stay in here if you want. I don’t care.” He lay down in the bed and wrapped the covers around him.

Riley, Maya, and Lucas warily sat around their friend as the adults meandered out of the bedroom.

They were at first silent. Riley could sense that they had the same thought as her. What do you talk about when your friend is recovering from a suicide attempt? You didn’t want to talk about the attempt itself or the reasons behind it, because that might upset them. Did you talk about the regular things, school, relationships, and friends, all of the things that you used to talk about or was that too frivolous? You didn’t want to ask how they were doing, because they probably got that question a lot. In Farkle’s case, she certainly didn’t want to bring up that his parents were all over the news. Maybe she could start the conversation lightly and see where it fell. “Um I saw a robin today.”

“Really?” Maya said trying to awkwardly hop on the subject. “What did it look like?”

“Well it was little and cute and gray,” Riley said. “It was eating some popcorn that a tourist dropped.”

“That probably wasn’t a robin, Riley,” Lucas said. “Robins are usually brown. It was probably a pigeon.”

“Also this is September,” Farkle said. “Robins don’t usually come around until spring.”

“Oh yeah it was a pigeon,” Riley said.

“Yeah they’re all over New York,” Maya reminded her friend.

“Oh so it wasn’t that interesting,” Riley said. “But you know once I think three were arguing with me. I swear I think one had an Italian accent.”

“You’re kidding,” Maya said.

“No, I’m serious, I thought for a minute they were the guys from Goodfellas,” Riley said. “I was eating a Coney Island hot dog and they wouldn’t leave me alone until I threw it at them! I swear I think one was cursing at me in Italian!”

“Yeah right,” Maya snorted. “This is like the time when you told me that you saw those gargoyles that everyone was raving about a few years back.”

“I did see the gargoyle,” Riley huffed

“Gargoyles?” Lucas asked. “You mean like the things on churches and waterspouts?”

“Oh we never told you about those?” Farkle asked. “I thought everyone heard about them.”

“Well I hadn’t,” Lucas asked.

“Yes well some rich millionaire guy with some long name-“ Maya said trying to think of it.

“David Xanatos,” Farkle said. “He was interested in some of father’s technologies but he refused. Father said the man gave him the creeps.”

“Yeah,” Maya continued testily. “Well anyway he bought this castle in Scotland and put it on top of his building.”

“.The Eyrie Building,” Farkle interrupted. “Making it one of the tallest-“ Maya glared at her friend so Farkle stopped talking.

“Who’s telling the story,” Maya said. “This was a long time ago before any of us were born, but apparently ever since then people have been claiming to see gargoyles come to life.”

“Yes and I was about seven or eight when I saw one I’m certain,” Riley said. “He had these glowing eyes and a long beak!”

“Are you sure it wasn’t Big Bird in a bad mood?” Maya asked dryly.
“No,” Riley declared. “He was chasing after a thief and he flew past me!”

“No!” Farkle exclaimed. “Gargoyles don’t fly, they glide on currents of wind.”

“Whatever,” Riley said. “I think he was trying to help somebody. It was kind of sweet like he was a hero trying to save a princess or something!”

“Then what happened?” Lucas asked interested. “Did it say anything?”

Riley continued to tell the story about seeing the strange gargoyle. Maya and Lucas listened often making joking comments and teasing remarks throughout the story. Farkle listened quietly. While he didn’t add very much to it and felt sleep overcome him, he felt peaceful. His friends were here for him, talking, laughing, and trying to get Farkle back to normal. Farkle just listened to Riley’s voice and watched his friends’ facial expressions through his closing eyelids.

Minkus walked around the apartment picking up any razors, knives, scissors, and other sharp objects. He also picked up the pills from the medicine cabinet. He ran his finger along the mirror which bore several sharp cuts and edges. Farkle must have tried to smash it, before he tried to—a lump formed in his throat.

He winced as he looked inside the bathroom. The bloodstains from when Farkle was pulled out of the tub remained caked on the floor. He would have to take a mop and bucket later and remove them. He wasn’t going to wait for the cleaning lady to do it. The bottle of diphenhydramine also lay on the floor with its contents spilled out. Minkus knelt down and picked up the pills one at a time and scooped them in his hand. He then gathered them in their bottle and fiercely pitched the bottle in the trashcan. He took all of the items that he gathered and walked into the kitchen.

Cory, Topanga, Shawn, and Katy listened from the living room as they heard the sound of shifting and moving. Occasionally, they heard liquid being poured into a drain and the sound of glass breaking. “I’ll go see if he needs help,” Cory offered.

Cory walked into the kitchen to see Minkus locking away most of the sharp objects and pills in a drawer. He was also in the process of pouring down bottles of alcohol in the sink and threw the empty bottles in the trash. “Minkus what are you doing?”

“What does it look like I’m doing, Cory,” Minkus said. “I am suicide proofing the apartment!” He then reached under the sink and picked up any highly toxic cleaning products and started putting them in the cabinet as well. “I want to minimize the possibility that Farkle would try to do that again!”

“You forgot about the bug spray,” Cory answered pointing at the spray can.

“Oh thanks Cory,” Minkus said as he knelt down to pick him up. “He still needs to take his meds.” He held up the two bottles from the pharmacist. “I’ll give them to him personally and hide the bottles. Let’s see I should probably remove any wiring in case he chokes on it. There aren’t any small enough garages for him to put carbon monoxide in the car, so I don’t have to worry about that for now but I’ll postpone giving him driving lessons!”

“When were you planning on giving him driving lessons?” Cory asked.

“When he was about 15 like every other kid,” Minkus said. “Probably never now. I wonder if I should remove the gas from the apartment! Oh what about my ties? He could get a hold of something at school, scissors or could try to swallow something toxic! I’ll have to talk about getting him home schooled! He wants to follow his lessons electronically maybe he could do that in his senior year!”

“What’s next you want to remove his bed sheets so he doesn’t hang himself?” Cory asked dryly.

“Oh you’re probably right, I should,” Minkus answered missing Cory’s attempt at irony. “I have his old Baby Cam. I’ll put that in his room for now. It will help me keep an eye on him when I’m not here. I can rig it to my laptop and—” He was about to head to the bedroom when Cory pulled him by the elbow.

“Minkus you are going overboard,” Cory said.

Minkus glared at the history teacher. “Overboard? Let’s talk about this if Riley ever does what he did! Don’t tell me I’m going overboard!”

Cory shook his head. “I understand how you feel and it makes sense to control Farkle’s access to certain things. Yes for now keep him away from sharp weapons, alcohol, or pills! But you can’t keep him locked away from everybody for the rest of his life! I know if Riley or
Auggie had tried to kill themselves—

"That’s the thing isn’t it?” Minkus said. “If Riley or Auggie had-‘ But they would never-. Riley would never put you in that situation. Riley, Lucas, even Maya are all strong kids. They would never do that to their families! You and Topanga, Katy, and Rachel will never have to go through what I’m going through now! Instead it was Farkle! It was Farkle who tried to—"

“Tried to what?” Cory said. “What did he try to do?”

“You know what he did Cory,” Minkus said.

“I know but you haven’t said it,” Cory declared crossing his arms. “Since Farkle has woken up, you won’t say it.”

Because if I say it then I have to admit what he did,” Minkus said. “I would have to admit that he tried to—"

“Admit what?” Cory asked.

Minkus’ eyes stung with his tears. “My son Farkle Minkus tried to kill himself alright! He wanted to commit suicide! For a few minutes, my son thought his life wasn’t worth living! My son has been falling apart before my eyes and I couldn’t stop it! I can’t control what people have been saying about me! I couldn’t control what Jennifer had done to him! I can’t control what the Bassetts have done, but I can control whether my son has access to any more weapons of suicide! At least let me do this for him!” He put the last of the items in the cupboard and locked the door. He looked around the kitchen and said wearily. “You know when I came home, I thought it was terrible that this house still looked the same as if nothing happened. How dare the paintings still be hung? How dare the Hollywood Regency furniture still be sitting there? How dare the sun be out? How dare the world still go on when my world had almost been destroyed?”

“Almost,” Cory said. “Almost been destroyed. The important thing is that Farkle is here.”

“For now,” Minkus said. “I went inside that bathroom and the blood is still there. I will clean it in a minute and get the mirror replaced but Farkle will still go inside that bathroom and still remember. The apartment isn’t the same, not really. It will always be there in our heads. He did this. He wanted to end his life and I couldn’t keep him from doing it. I promised myself that he would always be safe, protected, and loved and when he needed me the most, I wasn’t there. I couldn’t save him.” Minkus turned away from his friend.

“Minkus you’re here,” Cory told his friend. “That’s what’s most important to Farkle. It’s that you’re here for him and that you’ve always been there for him.”

“I’m going to get the wheelchair,” Minkus said in an attempt to change the subject. “I’ll be back in about an hour or two.”

“We’ll keep an eye on Farkle for you,” Cory promised.

As Minkus returned from dropping off the wheelchair, he leaned against a nearby apartment complex on the next block from his just to rest his head for a moment. In less than a week, his son had been driven to suicide, his wife had abused her son, possibly abandoned her family, and he was sure that he didn’t want her back, and he lost his business. He was left with nothing. Rachel’s words came back to him: When you take away all of that stuff, all of that exterior, that’s when you find out where your true strength lies. He looked at his reflection through the front window of the complex. He had been constantly fighting one thing or another for the past week. His in-law’s greed and vindictiveness, his wife’s volatile nature, his son’s depression and apathy, the public and media’s perception of him as an abusive monster. What he saw through the reflection was a man who was overwhelmed. Could he continue fighting? Was he ready for more or was he ready to surrender? If he did surrender, what would he be left with? He wouldn’t be permitted to keep Farkle that was for sure. He didn’t want to think about the alternatives leaving him with his mother or putting him in foster care. The Bassetts would gleefully take what remained of his assets. He leaned his head against the window. He could understand why Farkle would have wanted to kill himself when everything seemed so insurmountable.

Through the corner of his eye, Minkus saw a white piece of cardboard hanging on the window. He stepped back to read the words: Office Space For Rent!

He thought of Topanga’s suggestion that he could start a new business and that he had a sharp
business mind. As if his fingers lived for themselves, they picked up his cell phone and dialed the number on the sign.

Minkus returned from the meeting with the apartment owner satisfied. It was a tough negotiation, but Minkus told the landlord that he could afford to buy the whole building if he needed to. The landlord agreed. He would have to sell his car to make a down payment, but hopefully it would be worth it. Well at least Minkus had an office. Now he had to fill it with employees. He dialed Eddie’s number. He listened for Eddie’s “Y’ello,” before he spoke. “Eddie, it’s me. I have an idea. I’m hoping that you’ll go with me on it. Call Jessie, and try to get Christine, Mike, Ali, and Lonny. Tell them all to meet me at Topanga’s Bakery at about-“ He checked his watch. “8:00 PM. Most importantly I don’t want anyone else to know about it.”

“Sure,” Eddie said. “Is it alright if I know about it?”

“I think I have a way to turn this around for us,” Minkus said. “Also, do you still have our client books?”

“Why those are the properties of Bassett Investment, Stuart,” Eddie said. “I am shocked, shocked that you would think that I would take something that belonged to them!”

“Eddie,” Stuart said testily.

“Alright, I took one,” Eddie admitted. “I’ll bring it.”

“Good,” Stuart said. “I’ll make some other calls as well. I’ll see you then.”
Chapter Summary

Minkus and his co-workers begin a new business under the ashes of the old one and Farkle begins the painful process of living again.

The Lives of Genius
A Boy/Girl Meets World
By Auburn Red
Chapter Eighteen: Unhappy Family II: Picking Up the Pieces (Stuart Minkus Age 35; Farkle Minkus Age 13)

Minkus sipped his mocha latte nervously as he watched the Topanga’s Bakery front door. He waited for his colleagues to arrive. He told himself that they would be there that Eddie informed him that they agreed. But still that didn’t make him confident that they would agree to his proposal. If he were any of them, and someone made the offer that Stuart was about to, Stuart would tell him to get stuffed. He just hoped that Eddie, Jessie, and the others were better people than he was.

From behind the counter, Katy sensed her friend’s nervousness. “It will be alright,” Katy said determined.

Minkus looked straight at her. “What will be alright? I haven’t told you anything about what I’m doing—“

“I know,” Katy said kindly. “I just know that it’s going to be alright.” Minkus smiled at his friend’s faith. He wished that he had even a drop of it right now.

The doorbell jingled as Eddie and Jessie entered. “Hi Mr. Minkus how’s Farkle?” Jessie asked.

“He’s fine, Jessie. He was sent home today in fact,” Minkus answered.

“Okay, Stuart, what’s happening?” Eddie asked warily.

“I’ll tell everyone when they get here,” Stuart asked. “They are still coming right?”

“All confirmed,” Eddie said.

“You brought the book?” Stuart inquired.

Eddie motioned to the counter. “Hey Doll,” he asked Katy. “How about some ‘cinos for me and my people?” He gave his best flirting smile to the pretty waitress.

Katy smirked. “Hey Loser, how about not sounding like an extra from a bad gangster film?”

“May we have some cappuccinos please, Miss?”

“That’s more like it,” Katy said as she served him and Jessie.

Within a half hour, Christine, Mike, Lonny, and Ali arrived. “Swordfish,” Lonny quipped a secret password in his best cloak and dagger voice. He approached Minkus and put his finger to his lips.

“Shh, I have notified the underground. We will be leaving with the microfilm by plane tonight.”
Minkus rolled his eyes at Lonny’s overdramatic gestures. “Are you done yet Lonny?” Lonny shrugged and sat back down. “Sorry I was just getting into it. I feel like a spy in some old war film!” He then spoke in a hokey Russian accent. “‘Ve vill meet at Topanga’s at 8:00 pm. Tell no vone!”

“Yeah what is this all about, Mr. Minkus?” Mike asked. “You want us to meet here and not tell anybody. All of this sneaking around and secret meetings. If I didn’t know any better I swear that you were getting us into doing something illegal.”

“No one said you had to be here, Mike,” Minkus replied.

Mike shook his head. “No I want to! This sounds like fun! I’m just saying this is weird-” He then noticed Ali walking around her colleagues waving her hands around their heads. Mike pointed at Ali. “Like her. Ali what are you doing?”

“I’m cleansing all of our auras,” Ali replied. “We have been surrounded by so much negativity lately that it will help us be more positive.”

Minkus smirked as Ali cleansed his aura. “What do you know Ali that was the first item on the agenda! Cleansing our auras, check! You are one step ahead of me!” Ali smiled and sat back down ignoring Minkus’ obvious sarcasm.

“What is all of this about, Mr. Minkus?” Christine asked.

Minkus stood and faced his former colleagues. “Alright first thank you all for coming to this meeting. Now you are all aware of the problems that have been going on between me and Mrs. Minkus?”

The technicians shook their heads too frantically. “What?” “No, I haven’t heard anything!” “You and Mrs. Minkus get out!”

“You two are a rock solid couple, what happened?” Christine asked ironically.

Minkus silenced them with a look. They changed their tunes and nodded. “Alright I might have heard something.” “A small news item may have caught my eye.” “I think I saw something on TMZ about it.”

“Did you see the SNL sketch?” Ali asked laughing.

“Taran Killam’s got Mr. Minkus down,” Lonny agreed forgetting for a brief moment that the object of ridicule was standing in the same room as him. Lonny and Ali high fived and quoted some lines from the sketch. “Jennifer!” Lonny said in a whining voice. “I don’t care, I’m rich,” Ali quoted.

“If we can forget about Mr. Killam’s comedic talents for now,” Minkus said testily. “I will tell you what my plans are. As you know, I have been removed as CEO from Mi-uh Meese International or whatever they want to call it now. The way I see it we have two options: We can lay down and accept what has happened or we can start over on our own.”

“And you want to start a new business,” Eddie asked cagily.

“No, I want to bring Minkus Technologies back to what it should have been,” Minkus said. “What it could be without the Bassetts. I have enough money to get us started as capital. I have even found potential office space and am very close to closing the deal on buying it for us. I want to reopen and redevelop ourselves into a strong independent force that can provide the best in quality technologies. That is where all of you come in.”

“How so, Mr. Minkus?” Christine asked.

“Because I can’t provide the best in quality technologies without the best quality employees. I need all of your help. I want you all to know something. Only twice in my life have I ever said the words, ‘I need your help’ and meant them. The first time was when my son lay in the hospital and I spoke to my friends. This is the second, that’s how much all of you mean to me. I need the best technicians, the best in accounts, and the best office representative. I need all of you.”

“What will we do for money?” Mike asked.

“I have enough to provide for us to start out,” Minkus said. “It can stretch as long as it needs to.”

“What about clients?” Christine asked. “We can’t exactly make technology just for ourselves.”

“Well we will have to recruit them,” Minkus said.

Eddie dropped the book on the table. “That’s what you wanted with this. I know there are some
that haven’t been happy with their previous services.”
Minkus nodded. “We can get them first,” Minkus said.
“How much are we going to be paid?” Lonny asked.
“I don’t know, Lonny,” Minkus said. “It depends but I will be honest. You will probably not be
making as much as you could be from the Bassets.”
He turned to Eddie and Jessie. “I know Eddie and Jessiceno longer work for soon-to-be Meese
International..”
Mike raised his hand. “But we.” He indicated the four technicians. “Still do. We have a sure thing
with the Bassets. You are asking us to leave for a very risky venture. Can you promise us
success?”
“No,” Minkus lowered his head. “I can’t even guarantee that we will make a profit. I am going to
do this, but I am letting you know it won’t be easy. I am not asking any of you to do anything that
I’m not going to do. There will be long hours, minimal staff, and plenty of work, possibly too much
work once the clients start coming and requesting multiple orders. Everyone will have to pull their
weight and possibly do different things. Titles and duties will not be as cut and dry as they were
before, so everyone will be having to do different tasks that they otherwise wouldn’t be doing
beforehand. The means people will have to answer phones, register customer complaints, make
coffee, get lunch, make several items in an assembly line, and/or troubleshoot any issues. If they
have an idea on a product, everyone’s voice will be heard no matter what their position title is.”
“What are our strengths?” Christine asked.
“As a smaller staffed company we will be able to keep a closer rein on the technologies that we can
produce,” Minkus said. “With that attention to detail, our technologies will be better made and
more focused than the competition. We also have the appearance and certainly the character of a
closer knit staff one that is able to work one-on-one with the clients. When I began this business, I
set out to give technologies to those who couldn’t afford it to provide affordable and well made
items for first year students, entry level workers, and people who were struggling financially. I lost
sight of that and I realize that I have been wrong. I want to do that again maybe start in area
schools and smaller businesses. Then we can proceed from there.”
“That’s all well and good,” Mike said. “But we can’t live off of ideals. What can you give us that
the Bassets can’t?”
Minkus winced. “I don’t know, Mike. I can’t promise you anything except that we are an
independent outfit. I can promise you that you won’t just be a faceless technician, one of the
numbers. You will never feel crowded or slighted. Our company will be made of individuals who
will have every right to own what they bring out in the world. Everything that you create, you
keep. I can’t promise you anything, but recognition and individuality.”
“What if we want to stay with the Bassets?” Ali asked. “Would you be sad?”
Minkus smiled at the software designer’s at times childlike nature. “No, I have other names that I
have considered. I will contact them, but I would prefer the best people to be with me. I would
certainly spend much of the time trying to get all of you to work with me because I know that you
can do so much better than what you could under Alvin Meese and the Bassets.”
“So what’s the bottom line,” Lonny said. “Why are you doing this?”
“Well on a business note, I know that this business can do better than what we have been doing,”
Minkus said. “But on a personal note, I am doing this for my son. I can’t give in to the Bassets,
because I don’t want Farkle to grow up thinking that the only way to get through life is through
failure. I want him to believe that anything is possible and that even when things are at their worst,
there is always a way out. Maybe it’s naïve or self-centered but I want him to believe in me and in
himself again.”
“As I told you before I’m in,” Jessie said. “That will never change. I was with you in Philadelphia
and here in New York. I’m not about to leave now.”
Eddie considered. Well you know how I feel,” Eddie said. “I have a good thing going with Minkus
International-Technologies-whatever it’s called now and I have a good relationship with the boss.
Can I say either of those things about Old Man Bassett, Gordon Gekko, and the Doublemint
Twins? Not that they’d give me a chance anyway.”
Christine was next. “You have given me a chance that I don’t know anyone else would do. I would rather work for a man who hired me because I was a good hardware designer over a man who called me a “freaky she-male” behind my back.”
“Alvin Meese?” Jessie guessed. Christine nodded. “He called me a dyke once. I’m actually surprised he bothered to wait until your back was turned.”
Lonny’s turn was next. “I like the idea of being the little guy going against the big bad corporation! I can’t wait to stick it to their asses!”
Ali nodded. “The Bassets and Mr. Meese are terrible people to do this to you. I don’t believe a word of what they said either. I can’t work with people who are so cruel to their own families. I would rather work with someone who loves his family so much that he is willing to risk everything for them.”
Mike looked at his colleagues for a long time. “I have worked with various corporations here in New York and in Shanghai. Not one of them has ever signaled me out for praise or treated me like I was someone worthy of being recognized. Certainly not one would contact me to do this. It’s a risk, but it’s one I’m willing to take. I’m in.”
Minkus smiled. “Well now let’s make it official. All in favor of forming Minkus Technologies?”
“Aye,” Eddie said.
“Aye,” Jessie said.
“Aye,” Lonny said.
“Aye,” Christine said.
“Aye,” Ali said.
“Aye,” Mike said.
“Aye,” Katy said from behind the counter. They turned to her. “Just saying I’m with you guys.”
Minkus grinned. “Aye.” He said. “All opposed?” There was a quick silence around the room.
“When do we start, Mr. Minkus?” Ali asked.
“First let’s get something out of the way,” Minkus said. “We are going to be a small staff. We are going to spend a lot of time together so it makes sense for us all to be on a first name basis. I know that may be difficult to adjust to, but I think it’s something that will set us apart from other companies. Please everyone, call me Stuart.”
“Alright Mr….Stuart,” Jessie tested. After all she had known Minkus for over 15 years and never referred to him by his first name. “When do we start?”
“Well the first item on our agenda will be moving to our new quarters and to contact any clients,” Minkus said. “So get prepared for a lot of moving. All I can guarantee is that we will either soar to great heights or we will go down in flames. I want to do either with the rest of you guys. Thank you for doing this. I will never forget.” He cleared his throat trying to block the sentiment. “If there is no further business, this meeting is adjourned.” The technicians and Eddie rose. “This is going to be pretty wild,” Ali said as she left.
“Yeah just hope it’s worth it in the end,” Mike said as he followed her. Christine and Lonny followed shortly.
“Eddie I want you to stay for a minute,” Minkus said. “You too, Jessie.” Jessie had been sketching something on a notepad and nodded as Minkus spoke.
Eddie sat down on the sofa next to Jessie. “So what’s up?” Eddie asked. “After all that you aren’t letting us go are you?”
Minkus shook his head. “No just the opposite. You both have been with me longer than anyone. You have proven yourself to be loyal workers and….good friends. You have stood by me when most people in their right minds should have left. I want you both to be partners in this.”
Eddie grinned. “Like you had to ask, man!” He grasped Minkus’ hand and shook it roughly. Jessie was stunned. “You want me to be a partner? But I’m just the office manager.”
“Didn’t you hear what I said, Jessie?” Minkus asked. “Titles won’t be as defined as they were. There isn’t a ‘just’ anything. You are my friend, one of my oldest friends. I want you by my side… in business of course.”
Jessie laughed. “Of course. Finally a proposal from a man!” She then considered. “I don’t have as much money to put into this as you two do.”

Minkus held Jessie by the shoulder. “I probably don’t have as much money as I used to, to put into this. You put whatever you can.”

Jessie tapped onto the notebook. “You know what you were saying about how you would listen to our ideas no matter what we did?” Minkus nodded. “Would it be alright if I tested that promise?”

“Sure what do you have in mind?” Minkus asked.

Jessie flipped open the sketchbook. “I thought that we could create a miniature device—"

“—Like the MIMS,” Minkus said.

“—Like that but better,” Jessie said. “It can be smaller, but capable of being Internet compatible, containing apps, etc. and so on.” She showed her sketch of the small device that was half the size of a tablet.

“That’s great, Jessie,” Minkus said. “But what would we call it?”

“Well what you said about either soaring to new heights or going down in flames gave me the idea. We want to show people who we are, that we survived a tough time and bounced back, especially you M-Stuart. You reminded me of the story of the Phoenix and how when it knew it was going to die, it rebuilt its nest and burst into flames only to be reborn again. That’s like us. Now I know that the name has been used, but perhaps we can do something different with it like spell it in a different way. Perhaps as Feenix or something.”

Stuart and Eddie exchanged glances. “I think we have our first item.” Minkus said.

“It’s who we are,” Eddie agreed. “It’s going to be a hit!”

Jessie smiled. “Thanks guys!”

“Well we have an office, we have great employees, we have three partners, and we have our first idea,” Minkus said. “Now all we need are clients.” He, Jessie, and Eddie rose and meandered around the bakery before they left.

“You know if we can get some really big clients to start off with, word of mouth would spread and we would be set,” Eddie suggested.

“Well I suppose we will have to start making some calls then. But for now, I have to get back home. I have a sick child and an intervention to arrange.” Eddie and Jessie wished their partner good-night as he returned it. Minkus then turned to Katy. “Thank you Katy. Good-night.”

“Good-night, Stuart,” Katy said. When she was sure that the three had left the building, Katy reached over to the phone and dialed Cory’s phone number.

After school Riley, Maya, and Lucas sat in Topanga’s Bakery in silence. They were quiet and unwilling to talk. There seemed to be a hole in their ongoing daily life, a hole in the shape of a 13-year-old 118 lbs. boy. They agreed to take part in Jennifer’s intervention visiting the Minkus family with Elena, discussing the various steps, rehearsing the scenarios, and agreeing to be Farkle’s support system. Cory was even overseeing Farkle and Stuart’s letters to Jennifer. There was something different now in their relationship with their friend, something alien and changed. Farkle still hadn’t returned to school and hadn’t yet begun hanging out with them afterward. Neither of the three wanted to hurry him just yet until he was ready.

“Are you going by to see him later?” Lucas asked. The girls said yes in unison.

“It’s not the same is it?” Riley said. “I mean hearing his voice over the microphone and going to visit and helping in the intervention. It’s not like he’s actually here with us. It’s not like everything is the same as it was.”

Maya rolled her eyes. “Come on Riley, you’re talking like Farkle died. He’s still alive. He’s just I don’t know….home sick or something.”

“Yeah I know,” the dark haired normally cheerful girl said. Her eyes filled. “But he shouldn’t have to be. He shouldn’t have been in that hospital in the first place! He shouldn’t be at home now!”

Riley hugged and rocked herself not caring one bit that she was in public. Both Lucas and Maya hugged her. “He should be here with us! He should be talking about his plans for World Domination not lying in bed recovering from nearly killing himself!”
“I know,” Maya said. “When I was in your room yesterday, I kept expecting him to go through the bay window saying, ‘Ladies!’ When’s he going to do that again?”

“I just keep wondering, why?” Riley asked. “Why did he even do it? Why couldn’t he have told us what he was going through? Why didn’t he call us and say ‘Hey you won’t believe what my Mom said about me!’ Were we really not that good of friends that he didn’t even think to call at least one of us?”

Lucas shook his head and tried to block the tears that formed. He wiped them away with his finger. “I just can’t believe that my best friend attempted suicide. When I think about it, I want to hug him and then wring his neck for putting his friends and his father through this. It just seems so, I don’t know so selfish. I mean on top of his dad losing his job could Farkle really have put him through more grief if he did die?”

“I don’t know,” Maya said. “Maybe in that moment he wasn’t thinking of us. He wasn’t thinking at all except about how much pain he was in. Maybe the only thing that he could think about was that he wanted the pain to stop.”

Lucas held onto Riley as she sobbed on his shoulder. Maya approached the counter and asked her mother for a cup of green tea for her friend.

Katy gave her daughter the tea and Maya returned to their seat and gave it to her friend. “Okay drink up,” Maya said. “This will help you feel better.”

Riley nodded as she sipped the tea. She continued to cry a little bit more, but the tears were less frantic as she sipped. “The good thing is that Farkle is still here for us to tell him,” Maya said. “There probably aren’t that many suicides that get that chance for the people around them to tell them how much they love, care about them.”

Riley and Lucas nodded at their friend. What Maya said made sense. “I guess the most important thing is that we have to remind Farkle that it’s okay to start doing his regular things and being himself and that there are people who would miss him if he ever did that again,” Lucas said.

“My mom and dad said that there is more to living than just being alive,” Riley said as she wiped her tears. “They told me that it’s good that Farkle is alive but he needs to start living again.”

“I guess that’s where we come in,” Maya said.

The three talked about their friend when they were interrupted by a familiar monotone voice. “Hello Friends of Farkle.” Maya, Lucas, and Riley looked up to see Farkle’s sometimes arch nemesis/friend, Isadora Smackle.

“Hi Smackle, how are you doing?” Lucas asked.

“Don’t start Lucas, it’s over between us,” Isadora said testily. Lucas again was confused at the brainy girl’s accusations that he was flirting with her or they were in a relationship. “I was just inquiring towards Farkle’s well being. Since we attend different educational institutions, I am unable to get the most recent developments towards his general health as quickly as I had hoped. Being his friends you would know best and be the most convenient source for that information.”

Maya nodded. “Okay I think I got the word Farkle in that so I guess you’re asking how he is. Well he was sent home and he’s recovering and that’s about it.”

“He has not yet returned to John Quincy Adams,” Isadora asked. They shook their heads. “No his father says that he’s going to still be out a few more days,” Riley answered.

“Until his psychological status has improved no doubt,” Isadora replied. “I am flabbergasted that he would attempt such a thing. I find it very upsetting, surprising, and even saddening.” Despite Isadora’s bland face and big words, there was something lost in her voice that indicated that she was truly as upset about Farkle’s attempted suicide as the other three were.

“We are all upset and sad about it, Smackle,” Riley agreed. She put her own sadness on the shelf long enough to give the genius girl a hug. Isadora resisted clenching her body inside the other girl’s embrace.

“I also understand that his mother has not been in contact and that his father has been removed as CEO of Minkus International,” Isadora said once Riley pulled away from her.

“Well that’s no big secret,” Lucas replied. “It’s all over the news. As if he and Farkle didn’t have
enough to worry about.”

“Yeah those photographers around his dad’s old office aren’t exactly tourists,” Maya said dryly. “More than idle curiosity has led me to this inquiry,” Smackle said. “My parents are former business partners of Farkle’s father. They are still somewhat acquaintances. In deference to their old business relationship and Farkle’s current status, not to mention the fact that competition isn’t as entertaining without my arch nemesis, I would truly like to say if there is anything that I or my mother and father are able to accomplish in a positive manner to assist either Farkle or his father to please let me be aware.”

“I assume that’s ‘if there’s anything that I can do please let me know,’ “ Maya translated. “I can’t think of anything but it’s nice that you said that…whatever it was.”

“Thank you Smackle,” Riley said. “I don’t know if Farkle and his dad need anything. I mean they haven’t said.”

“I guess if your Mom or Dad wanted to hire him for something,” Lucas guessed. “I suppose Farkle’s dad will need that.”

“Well I just wanted to express my concern and worry for Farkle,” Isadora replied. “Despite our animosity, he is a good friend and I am glad that he didn’t….succeed in what he attempted to do.”

“We are too,” Riley replied. Maya and Lucas nodded.

Isadora was about to leave when Katy called her over. “Hey did you mean what you said about you and your parents wanting to help Farkle’s father?”

Isadora nodded. “Yes of course.”

Katy pulled her aside. “Well I might be breaking a confidence, but….” She then leaned closer to Isadora and told her about the new business.

Cory Matthews waited as Rebecca, Jonathan Turner’s administrative assistant told him to enter the office. Cory entered and waited as his former English teacher finished his phone call. He knew that his school district needed new electronics and that Turner had yet to find a suitable company that would provide them. Cory considered this a winning situation for everyone: the district would have its computers, Minkus’ company would gain a stronger foothold, and Stuart and Farkle would recover financially. Maybe Farkle would start living again.

“Okay yeah I’ll have to call you back…Thanks bye then,” Mr. Turner spoke with that familiar accent as he hung up the phone. Even after all this time, Cory often had to fight the urge to give some excuse about why he didn’t do his homework. “Matthews what do you want?” the district superintendent said. “I’m a very busy man! I don’t have time for you little people!”

Cory stepped back. Had he come at a bad time? “Uh if this is a bad time, I can come later.”

Turner’s formerly severe face broke into a smile and he laughed. “Got ya!” Cory relaxed. “So what’s going on?” He rose and closed the front door, his limp still pronounced. Cory could never forget that limp or the reasons behind it. He knew that Shawn would never forget it either.

“Well remember how you were talking about how the district needs new computers, laptops, and other items?” Cory said.

Turner snorted. “Yeah tell me about it. Suddenly we have this government grant to give 21st Technologies to New Students, but we can’t afford to get any good ones. The way things are going right now, the students will have their choice between an 80’s era calculator or an abacus. You know most districts can give each student a free laptop or tablet. Why not us?”

“Well Mr. Turner how would you like to work with a technology company that’s starting out and is interested in working in area schools?” Cory asked remembering the highlights of Katy’s phone call.

“Sure which one?” Turner asked. “It would be nice if these kids learned to use this technology for things other than downloading episodes of SpongeBob.”

Cory smiled. “Well does the name Stuart Minkus ring a bell?”

Turner nodded. “Yeah I heard about that. Tough break for him and Farkle isn’t it? But I just got off the phone with his company or rather the company that he used to work for. The installation fee alone was astronomical. It didn’t even cover a third of what the grant money has.”

Cory then motioned Turner over to him as if confiding a secret. “I have it on good authority that
Minkus is starting his own separate company from the other one and they could really use some good clients.”

Turner’s eyes widened. “Tell me more.” He listened as Cory told him the news of what Katy told him.

Jennifer Bassett-Minkus sat on her old bed holding her arms to her chest and sobbing. When she tried to stop crying, she would wipe her tears and do it again. She couldn’t get that image out of her head: her son lying in that bathroom tub with blood pouring out of his arms. Sometimes her memory became more graphic. Sometimes she saw the blood gushing out so much that the floor which was once white was completely red. Sometimes she saw maggots and other parasites coming out of his small body. “Farkle,” she said through her tears. She tried to mutter the old prayers that she learned as a child such as the Ave Maria or Paternoster while crossing herself, but they gave her no comfort. Her son was dying and quite possibly dead. She was angry at the boy. He should have known that she didn’t really want him to kill himself. He was too stupid to know that his mother didn’t mean what she said. But those words came back to haunt her “Why don’t you just kill yourself? It would save us all the trouble… “ Then once again the bloodstained body of her son would return to haunt her.

She thought that once she was out of their apartment and back at her family’s home in Rochester that the feelings that consumed her would disappear. But now inside her room, they were more and more apparent. She thought that if she had charged her husband with abuse, then Stuart would be declared the guilty party and she would be free to have her son and free from this despair. But now the despair was all around her and she couldn’t escape.

She hit her head with her hands in anger and frustration and mumbled to herself. “Why did you do it?” she kept asking. “Why did you do it? Your father did it to you! It was his fault!” She kept hitting herself and chanting, “It’s his fault! It’s his fault!” She rocked herself again as she opened her pill bottle of barbiturates to lure herself to sleep. “It’s your fault! It’s your fault!” She said as though Stuart were in the room and she accused him. As she kept chanting, she could see her own reflection through the mirror. Through the mirror she saw a woman whose short blond hair was in disarray, whose face was completely red from the crying, and who was still wearing the periwinkle print and white nightgown since her father came for her after her son’s suicide attempt. She looked like a mess someone who wasn’t a grieving mother, was just a mad woman. “It’s your fault!” “It’s your fault!” She said to her husband’s spirit, but it had less steam. In fact it seemed more like she was accusing her own reflection rather than Stuart.

To block the image of the madwoman and possibly break the mirror, Jennifer flung her pill bottle to the mirror. The force of Jennifer’s swing caused the mirror to be knocked from the wall and tumble down to the floor shattering. “I hate you!” Jennifer screamed but she wasn’t sure if she was referring to the mirror, Stuart, Farkle, or herself! She sank down back on the bed and began to sob. She heard footsteps and heard her mother, Eunice’s voice from behind the door. “Jenny, are you alright in there?”

Jennifer continued sobbing instead of answering. She was about to reach for a wine bottle to drown out her sorrows and possibly make the barbiturate work faster when Eunice unlocked the door and turned on the bedroom light. “I’m sorry Jenny..” Her mother then knelt down next to her daughter and hugged her tightly. “Now what’s wrong baby?” She asked. She felt like her 35 year old daughter was a little girl who woke up from a nightmare again. “My baby’s dead,” Jenny said. “My baby’s dead and it’s all my fault!” She continued to cry as her mother held her.

“It’s alright darling, it’s alright,” Eunice said. Since her daughter had spent most of the time sleeping and holed up in her room, she wasn’t yet aware of the news around her. “Darling, honey, Farkle isn’t dead.”

Jennifer looked up in her mother’s eyes. “Oh Mother spare me the ‘He’s-With-Our-Father-or-in-the-Children’s-Limbo’ speech. I saw his body. I saw the blood! He couldn’t have survived that.”

Eunice gave her daughter a kiss on the top of her head. “No, honey, he is still alive.”

“What?” Jennifer asked. “Farkle’s alive?” She gulped through her tears.
“In fact, he and Stuart called just now,” Eunice said. “They want to talk to you.” Jennifer wiped her tears. Her old haughtiness returned, but without the usual bitterness. “What makes them think that I want to talk to them?” She asked. Or that I should, she wanted to say but couldn’t form the words.

“Well Stuart said that he had to cancel your credit cards,” Eunice said. “He wanted to talk to you about them.” Jennifer rose from the bed. “That son of a bitch did what?” She asked. “Those aren’t his to cancel!” She was about to brush her hair when her mother held her down.

“Now, Jenny slow down, what are you going to say to Stuart?” She asked.

“What I have always said to him,” Jennifer said. “That new money bastard cannot do this to me!” Jennifer felt woozy as she stood. Since she had been crying so much and hadn’t eaten, her rising was very painful. Her head throbbed as she jerked around the room. Eunice held her daughter by the shoulder.

“Darling, Daddy will give you some new credit cards,” Eunice promised. “You know that.”

“Mother it’s not about the credit cards,” Jennifer said. “How can he do this to me? How can he do this to Farkle?”

“Farkle,” Eunice questioned. “What does he have to do with this?”

“Well how else am I going to look after him?” Jennifer asked.

Eunice’s mouth dropped open. “You really think that you will have custody of Farkle?”

“Of course I will,” Jennifer declared. “I’m his mother!”

“Jenny I don’t know if-” Eunice began tactfully.

“You don’t know what-” Jennifer asked. “Are you against me too?” Eunice shook her head. “No, I’m not. I just think that we should look at this realistically! You aren’t well, right now. A few minutes ago, you thought that your child was dead! Maybe you should wait a bit to have him until you are feeling better!”

“I wasn’t feeling well because I thought my son was dead,” Jennifer declared. “Stuart could have told me that anytime, but he chose not to! I told you what he did to me! Are you saying that I lied?” Jennifer shook her head fearing her daughter right then almost as much as she feared her husband and sons. “No of course not, Jenny. But this will need some time, time for you to refocus. Maybe you should look after yourself for awhile before you look after your son.”

Edward Bassett appeared through the door at his wife and daughter. “How are my two favorite ladies doing?” He turned to his wife. “Eunice,” he said cordially. His relationship with his wife had been frosty for a number of years. But his relationship with his children had improved when they became just like him. He kissed the top of Jennifer’s head. “How are you feeling Princess much better?”

“I’m trying to Daddy,” Jennifer said.

“I know Sweetheart,” Edward said. “I know what that awful Stuart Minkus did to you and I promised you that I wouldn’t stand for it. I said that I would do something about it and I have.”

“What did you do Daddy?” Jennifer asked.

“I don’t know if you should tell her,” Eunice warned.

“Eunice, don’t talk about things that you don’t understand,” Edward warned his wife sharply. “It’s about time that Jennifer should learn the news. Your brothers and I have pulled our stocks from Minkus International and not even two days ago, we have removed Stuart as CEO from the company.”

Jennifer sighed with relief and hugged her father. “Oh thank you, Daddy!”

“Anything for my Baby Girl,” Edward said. “There will be some changes to make that’s for sure. Of course I called in a few favors from the media. The tarring and feathering has already begun. I think Stuart will still find the occasional feather in his shoe or coat pocket for years.”

“Isn’t it wonderful, Mother,” Jennifer said. “Stuart Minkus will never bother us again!”

Eunice nodded. “Yes, but what’s going to happen to him and Farkle?”

“Who knows,” Edward said. “No wait let me rephrase that, who cares?”

“Well I know that Stuart has been a problem,” Eunice said. “But do you really want Farkle to suffer
for it more than he already has?"

"Mother, he won’t suffer for it when he lives with me," Jennifer reminded her mother as though it were a foregone conclusion and she had the custody papers in hand already.

"Jennifer you don’t have Farkle yet," Eunice reminded her daughter. "I just think that it’s going to be harder for him and Stuart."

Edward rolled his eyes. "See Eunice this is why you don’t have a business mind! You are too kind especially to those who don’t deserve it! Why did I marry such a featherbrained fool? Stuart Minkus rode our coattails for years. He has hurt my daughter even after I generously pulled that business from the ground. Most of all he continues to tell lies about my baby girl! No one does that!"

"What sort of lies?" Jennifer said.

"Oh mostly about your temper and other things," Edward said casually. "He even mentioned that little Christmas incident some time ago."

"It was hardly a little incident," Eunice told her husband.

"Yes well we went through that charade of a hospitalization didn’t we?" Edward said. "Our Jenny had done nothing wrong. She was pushed into it by her husband. The blame was solely on him."

"Does Jennifer ever get the blame?" Eunice shot back. Both her husband and daughter glared at her as if she had committed treason. "I’m sorry, Jennifer. But that doctor would never have diagnosed your condition if he didn’t have a reason to."

"You are against me too," Jennifer said. "Daddy-"

Edward held onto his daughter. "It’s alright Princess. Your mother doesn’t know what she’s talking about. She is just that naïve and inferior."

Eunice winced. "I remember when it was me you used to come to, Jenny. When your father would call you a loser if you got bad grades. When he would pit you and your brothers against each other. When he kept telling you that if you didn’t win in everything you did, you may as well not bother."

"I don’t remember any of it," Jennifer hissed. "Even if I did, it made me strong. It will make Farkle strong."

If it doesn’t kill him first, Eunice thought but chose not to say.

"Teddy, Tommy, and Jenny are the exact children that I hoped for," Edward said. "Everything that we wanted them to be."

Eunice nodded and was about to leave the bedroom. "Yes they are everything that you hoped for, Edward. I just hope that you can live with the consequences." She closed the door behind her.

Jennifer returned to the Minkus apartment for the last time. Instead of arguing about her cancelled credit cards, Jennifer had been tricked to attend an intervention. Not only in front of Stuart and Farkle, but the Matthews family, the Harts (whom Jennifer was still convinced that Stuart was screwing the mother or the daughter or both), Shawn Hunter, and that handsome boy—what was his name Linus? Louis? She had tried to flirt with him, but the boy resisted. Jennifer snorted. He was probably gay!

Her soon-to-be-former husband and son wrote to her about how they wanted her to change and how much they loved her. The counselor told her that the final decision was up to her. What did Jennifer say? She looked Stuart Minkus in the eye and told him, "I want a divorce." Not that would have mattered, divorce was going to be a foregone conclusion anyway. Jennifer had already been talking to a divorce attorney acquaintance of Eugene’s before she left to meet them. She was ready to fight for all of the assets that she could get.

She was proud of herself for not submitting to their tedious demands to get treated. But still she was haunted, haunted by their words. Mother if we didn’t love you we would continue to let you do this to yourself...I want you to get help because I love you so your words and actions can be something that I could love again....I still love you Jennifer...Get treated. Get clean. Get better.... I would rather face a healthy you in court than read an obit of you as a beautiful young corpse." That last bit shook her. She could die from all of this, the alcohol, the pills, the rages. She could kill someone or herself. She could be the same way Farkle was....That image of her little boy bleeding in the bathroom tub came to her once again. She tried to resist those thoughts saying that Stuart was
lying. But if he were, he wouldn’t have warned her. Farkle and Stuart spoke of their love and because of their love, they wanted her to get better. Her father didn’t think that she had a problem. He let her drink and take as many pills though he didn’t want her to mix them. But she could take whatever she needed and did she need a lot in the past few days. Did that mean that Stuart and Farkle loved her more because they wanted her to live?

She also remembered what her father said that she and her brothers were the exact children that he hoped for. She couldn’t think that way about him! What he said never bothered her. He always wanted her to be tough, to be strong, and to be a winner in life! She and her brothers always had to rise above everything even each other to meet their father’s praise. It was how things were and that was what she wanted for Farkle. But it didn’t make him strong. It made him weak and suicidal...That image flashed in her mind once more. Her baby almost died...but not because of her. She loved him couldn’t he see that? Her father loved her and she loved him. She gulped as she remembered herself as a little girl listening to her father tell her that “How dare you get a B? Only losers get B’s! Only nothings come in second! You don’t ever want to be a nothing, do you?” She remembered how she hated hearing him say that. From the letter Farkle said that he hated the things that she said too. Did she ever once say that she loved him or that he made her proud every day? No time that she could recall. Jennifer held the letters to her chest as she looked up at the apartment.

“Mrs. Minkus, are you going in or what?” one of the movers interrupted her.

“Oh yes of course,” Jennifer said. She pushed the button on the call box and announced her presence to Stuart.

“Alright come up,” Stuart said. Jennifer nodded at the movers as they walked inside the apartment building.

“There that’s the last of it,” the mover said. Jennifer signed her signature with the stylus.

“Thank you,” Jennifer said to the men. The movers left the apartment building leaving Jennifer alone with her former husband and son.

“So what will you do now?” Stuart asked.

Jennifer glared at her husband, but then downward. “We’re getting divorced remember?”

“As if I could forget,” Stuart said.

“We have it pretty well organized by now,” Jennifer said. “I’d tell my lawyer to get more from you but there almost isn’t enough to bother fighting over is there?”

Minkus smirked at his wife. “Oh Jennifer, I am going to miss that loving kindness from you.”

Out of the corner of her eye, Jennifer saw Farkle peer through the open door of his bedroom and look at his mother. Those words came back to haunt her:

Mother if we didn’t love you we would continue to let you do this to yourself…. I would rather face a healthy you in court rather than read an obit of you as a beautiful young corpse. Those words and that memory of her child bleeding grabbed into her. She couldn’t look at Farkle. Seeing her son was just too painful.

She turned towards Stuart purposely avoiding her son’s gaze, “Is that offer to get treated still on the table?”

Stuart nodded. “Yes it is.”

“For 60 days and you will pay for it,” Jennifer asked.

“Yes as we agreed,” Minkus answered.

“My family still gets to keep what we withdrew,” Jennifer warned. “You won’t challenge your dismissal?”

“I have other things in mind so no, I won’t,” Minkus said.

Jennifer sighed wearily. “Then I will agree to it.” She answered defeated. “But this doesn’t change anything. We’re still getting divorced. Be prepared for a prolonged court battle when I get out.”

“At least you’ll be alive to give me one,” Stuart answered. Jennifer was about to approach Stuart and kiss him or embrace him. Instead Stuart had his hand out. “Good-bye Jennifer.”

“Good-bye Stuart,” Jennifer answered as she shook his hand.

“Jennifer,” Stuart said. Jennifer looked at her former husband. “Despite everything, thank you for
my son.” Jennifer looked downward. “Thank you for marrying me….once.”
“Good-bye Mother,” Farkle said. Jennifer would not, could not look at her son. Instead she turned around and walked out the door.
Lonny Overton and Ali Gold walked towards their new office building with bags of Chinese food in their hands. The Minkus Technologies staff had finally moved into their new office and were ready to get some business going. However, the phones were more dead than alive. While the staff had been working to create and build the Feenix, there wasn’t anyone to present it to yet. “This is only the third day,” Ali encouraged. “Things will pick up.”
“If they don’t pick up soon, this Feenix might as well stay in its nest,” Lonny said bitterly. For a moment there, he sounded more like the ever cynical doubtful Mike.
Lonny glanced up at the bald man in the pin striped suit watching them. “I don’t know why that dude’s even bothered watching us,” Lonny said. “Not like there’s anything to watch.” “He’s probably a reporter,” Ali suggested. “I’d really love to get one of them!” She cursed. “It’s hard enough for us to get started without everyone saying that Stuart beats Farkle.”
Lonny and Ali stopped at the door to the office building. “Yeah let me give him something to write about.” He looked straight at the man watching and flipped him off. Ali giggled and pushed his hand down.
“Stop,” she said. Lonny laughed as well especially after the man looked straight at him. Both Lonny and Ali gave innocent waves as they ducked down into the office. Since they were inside the office, they didn’t see the man dialing the phone number of Edward Bassett.
Lonny and Ali entered with the food. Christine, Mike, Eddie, and Jessie were putting the finishing touches on the latest Feenix. “Okay gang Feenix Number 100 is off the ramp,” Eddie said excitedly as the Feenix lay to close to the edge. The Feenix then fell down off the table and landed on the ground with a bang.
“Feenix Number 99,” Christine corrected.
Minkus was on the telephone talking to a potential client. “Yes of course, but you see. You would have a much better deal with Minkus Technologies than you would anywhere else…..Yes I know we are a smaller outfit, but you won’t get that attention from the larger ones.” “How’s he doing?” Lonny asked as he and Ali passed around the food to the other employees. “That’s the 15th,” Jessie said. “Client?” Ali asked excitedly. “Phone call he’s made,” Jessie replied. Lonny and Ali sighed with the others.
Minkus seemed even more desperate as he continued to speak on the phone. “No, no. I understand completely. You have a good thing with Meese International. If you ever change your mind, don’t hesitate…Hello? Hello?” He hung up the phone and glanced at his employees. “They’ll call back later.” He said with false bravado.
He accepted his Mushu pork from Ali, but only picked at it. He crossed out the last name in Eddie’s book and thumbed through reading the names. He pointed at each one. “No.” “No.” “Yes.” “Yes.” “Not in a million years.” “Are you nuts?” “Maybe.” “No. No.” He continued down the list and closed the book with a snap. “Only two confirmations and seven maybes, mostly no’s,” Minkus said. “That’s not going to be near enough.” “Well look at the bright side,” Eddie said. “Which is?” Minkus asked.
Eddie was silent thinking. “Hang on, I’m thinking of it.” The door opened as the staff tensed hoping that it was a possible client stopping by.
“I’m doing better thanks Jessie,” Farkle answered. Of the employees he had known Jessie and Eddie the longest. He almost thought of them as a second aunt and uncle.
Stuart stood up and approached his son putting his arm around his shoulder. “What are you doing
up? You should be home in bed.”
Farkle shook his head. “I got bored and my friends won’t be back from school for another hour. I thought that I’d get some exercise and see how you were doing.” He nodded at their apartment which was just down the block from the new Minkus Technologies office.
“Well you need to get home,” Minkus said. He then moved his hand down Farkle’s arm lingering on his wrist. Farkle pulled on his sleeve to cover up the bandage. After the intervention for his mother, Farkle had been troubled by nightmares and panic attacks. The panic attacks had become so frequent that Rachel had to increase the medicinal dosage. Many times Stuart had to stay awake either in his son’s bedroom or in the living room waiting for him to call. He suspected that Farkle was dealing with his mother’s rejection the only way that he possibly could.
“Farkle,” Minkus began but he couldn’t finish.
There was an awkward pause between the father and son. “I’m getting them removed soon remember?” Farkle whispered indicating the bandages.
“I know,” Minkus said. “That’s why you should be home resting.”
“Oh come on, Stuart,” Lonny said. “We have enough food. You want something man?” He asked.
Farkle shook his head. “No it’s okay thanks anyway.” He sat on one of the revolving chairs as the others ate. Farkle’s appetite hadn’t yet returned. So far he only picked at his food. He was still sometimes lost in his depression.
Minkus’ appetite really hadn’t returned much either but it was more from the stress of the past few days of his child’s hospitalization, his soon-to-be-ex wife’s intervention, and being removed from one business to start another.
“Besides this isn’t the first time that Farkle has visited us,” Jessie said hoping to break the tension with a story.
“I remember the first time,” Eddie said recalling. “You were about three then weren’t you?” Farkle gave an embarrassed sigh. “Oh no,” He said covering his face but slightly grinning.
“Oh I bet you were so cute,” Ali said.
“Yeah it was like I was a little kid or something,” Farkle sighed.
“Oh he was adorable,” Jessie said. She then recounted the first time Farkle came with his father to work. The technicians laughed and the embarrassed teen shook his head but didn’t really mind the adults fussing over him.
Christine opened her fortune cookie and glowered. “Did my mother write this fortune? ‘Dress so you do not catch your death!’” She laughed until she looked up at Farkle. “Oh I’m sorry, I….” realizing that a harmless death comment could be painful to someone who was recovering from a suicide attempt.
“It’s okay,” Farkle said politely. “It is a dumb fortune.”
“Mine says that ‘Prosperity comes your way’,,” Mike said. “Sure hope that’s true.”
“Hmm mine says ‘You’re Next’ wonder what that means,” Lonny said. The others looked at him confused. “Just kidding. It says ‘Courage is your greatest present need.’”
“I wouldn’t be surprised if it did say ‘You’re Next’ with that creepy guy at the counter,” Ali said. She then explained about the creepy man in the Chinese restaurant who kept flirting with her. “I was so embarrassed. I felt like I could die….” She trailed off remembering Farkle was in the room. There was an embarrassed tense silence. “I mean it wasn’t that funny,” Ali added glumly.
“It’s fine really,” Farkle added. He subconsciously hid his wrists so the adults wouldn’t comment. “I’m fine.”
“Farkle,” Minkus was about to suggest that his son go home when there was a knock at the door. The knock continued for the second time as the colleagues and Farkle all glanced at each other. Some even pointed at each other and themselves counting the people who were already in the room.
“I think when someone knocks, we’re supposed to answer,” Minkus said rolling his eyes at the long pause. He rose and answered the knocking door.
He opened it to see Ingrid and Elliot Smackle facing him. Even though he had seen them at various technology and computer conventions and they had emailed each other quite a few times, they had lost touch on a personal basis. They looked different, older. Elliot had definitely put on a lot of weight over the years, but he still had that wide smile. Ingrid’s hair had gotten shorter and she looked more business-like. But he could still recognize them. “Ingrid, Elliot,” Minkus said confused. “What are you two doing here?”

“Well we were in the neighborhood and thought well you know,” Elliot said not wanting to finish that cliché.

“Actually we want to talk business with you, Stuart,” Ingrid answered.

“Sure come on in,” Minkus said but he held up his hand. “Wait a minute! How did you know where I was?”

Ingrid and Elliot glanced secretly at each other. “We have our sources,” Elliot answered mysteriously.

“Well okay come on in,” Minkus said leading Ingrid and Elliot inside the office.

Christine, Mike, Ali, and Lonny gawked at Ingrid and Elliot as though superstars had walked into the building. “Everyone this is—”

“-Ingrid Iverson-Smackle,” Ali said walking up to her in amazement. “I love your software! I am such a big fan!” She shook Ingrid’s hand so hard that she felt like it would fall off.

“Thank you,” Ingrid said.

“Elliot Smackle,” Mike said. “I had your first MIMS device. Okay not the first one, but the first one that was available in Shanghai!”

Elliot smiled with pride and nodded at the younger designers’ admiration of him and his wife. “Now I know how a pop or rock star feels!” He held his fists to his hips like a superhero. “Behold my people.”

Ingrid rolled her eyes. “Knock it off Bieber!,” she teased her husband. “Really he’s not as impressive as he seems.” She teased the designers.

“We didn’t know that you knew the Smackles Stuart,” Christine said. “You never told us!”

“Yeah why didn’t you tell us you knew someone famous,” Lonny admonished.

“Um because I am someone famous,” Minkus reminded the software designer. “Well now someone infamous.” He rolled his eyes good naturedly at his colleagues’ admiration of his former colleagues. He turned to Ingrid and Elliot. “Well your fan club are Christine Monte, Mike Chu, Ali Gold, and Lonny Overton. Jessie Goloff, I’m sure you remember. That’s Eddie Giatti, he started a few years after we parted ways. Of course you know Farkle.”

“Remember him from the debates and the Buggies,” Elliot remarked. Farkle nodded.

“Now that the introductions are over what are you doing here?” Minkus asked.

“Can we talk to you in private for now?” Ingrid asked. Minkus nodded over to his desk and led the couple towards it.

“Love what you’ve done with the place, Stuart,” Elliot said. “I felt like we opened a door and stepped into the past.”

“Yes, it’s my downward mobility look,” Minkus said. “Apparently that’s so out, it’s in now.”

Ingrid cleared her throat and reached into her purse opening it for a minute. “We heard that you left Minkus International—”

“-Left is not the word that I would have used to describe it,” Minkus said. “More like forced out on my keister.”

“After all you did for those assholes,” Elliot said. “Pardon my French.”

“Well people sometimes have a bad reaction when your marital problems with your wife become a matter of public record, especially when said people are your in-laws,” Minkus said dryly. “Particularly when you are falsely arrested and charged with things that you didn’t do. They don’t look very favorably on that.”

“We didn’t believe it for an instant, Stuart,” Ingrid said.

“Remember we knew you and Jennifer when you started dating,” Elliot replied. “Would this be a bad time to say we told you so?”
“Might as well,” Stuart said. “Everyone else has including myself.”

Ingrid said. “We also heard that you are starting a new company.”

Minkus nodded. “Yes I am. One that is more inclined towards what we set out to do. Elliot, Ingrid, it has taken me 15 years to realize that I was wrong about a lot of things about what I do, who to trust, and what I believe in. I left our ideals behind for money and what I thought was love for Jennifer. All I ended up doing was getting myself and my son hurt. In fact Farkle is the only part of my life that I can say has made me happy since.

There are many things that I wish that I could take back and among them are I wish I had left with you two.”

Ingrid and Elliot held hands and smiled. Ingrid opened her purse and took out a check. “I don’t know if this will help you continue, but we want to do everything we can.”

She handed the check to Stuart and he started. $150,000! “Thank you but I can’t accept this,” Minkus said.

Elliot rolled his eyes. “Stuart ignore your pride! We know how tough it is out there, we were out there with you, remember? You recruited us as students and helped us be the people who we are. Let us do the same for you.”

“No, I mean that I can’t accept this as a loan or a gift,” Minkus answered. “I will only accept this as an investment.” Ingrid and Elliot smiled. “Congratulations you are now part-owners of Minkus Technologies. Welcome to the Board of Directors. All you have to do is come to our monthly partner meetings. Thank you, and I just hope you didn’t put your money on a white elephant.”

“That’s a misstatement,” Elliot answered. “In Siam white elephants were considered rare but very lucky indeed.”

Minkus offered a thin smile. “It’s funny I thought that I had a talent for chasing people away. But in the past few days, they seem to be coming back.”

“Well we’re certainly glad to be counted among them,” Ingrid replied holding Elliot’s hand. Minkus shook their hands and helped them to rise. He then led them to the commons area where the rest of his colleagues were still eating. “Everyone great news,” Minkus said. “Elliot and Ingrid have consigned to be our new partners, along with myself, Jessie, and Eddie.”

The staff members cheered. Farkle just gave a thin smile. “Here if you want to stay we have plenty of food,” Minkus invited.

“I think there’s some honey chicken left,” Christine said.

“No I ate it all,” Lonny answered. Christine playfully swatted her colleague with an unused chopstick.

Elliot and Ingrid looked at each other and shook their heads. “No but thanks anyway,” Ingrid said. “But we will by quite often.”

“We’re keeping our eyes on you kids,” Elliot said acting like a stern father. He even did the “my-eye-on-you” gesture. Ali and Lonny returned the gesture. “Make us proud,” he said with a smile. The staff and Smackles waved good-bye to each other when Farkle got up and approached them. “Mr. and Mrs. Smackle how did you know that my father was starting another company?” Elliot asked. “Let’s just say a little 13-year-old bird told us.”

Farkle then realized that their daughter gave them that information. “Isadora, my arch nemesis.”

“Maybe you two aren’t such arch nemeses after all,” Ingrid hinted.

“Will you tell her thanks for me,” Farkle asked.

“We will,” Elliot answered.

Ingrid and Elliot left when the thought occurred to him. “Wait a minute, how did Smackle know?” Minkus turned to his son. “I think that we have Katy and the rest of our friends to thank for that news. Katy was working when we made plans for the business. She probably told Isadora and Isadora told her parents.”

“It’s kind of embarrassing,” Farkle said wanting to be proudful. “But it is nice that people are looking out for us.” He knew of another act of friendship but didn’t want to say so. He didn’t want to jinx it or hope for too much too soon.

Minkus was about to say more when his cell phone rang. “Hold that thought,” he said.
“Hello….Yes this is Stuart Minkus.” He listened as the caller introduced himself. “Mr. Turner, hi?” The other employees exchanged confused glances as Minkus spoke on the phone. Jessie gave Eddie a look like ‘do you know anything about this?’ Eddie shrugged and shook his head. Farkle bit his lip to avoid a knowing smile.

Jonathan Turner explained quickly his interest in Minkus Technologies to the area schools. “We want tablets, laptops any software that you can come up with Minkus. Can you do that?” Minkus took a minute to catch his breath. “I don’t know. An order for the entire school district! That’s incredible…but a big order like that I mean we would have to get possibly more employees.”

The staff looked excited at each other as they mouthed “more employees,” “big order,” and “the entire school district”!

“Well hopefully the grant money will cover it,” Turner said over the phone. “So what do you say?”

“Well what can I say?” Minkus asked. He glanced at his colleagues who all nodded and mouthed yes. Lonny and Ali even mimed heart attacks. “Except yes! Thank you Mr. Turner!”

“You’re welcome Minkus,” Turner said. “Think of me as your first big client!”

“Mr. Turner, I didn’t tell you that I was starting a new company did I?” Minkus asked. “How did you know to contact me?”

“Let’s just say we know some mutual friends,” Turner answered furtively.

Minkus nodded. “Cory Matthews I bet. Of course.” Technically, he should say that he had too much pride to accept help from him. But for goodness sake, Cory was a friend! He was trying to help. Minkus would be a fool to pass this up. “Well thank you Mr. Turner and thank Cory for me.”

“I will. You take care and continue changing the world kid,” Turner said.

“I think I’m about to,” Minkus answered. He and Turner agreed to discuss the particular terms the next day. Minkus hung up and then faced his eager employees.

“That was Jonathan Turner, the superintendent of the Manhattan school district. He wants an order to provide technological materials to every student!”

The staff erupted into cheers and joyful cries. Farkle instead was silent but had a proud smile on his face. “Did you know something about this?” Minkus asked.

“Well,” Farkle said. “Yesterday Riley told me that Ms. Hart talked to her dad. Then her dad had talked to her Uncle John about you. They didn’t want me to say anything because it wasn’t definite until he talked to the school board but…”

“.Well now it is,” Minkus said as he reached up and embraced his son. “I think we’re off to a good start!” Minkus smiled.

“You know I think I will have something to eat,” Farkle said.

“Me too,” Minkus added. Farkle sat between Ali and Lonny and accepted some of their food. Minkus heated up his Mushu pork in the microwave and ate it.

Minkus was relieved. He now had a new business or a return to the old business, four partners, six employees, an office, three clients, a big order to get them off and running, possibly the go ahead for new employees, and a new device. As he looked around the room at his colleagues and his son, he absently squeezed Farkle’s shoulder knowing that for the first time in his life, Stuart Minkus finally made the right choice.

Farkle tensed as Rachel Friar made the incision in his bandages. Stuart held onto his son’s shoulders while his three friends waited in the hospital room with him. “Thank you all for coming,” Minkus said to Lucas, Riley, and Maya. “You’re all Farkle talks about and he didn’t want to go through this without you.”

“We’re a team,” Riley said determined. “We go wherever Farkle goes.”

“You get one of us you get all of us,” Maya said.

“And I’m going so it’s not just the girls with him,” Lucas said dryly. Rachel grinned at her son. “I can’t look,” Farkle said turning his eyes away as Rachel cut the bandages and slowly unwrapped the left arm.

“Okay one arm down and the next to go,” Rachel said as she unwrapped the right arm. “There all finished.”
Farkle had shut his eyes and wouldn’t look at the scarring. There was a tense silence when his friends and his father wouldn’t talk. “What do they look like? Are they awful?”

“They’re not too bad,” Riley said diplomatically.

“You can hardly see ‘em,” Lucas said.

“I mean they could be worse,” Maya said trying to be polite. “They could make your arms look like road maps.” Riley and Lucas glared at their blunt friend.

“Okay let me see them,” Farkle said opening his eyes. He looked down at his arms. One long jagged scar ran down the inside of each arm from the edge of his wrist to his inner elbow. “They’re bigger than I thought they’d be,” Farkle said hoarsely. “But my arms are limp.”

“You haven’t had a lot of circulation in them,” Rachel answered. “Within a day or two, they will be back to normal.”

“They will be,” Farkle said barely listening. “But I won’t be.” He began to hyperventilate. “They look terrible! I look terrible!” He continued to have a panic attack constantly catching his breath as Minkus patted his son on the back.

“Farkle it’s okay,” Minkus said. “I’m right here, son!” He put his son’s hand on his own throat. “Just breathe. Can you do that? Listen to my breathing. Nothing else just listen to it.” Minkus breathed in and out slowly while Farkle struggled to hold his breath. As he listened to his father’s breathing he counted the 3 squared multiplication tables to slow himself down.

Farkle felt dizzy, but he managed to slow his breathing down. He slowly moved from his father’s grasp and looked down at his arms. “Everyone will see them and they will know won’t they?” “It doesn’t change anything,” Riley said. “You’re still Farkle.”

“Yeah you’re the Farkliest Farkle that we know,” Maya replied.

“You’re just fine,” Lucas said. “You’ll be just fine at school.” Farkle nodded and smiled at his friends.

When Farkle and his friends returned back to his apartment, Minkus pulled Riley, Maya, and Lucas aside. “Thank you all for being there for him,” he said. “I want to ask you, if you can be there for him when I can’t.”

Riley, Maya, and Lucas exchanged confused glances at their friend’s father. “Of course we will Mr. Minkus,” Riley said. “Why do you even have to ask? You’re not…” She wasn’t sure if she could finish even thinking about what he was planning to do.

“No, nothing serious,” Minkus said. “Just when I’m at work and you’re at school or when he’s hanging out with you guys. When he gets like that, can you please take care of him? Make sure to calm him down if he has an anxiety attack or starts getting depressed? Just make sure that he’s going to be okay.”

“We will sir,” Lucas promised. “I don’t think any of us want Farkle to go through that again.”

“He’s our friend no matter what,” Riley said.

“I’ll personally kick the crap out of anyone who talks shit about him,” Maya vowed.

“After me, you come first,” Lucas nodded at Maya.

“And I will…..talk to them severely,” Riley said realizing that she couldn’t physically fight anyone for Farkle.

“Farkle has some great friends,” Minkus said. “I am proud of that.”

In two days Farkle returned to John Quincy Adams Middle School with his three friends. Farkle tensed as he entered the hallway. He stood in the hallway looking down at his bright yellow turtleneck. Not for the first time did he think that his clothes were no longer appropriate. They were of the optimistic hopeful Farkle of seventh grade. The one who hadn’t tried to kill himself. Maybe he should dress differently from now on.

Riley, Maya, and Lucas all stood in front of Farkle looking at their friend. “So are you coming or not?” Lucas said.

“I don’t know,” Farkle said.

“You could stay there all day if you want,” Maya said. “In fact I think I’ll join you.” Riley pulled her best friend aside knowing that Maya’s decision to stay with Farkle was more out of academic laziness than solidarity.
“Farkle I thought you wanted to do this,” Riley said.
“I know,” Farkle said. “I even argued with Dad about it.” Since the suicide attempt and his mother’s intervention, Farkle had taken to calling his father “Dad,” to solidify the closeness that had emerged from the tough times that the two had to live through the past few weeks. “He still thinks that I should be home schooled.” Farkle answered. He loved his father but he wondered if he was getting too overprotective of him. Not that Farkle could blame him really after what they had been through.

“Well then prove to him that you don’t have to be,” Maya said. “Come through that door and come to class.”

“But people will talk and what will they say when they ask me what happened?” Farkle asked.
“Just tell them whatever you can,” Lucas said. “Just say you’re fine. It’s the truth isn’t it?” Farkle nodded. “But they might give me a hard time about it.”
“If they will, they will,” Maya said. “They would have done that anyway.”
“We will make sure that they don’t,” Riley said. “And we will always be glad that you’re here for us to defend.”

Farkle took Riley’s hand as Maya and Lucas stood behind them holding onto each of his shoulders. Cory was about to begin his lecture on the play The Crucible by Arthur Miller when his daughter, Maya, Lucas, and Farkle walked in. Around the room several of the other students like Zay, Yogi, Darby, and Sarah whispered to each other and gave Farkle confused stares. Riley, Maya, and Lucas gave Farkle a pat on the shoulder or a tight squeeze before they sat down.

Cory looked at his best student for a long time in silence as Farkle removed the microphone from his desk and sat down. “Good to have you back, Farkle.”
“Thank you, Mr. Matthews,” Farkle replied. He wanted to say something like it was good to be back, but he couldn’t, not yet.

Cory then continued. “Now The Crucible is a play written by Arthur Miller about the Salem Witch Trials….,” He lectured as Farkle listened, chiming in with a comment, or talking about the lesson. He didn’t give one of his Farkle Times yet, but he enjoyed once again being a part of the group. It was enough for now.
Living Organisms (Stuart Minkus Age 35; Farkle Minkus Age 13)

Chapter Summary

During a familiar identity crisis, Farkle becomes closer to one of his special ladies and Minkus has a reunion with someone from his past.

The Lives of Genius
A Boy/Girl Meets World Fanfic
By Auburn Red

Chapter Nineteen: Living Organisms (Stuart Minkus Age 35; Farkle Minkus Age 13)

Author’s Note: As previously stated because the events in “Unhappy in its Own Way” predate many of the events in the second season of Girl Meets World, many of the canon events will be altered to fit accordingly. In this chapter, for example, you will see further motivation for the creation of “Donnie Barnes: Regular Guy” and “Morotia M. Black” in “Girl Meets Yearbook” that involve more internal and familial conflicts as well as Farkle and Riley’s public perceptions in school. In this timeline, also Morgan has come to visit during the “Girl Meets Yearbook” time less for the “Yearbook” storyline than for the events in my fanfic, so there are some adjustments in putting Morgan into the events as well. Morgan’s friend, Jolene is an original character. The lyrics to “Someone to Watch Over Me” are by George and Ira Gershwin. There are also references to the “Girl Meets the New Teacher” episode.

Farkle greeted his father in the morning. Minkus lowered his laptop since it gave him a full view of his son’s bedroom. “Morning, Farkle,” he said. He had already left from the bathroom to do his daily count of the amount of anti-depression and anti-anxiety medicine that Farkle was taking. 21 of each, the right amount. He counted every day to make sure that Farkle wasn’t either missing a dosage or taking too many of them.

“Morning Dad,” Farkle answered.

“Where are you going?” Minkus asked.

“School?” Farkle inquired as though it were a dumb question.

“I meant after that,” Minkus answered.

“I don’t know probably Riley’s and maybe we were going to the bakery,” Farkle answered.

“I want you back about 7:00 pm,” Minkus said.


“And call me to tell me where you are,” Minkus said.

“Do you want me to call you after every class or-“Farkle began placating his neurotic father.

“Don’t get smart,” Minkus corrected. “I meant after school, tell me where you are going.”

“I just said,” Farkle argued. “I just told you where I’m going.”

“Well I want to make sure that I know where you are at all times,” Minkus told his son.

“Dad,” Farkle began but then he sighed. “Alright, alright I will. I know that the yearbooks came in. Riley and I will be passing them out today, so I have to get there kind of early.”

“Alright, go have a good day and be careful,” Minkus said. “I’ll be at the Small Business Owners’ Convention most of the day. Let me know if anything…happens.” He and Farkle held hands for a minute. Minkus’ hand lingered on his son’s wrist. Farkle withdrew his hand, but covered his scars with the edge of his sleeves.

Farkle and Riley passed out the yearbooks. Farkle felt good that the student body’s attention was on those books rather than on him. Since he returned, he tried to avoid the judgmental stares, the uncomfortable questions, and the alterations to his routine. Kids would ask him how he was doing;
sometimes they would make gallows humor jokes about death and then stop as though they realized Farkle was still in the room. The meaner ones like Brandon, The Rebel, would continue with a smirk and tell the joke as though they didn’t care. (“What was on the Kid’s mind when he tried to off himself? The bathroom floor!” Insert nervous laughter).

Teachers and staff members even some of the more understanding ones like Mr. Matthews and Harper would say that they were available any time Farkle wanted to talk (as if he could forget that). Miss Oben, the guidance counselor, even suggested that Farkle come after school for an appointment. As though every time, Farkle tried to forget about the troubled past few weeks, there would always is someone or something reminding him. He was forever marked: Farkle Minkus, Abused Child; Farkle Minkus, Celebrity Son of a Celebrity Couple Getting Divorced; Farkle Minkus, Attempted Suicide.

It was fortuitous that he would return to school right before the yearbooks came in. As co-editor with Riley he wouldn’t have missed this moment for the world. The two of them worked hard on the yearbooks the previous year and it was a reminder of his life before the recent events….before his mother hurt him to the point of no return…before he almost took his own life…..before his mother finally left…..before his father had been removed from his job….before so much had happened. He never thought that he would be nostalgic for those days, especially since his mother would have continued to drink and verbally abuse him, but Farkle began to think of last year as a calm. Farkle flipped through at his own picture in the yearbook. There he was with a big wide grin wearing a bright red turtleneck looking like he could rule the world. Wake up, don’t pretend anymore, Farkle wanted to tell his seventh grade self,. Your mother thinks you’re useless. You’re not going to rule the world. You could barely keep yourself from dying!


“Oh yeah,” Farkle said. “Just taking a look.”

Riley and Farkle passed the yearbooks around telling the students the pages that they were on and the superlatives that they earned.

Lucas flipped through and read. “Most Likely to be Farkle….Farkle.”

Farkle winced as he explained to Riley that they made his name into a category. When they read that Riley became “Most Likely to Smile Herself to Death,” he explained to his naïve cheerful friend that they were making fun of them. As editors, they should have known what the superlatives would lead but Farkle remembered that some of the other yearbook staff had volunteered to work on that page. They must have done that on purpose because they didn’t want Farkle or Riley to read them until after they were published.

Farkle winced. It wasn’t just that everyone thought of him as Farkle, the nerd with the bright turtlenecks. He also felt like that was no longer him. Farkle Minkus was a seventh grader who lived in blank ignorance of the storm that was coming. He was caught up in his stupid fantasies of being the dictator of the world and a lady’s man. He didn’t have scars that defined him as an attempted suicide. He did not yet realize that his mother hated him. It was time to shed the turtlenecks and become someone new.

As if cuing him Lucas said, “It’s not like you can turn around and be someone different.”

Farkle then removed his orange turtleneck and green shirt as if saying good-bye to the past. “The old Farkle is gone. You won’t see him anymore.” He said as he showed the dark sweater underneath. He couldn’t miss the stunned look on his friends’ faces that he purposely used those words about himself.

Less than an hour later, Riley stewed as Darby and Sarah read that Lucas and Maya became Favorite Couple. She was stunned! She was Lucas’ girlfriend, sort-of not Maya! She didn’t believe Maya would intentionally steal him and maybe she didn’t, but what drew other people to Maya and away from Riley? Riley felt like it was the death of her relationship with Lucas. She glanced over at Farkle. How could she think such shallow thoughts when Farkle almost died? He had been in darkness for so long and he almost gave into it. Now the darkness surrounded him. He didn’t fight it, now he wore it. Maya wore her darkness in a “tough don’t mess with me” manner. Darkness
touched them. Death almost touched Farkle. Maybe that was all there was. Riley covered her face with her hair to see the dark world that her friends were seeing. It was stark. It was nightmarish. It was horrid. To Riley, it was wonderful.

Minkus and Eddie looked through the conference room at the Eastern Seaboard Small Business Owners’ Association Convention.

Minkus checked his text messages to see if Farkle contacted him. When he didn’t, he texted his son, “Are you alright?”

After a few minutes, he received an answer, “Fine like the last time you asked.”

Eddie rolled his eyes at his boss. “Farkle again?”

“He’s alright,” Minkus said as if in confirmation of why he needed to call.

“Stuart, he won’t be if you keep bothering him,” Eddie said. “Stop worrying. He’s okay. You ought to give him some space.”

“Eddie, Farkle is my son,” Stuart reminded him. “Let me decide what’s best for him.”

“Fine whatever,” Eddie said as the two entered the convention center room.

Their boxes and samples were in their arms as they headed for Minkus Technologies’ booth. Eddie glanced around at the various businesses that had already gathered: some regular like sporting goods stores, dry cleaners, hair stylists, convenience stores, and some oddities such as psychic readings, polka dancing lessons, pet taxidermy, and exotic animal shops. Eddie stared wide-eyed.

“Stuart, this is the Island of Misfit Toys,” he said.

Stuart glanced at his friend. “Well as of right now, where else are we going to get recognition?” he reminded Eddie. “These are the type of people that we want to start with. Besides who better than a couple of misfits ourselves?”

Eddie nodded. “Okay ready when you are, Charlie-in-the-Box.”

“Right behind you, Spotted Elephant,” Stuart returned. Eddie gave him a look surprised that he got the reference. “I’ve seen Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer a few times with Farkle. It’s an enjoyable special.”

“We’re all Misfits,” Eddie said partly imitating the toys’ whine but also with pride in being a unique misfit.

The two approached their table and laid out their examples including the Feenix, their brochures, and laptop which showed their company website including the ecommerce store. The two friends watched as people entered. “Do you think anyone’s going to come by our booth, after all the news,” Eddie asked tactfully.

Stuart knew what he was talking about. “We have to make them forget all of that,” Stuart said. “In order to thrive, an organism has to change and adapt to their new environment and we are that organism.”

Eddie waved his hand. “Stuart you’re talking to a guy who pulled a ‘C’ in Biology on his good days.”

Minkus slowed down trying to talk on Eddie’s level. “I don’t want the first thing that people think of when they see Minkus Technologies is a man who had an unhappy marriage and will soon be going through a potentially worse divorce. I want to make them realize that Minkus Technologies isn’t just fodder for the scandal sheets. We make them see that we are able to survive, even thrive in difficult surroundings and that we can provide these businesses with the best in computers, in business software, and the best in consultation on adapting to a more technological world. I mean we have the contract from Turner and we have our new part-time technicians.” The other technicians who totaled about eight were under the direct supervision of Christine and Mike, Co-Hardware Specialists and Ali and Lonny, Co-Software Specialists. “-and machinery to make such a large order. We’re doing well on that. If all goes well-” Eddie knocked on the wooden table. Even though Minkus did not consider himself superstitious, he followed suit. “-We should get them off and running for the next school year. But you and I both know that we can’t live and die from only one contract no matter how big.”

“Yeah especially since we won’t be done until at least January.” Eddie said. “With building the things, getting the programs put in, hooked up to their schools’ website, showing the teachers how
to use it, troubleshooting, and on and on.”
“Mr. Turner understands that we’re a small staff,” Minkus reminded his VP. “He told us that we can take as much time as we need. I’m sure that this convention will work out for us too.”
“I hope you’re right,” Eddie said.
After a few hours, Stuart was less confident than when they arrived. Some of the business owners stopped by the booth and asked questions. Though they exchanged contact information, most showed vague interest. A few asked if Stuart was “that Stuart Minkus” and then they sidled away as if Minkus was the carrier for some disease that they didn’t want to catch. At least two business owners informed Minkus loudly that they were Christian organizations and did not believe in consorting with a man who had such a scandalous private life.
“Thank you have a nice day,” Minkus said trying to smile as the second Christian business owner stormed off.
“Well she seemed nice,” Eddie said dryly.
“Oh maybe this wasn’t such a good idea after all,” Minkus said. “It may be too soon after the news.”
“Gee ya think,” Eddie said sarcastically. “If I were you, I’d pack this up.”
“Let’s give it a couple of hours,” Minkus said. “We paid for the booth until 4:00 might as well get our money’s worth.”
“Alright, but I don’t think anything’s going to change,” Eddie said. He then looked up and smiled lasciviously. “On the other hand, some of these business owners are quite attractive. Maybe coming here wasn’t such a bad idea after all.” He grinned and waved two women, a blond and a red-head. “Hey there,” he said. “Want to exchange business contacts, ladies, perhaps over drinks?” The accounts executive winked at the two women.
Minkus buried his head in his hand partly in shame that Eddie was using their booth to pick up women but also embarrassed at the rejection that he knew was coming.
The red head smiled, but the blond rolled her eyes. She looked directly at their booth. She was dressed in a navy blue colored blazer and matching slacks with a white blouse. Her hair was tied back in a small ponytail with a blue barrette. She looked familiar somehow to Stuart.
She approached the booth. “Want to go to a bar and get rejected with that line and leave us real business people here to actually accomplish something?”
Eddie laughed embarrassed. “So no?” He asked. Stuart decided to save his VP some pride and his business some dignity by approaching the blond.
“I’m sorry for my Vice President,” Stuart said. “He has been bereft of manners for years. His mouth works faster than his brain sometimes. I apologize for your treatment” He read her name tag. “-Morgan.” He then started as he looked closely at the blond in surprise. “Morgan? Morgan Matthews!” He fully recognized Cory’s younger sister.
“Right,” Morgan said with a laugh. “It’s good to see you again, Stuart Minkus”, she said reading his name tag though she would have known Stuart Minkus anywhere. She greeted Stuart with a warm familiar embrace.
“Morgan Matthews,” Stuart said in surprise.
“Right again,” Morgan teased. “You’re amazing.”
Stuart said. “God, I haven’t talked to you since you were about five or so. What have you been doing with yourself?” Actually he remembered seeing Morgan last when after his grandfather’s funeral, he saw her in the Matthews’ home with the rest of her family.
“Well I’m a bit older than five. I turned 30,” Morgan said. “I have an MBA from Pennbrook. I run my father’s outdoors store.”
“Oh I remember hearing about your dad buying it,” Minkus said. “That was about 20 years ago. How’s it been doing?” He didn’t want to mention any possible negative aspects, but he knew with the economy as it was small businesses had been closing.
“Alright for the most part. It’s been called Matthews’ Wilderness for a number of years now. Dad took the “& Sons” out of it for obvious reasons. I guess he thought one of the boys would get it,” Morgan said with a shrug. “But one’s a teacher, one’s a senator, and one is studying to be a
pediatric/neo-natal nurse. Ironically his daughter had the business mind in the family. So Dad’s semi-retired and I run it now. It’s under almost my full complete power!” She said giving a fake evil laugh and a villainous hand rubbing. After she finished her villainous laugh, she turned serious. “Actually that’s why I’m here.”

“Is there anything that I can help you with?” Stuart asked.

Morgan thought for a minute. “Actually maybe you can,” she said. “See I’m a member of the Philadelphia Small Business Owners’ Association. That’s why I’m here for the big convention. I’ve been trying to get my Dad to modernize the store. We have a computer that’s been going bad for a long time and we have a website but really it’s nothing to shout about and it could be greatly improved. In fact I really want us to get involved with ecommerce, but you know what my Dad’s like. ‘An online store can’t replace people walking in and looking around.’ But we may not have people like that for very long. There’s a Pro Bass Fisherman less than 30 minutes away.”

“So it’s you have to adapt to the modern shopper or die,” Minkus guessed. He heard from many small businesses that this was a concern like his father’s hardware store for instance. It had been a long time since he heard from his parents beyond occasional courtesy calls. With all of the scandalous news, Tom and Nancy Minkus made it clear that they wanted to have as little to do with their son as possible. But he did know that his father’s hardware store had fallen on hard times since it had to compete with a Lowes and Home Depot.

Morgan nodded. “Yeah I know. I’m not suggesting that we replace our regular store, but we have to do more to draw in customers.”

“Have you talked to your Dad about that?” Minkus asked.

“Oh I have,” Morgan rolled her eyes. “But he shoots it down. He says that I don’t fully run the business yet. Also, I think he’s kind of negative about me getting an MBA in the first place. He’s all-“ She mimicked her father’s voice. “‘I didn’t have to get a degree to know how to run a store. I’ve been working since I left the Navy that’s how I learned how to do it.’”

Morgan and Minkus laughed. “You do a great Alan Matthews.” Minkus teased. “For a minute there, I thought you were a man!”

Morgan laughed. “Stop,” she said gently pushing on Minkus’ shoulder but then she returned to the original subject. “Well try working with him and being his daughter. I guess he wonders why I need a fancy degree to learn how to do something that he learned by hand.”

Minkus had to ask curiously. “Morgan you’re in the same organization as my father. How’s Minkus Hardware doing?”

Morgan’s mouth dropped open in surprise. “Oh I would have assumed your parents told you-“

“-We don’t talk much anymore,” Stuart replied reluctantly. “I’ve had problems with them.”

“Oh well then, I don’t know how to tell you this,” Morgan said. “But it closed down about three maybe four years ago. Your father is a regional manager of Lowe’s and your mother does freelance bookkeeping. She even did some of mine.”

Minkus felt ice cold as he sank down in a chair. “It closed down? Why didn’t he ever tell me?”

Morgan held onto his shoulder sensing that he was upset. “It’s okay. I mean they’re doing alright. They’re healthy, they’ve still got their house. They probably didn’t want you to worry about them on top of your problems.”

“It’s not like that, Morgan,” Minkus said. “We barely speak to each other. They haven’t been exactly supportive through the difficulties. In fact they seemed to think I deserve what I get.”

“I didn’t want to say anything but they told a local reporter that ‘a wife beater-‘,” Morgan began.

“-Has no business being in their family,’” Minkus quoted. “I saw the news clips of the interview. How terrible do you have to be to not get support from your own parents?” Her face fell as she pulled the taller man aside. “Yeah all the gossip is all over the news back home. You know they love their ‘local boy makes good or bad’ stories. It’s terrible what the media is saying about you.”

“Yeah well,” Minkus agreed. “The only thing that I can do is get around it, raise my son, and try to earn a living.”

Morgan nodded. “Well if it’s any consolation to you, I haven’t seen you in years and I don’t really
know your wife at all. But I know any friend of my brother’s or the father of my niece’s friend can’t be that bad.”

Minkus nodded. “Thank you, Morgan I appreciate it.” He shook her hand. Their hands touched a bit longer than the handshake. Minkus shyly removed his hand from hers.

Minkus cleared his throat and for the moment put his personal feelings about his parents or this lovely woman next to him aside, so he became more business-like. “So I take it my father’s store is a bit of a warning about your own.”

Morgan shrugged. “Well part of the reason that I got the MBA was because if the worst ever did happen to Matthews’ Wilderness, I have the education and experience to fall back on another business. We’re doing surprisingly well, but I want us to evolve. I believe that the businesses that are the most successful are the ones that aren’t afraid to adapt to the changes in their customers. One of the ways to do that is to be involved in ecommerce and social media. It’s like a-“

“-Living organism,” Minkus remembered what he told Eddie about Minkus Technologies. “Well I tell you what, if you want to come by my office, I can set you up with some ecommerce platforms. We can also discuss any other technologies that you can implement with your store and perhaps even discuss how we can change your father’s mind about it.”

“I’d like that,” Morgan agreed.

“Would tomorrow be alright?” Minkus asked. “About 1:00?”

“That’d be fine,” Morgan said. She wrote down her phone number. “I’m staying at Cory and Topanga’s for the week-“

“I know the number,” Minkus said.

They shook hands and stared at each other for a long time again. Minkus felt uncomfortable. He again withdrew his hand feeling nervous about his emotions over a girl he had known practically his whole life.

“Oh and tell your friend that I’m sorry for being rude to him,” Morgan said. “I just ended a bad relationship and my nerves are kind of on an edge.”

Minkus waved his hand disdainfully. “Don’t worry about it. Eddie collects rejection from women about as often as a philatelist collects stamps. He’s got a big mouth but he’s a good guy and very loyal.”

Morgan nodded. “You’re very sweet,” she said. She looked at her watch. “Oh I have to go. Jolene and I were going to catch another lecture before closing.” She then called to the red-head who was deep in conversation with Eddie.

Eddie had his hand out as the red-head was reading his palm. “Let’s see, this says that you will live a long life and that you will have many lovers,” Jolene said in a heavy Philly accent.

“Well so far I’d had no complaints,” Eddie said adjusting his tie. He looked down at his palm and spoke to it. “Good job, Buddy. You tell it. You preach to her.”

Jo laughed as she pointed at his head line. She was interrupted by Morgan calling her.

“Jo,” Morgan said. “We’d better get going.”

“Alright, alright,” Jo said to her friend. She rolled her eyes. “Call me,” she said to Eddie.

“I will,” Eddie said. “Though you probably knew that I would.” He said to the psychic.

Before Morgan and Jolene walked off, Minkus called her. “Uh Morgan um….“He stalled thinking of the first thing to say. “Good job growing up.”

Morgan smiled and laughed as she and her friend left.

Eddie shook his head as Minkus sat back down. “ ‘Good job growing up?’” Eddie teased. “Mind if I use that line?”

“What?” Minkus said. “What are you talking about? We were just talking business!”

“Uh huh,” Eddie said dryly. “So you sweet on her?”

Minkus laughed at the notion. “ No, Ms. Matthews and I are just meeting tomorrow to discuss possibilities in ecommerce.”

“That maybe what your lips were saying,” Eddie said. “But your eyes were saying ‘let’s get a drink later’ and her eyes were saying, ‘take me, I’m yours.’ “

“Really?” Minkus said surprised but then he shook his head. “I mean no, she’s my friend’s younger
sister! She’s practically a sister to me! I’ve known her for years, since she was five!”

“Yeah but in case you haven’t missed it Stuart, she’s not five now,” Eddie pointed out.

“Yeah in case you haven’t missed it, Eddie,” Minkus said. “I’m still married.”


“Eddie,” Minkus said. “I’m coming off a bad marriage one that isn’t even over yet. I am trying to run a new business separate from my old one while fighting my former in-laws. I have a son who is still recovering from his psychological problems thanks to his ‘ever-loving’ mother. Plus, I just found out that my father’s business closed down. I’m not exactly high in the public eye right now and I’m trying to get through a possibly long, expensive, and certainly painful divorce. Dating, especially my friend’s sister who is technically one of my friends, is not exactly high on my list of priorities. We’re just friends.”

“Hey, all I’m saying is that I have a lot of female ‘just friends’, but not once did I tell one of them ‘good job growing up’,” Eddie said pointing his index finger and winking while clicking his tongue. “And not once did I hold their hand like you just did.”

“It was a handshake,” Minkus reminded his friend. “We do that in business.”

“You were holding hands long after the shaking, my man,” Eddie said. “All I’m saying.”

At home, Minkus heard the phone ring a few times before his mother picked up. “Hello Minkus residence, this is Nancy speaking.”

“Hello N- uh Mother,” Stuart said with his heart in his throat. “It’s Stuart.”

There was a long silence. “I know who it is and I have nothing to say to you.”

“Wait before you hang up,” Minkus said. “I ran into Morgan Matthews and she told me that the store closed down.”

“Yes it closed down four years ago,” Nancy said bitterly. “Thank you for offering us a condolence call now. Are you trying to salvage your reputation?”

“I just found out,” Minkus objected. “Why didn’t you or Father tell me?”

“Well I don’t know, Stuart,” Nancy said bitterly. “Perhaps we couldn’t find the time between your various appointments, your conventions, and your jet-setting. Should we have called your secretary to schedule an appointment to give you a call or do you not bother with the riff raff anymore?”

“That door swings both ways Mother,” Minkus reminded her. “You’ve barely called me and every time I did call, you never want to talk! How was I supposed to know what was going on in your life if you didn’t tell me? I could have helped! I still can. Granted, I’m not as wealthy as I once was, but I can certainly give you-”

“-I don’t take charity from strangers,” Nancy said.

“I’m not a stranger, I’m your son,” Minkus objected.

“As you pointed out so clearly we have not been emotionally close for years and we are not parents and their son, we just lived together,” Minkus winced at his words from when he was 16 being thrown back at him. Nancy continued. “Besides Tom and I don’t want to have anything to do with the likes of you after what you did to your wife and son!”

“Jennifer lied, Mother,” Minkus said. “The charges have been dropped. She’s had mental health issues and is an alcoholic! I didn’t beat her! She was the abuser, not me! I was protecting Farkle!”

“Of course that’s what you would say,” Nancy said. “Don’t call us again!” She hung up the phone.

“Mother? Mother,” Minkus said to the dial tone. It was useless.

He knew that Tom and Nancy Minkus were stubborn and bullheaded. Once they held to an idea, it would never leave. They wouldn’t ask for help from anyone, particularly their son even if they were turned out in the streets. He turned off his cell phone and rubbed the bridge of his nose.

“Dissed by the old lady?” Farkle’s voice interrupted. Or at least he thought the voice belonged to Farkle. His voice was right, but his words and the tone of his voice weren’t the same. Since when did Farkle talk in slang and since when did he speak with that jaded pseudo-cool, “whatever” tone of voice?

Minkus looked up from the phone for a moment not looking at his son. “Just arguing with your
Grandma Minkus. I can do that anytime.” He turned around and glanced in shock at his son. Instead of the orange turtleneck and green shirt he wore going to school, his son was dressed in a black sweatshirt, black jeans, and a beanie.

Minkus at first was stunned, but then he held up his hands. “I surrender, take all my stuff! Just tell me where my son is!” He said finding humor in his son’s new look. Farkle, or rather the young stranger who resembled Farkle, rolled his eyes. “Don’t be a dork, Dad! It’s me!”

“Farkle,” Stuart asked slowly as though he were speaking to a crazed gunfighter taking hostages. “What happened to you?”

“It’s the new me,” Farkle said. “And I’m not Farkle.”

“Okay, who are you then?” Minkus asked. Oh no, on top of all of the other issues he had such as depression and anxiety, had Farkle developed multiple personalities or schizoid affective disorder?

“I would like to talk to Farkle now.”

“God you are so lame,” Farkle groaned.

Now Minkus was angry that his son was being rude to him. “Hey now just a minute there, Farkle!”

“It’s Donnie,” Farkle corrected.

“Donnie,” Minkus asked. “At no point, did I ever name you Donnie. Donnie Minkus?”

“Barnes,” Farkle corrected again.

Minkus thought for a minute saying aloud the family names. “Let’s see Minkus, Bassett; Your grandmother’s maiden name is Ginsburg your other grandmother’s maiden name is Smyth. Yeah, at no point was there ever a Barnes!”

“You don’t get it,” Farkle said. “I’m not Farkle Minkus anymore! I’m Donnie Barnes: Regular Guy!”

Minkus’ mouth dropped open. “I can sort of understand albeit reluctantly you not wanting to be called by your first name, but your last name too? Why do you not want to be Minkus anymore?”

“No reason,” Farkle said as though he were too cool to give an answer. “I just want to be normal alright? We’re not it! Let’s face it, I can’t be Captain of the Nerd Herd anymore!”

Minkus didn’t know what he said, but he didn’t like the way this conversation was going. “I don’t like to hear such comments from anyone, but especially from my own son! You forget this nerd went through a lot to put food on your table and clothes on your back, and he was there for you when your mother certainly wasn’t!”

At the mention of his mother, Farkle’s eyes became less cold and more emotional. He just as quickly dropped them and reverted back to his original posture. He rolled his eyes at his father’s questioning. “What have you been doing after school? You didn’t answer my texts!”

“Just hanging out with my friends?” Farkle said. “What difference does it make to you?”

“Your friends Riley, Maya, and Lucas,” Minkus asked. “Or anyone else?”

“Just them,” Farkle said getting annoyed.

“What have you been doing?” Minkus asked.

“Stuff,” Farkle said as though he wanted there to be an end to the interrogation.

“Have you been drinking or taking any drugs?” Minkus asked.

“What no!,” Farkle argued. “Don’t you trust me?”

“Well I don’t know,” Minkus said sarcastically. “You went to school dressed one way and come home dress another way. You mouth off to me and now you want to change your name! What am I supposed to think?”

“You’re supposed to think that I can take care of myself,” Farkle said turning his back to his father. “You’re supposed to think that if I’m 13, I don’t need to be babysat!” He held up his cell phone.

“You’re supposed to think that I don’t need to be texted every hour!” He then threw his cell phone at his father. “Don’t text me again!” He warned.

Minkus held the cell phone in his hand and said in a very icy tone. “I’ve had enough of getting things thrown at me! I will not tolerate this behavior from you! Now go to your room and don’t come out until you—put on some decent clothes!”

Farkle glared at his father, ran into his room, and slammed the door. “I’m not paying for the walls
to get replastered!” Minkus yelled through the closed door. He then stared at the closed door in silence. What had happened to his son? It was as though overnight, he had turned into someone different. Minkus checked Farkle’s movements on his laptop. The boy simply was flopped on his bed and was listening to music, loud techno stuff that Farkle didn’t usually like listening to. Despite Farkle’s claim that he hadn’t taken any drugs or been drinking, Minkus ran to the bathroom and opened the medicine cabinet. The only two pill bottles that lay inside were the prescriptions.

Minkus still kept his son on suicide watch and had most of the sharp objects and pills locked up. He only brought out such essentials, like the razors or cold medication when Farkle asked for them. Minkus didn’t do all of the things that he had breathlessly told Cory that he was going to do. He attributed most of it to frantic nerves. But he still kept the baby cam in Farkle’s room unbeknownst to Farkle and he still texted him constantly to discover his whereabouts.

Minkus took out the two pill bottles and counted inside. Before he could take a full count, Farkle’s voice called through the bedroom door. “There are 20 in both. I only took one from each.” Minkus was stunned that his son deduced that he was counting his medicinal intake. Before he could ask about it, his son’s sharp voice interrupted his thoughts. “And you wonder why I don’t want to be called Minkus anymore!”

Minkus stood over Morgan as he showed her the platform for creating an ecommerce. He gave her a few pointers to put in the item. He showed her a sample of fishing poles. “See you push this to send.” She sent. “Then you put in the order form and price ranges.” Morgan obeyed. “Put any information on sales through here.” He said showing her how to update the page. “Now you click, and there it is!”

Morgan held up her hands and smiled with delight. “There it is!” She said as she clapped her hands. “Matthews’ first item is now sold through the Internet.” She stood up. Minkus thought that she looked innocent and attractive in her frilled white blouse, salmon colored jacket, and pink floral and black pleated knee length skirt. Cute-Girl-Next-Door-Rugged-Outdoorsy-Type-Hot, Eddie’s words entered Minkus’ mind. He willed those words to be silent. He was there to help a friend modernize her store, not to get laid.

“Thanks, Stuart,” she said. “I appreciate this. Do you think my father will go for it?”

Minkus shrugged as he sat at his desk across from Morgan. “Often time people who don’t want to embrace technology avoid it, because they don’t understand the benefits or they think that it’s going to replace the in-person contact. I have a feeling that if you tell your dad that his business will double the amount of foot traffic into the store as well as increase your availability to your customers both in person and online, he will understand.”

“So reminding him that we’re still keeping the personal touch even though we need to adapt,” Morgan said.

“Yes that would be my best suggestion,” Minkus offered.

“Well thank you very much for going through the trouble for a friend,” Morgan said. She gave Stuart a hug which he warmly returned. They pulled away from each other and looked into each other’s eyes for a long time. Minkus was about to lean closer but he pulled away. He then moved back to his desk. “I can show you some other possibilities to metadata composition!” He said.

“Actually I need to check on Farkle.” He texted his son. As he expected, the phone remained still.

“Is Farkle okay, Stuart?” Morgan asked. “I mean considering all that’s been happening?”

“Oh yeah, he’s fine,” Minkus answered. “Why do you ask?”

Morgan shrugged. “I don’t know, I mean I don’t have any kids. But, Riley’s going through something kind of…weird right now. Maybe that’s typical for teenagers, but considering all of the baggage he’s been through, maybe there’s something with Farkle too.”

Minkus sighed. Even though he had scaled down to a smaller staff, he was still reluctant to admit his personal problems in a business environment preferring to keep those aspects to his life separate. But on the other hand, Morgan was a long time friend. Maybe she could offer some advice.
“I don’t know, I guess he’s growing up now,” Minkus said. “We weren’t getting along yesterday.”
“So you guys were getting into fights?” Morgan asked. “That’s normal.”
“Yes, but not for Farkle,” Minkus replied. “We have always been close. I thought the issues with his mother drove us closer, but now ever since Jennifer and I parted ways, it’s not the same. He’s been drifting further away from me. I told myself that his teen years wouldn’t be like everyone else’s. They’d be easier and they’re not.”
“Well I’m no expert but that probably makes you no different than most parents,” Morgan said. “Come on, I’m sure you went through that phase.”
“Well my phase actually ended in an aborted attempt at running away and a public nervous breakdown,” Minkus replied. “I just hope that the same things don’t happen to Farkle. Was it difficult for you too?”
Morgan laughed. “Are you kidding? I was practically a different person by the time I became a ‘tween! Mom told me that one minute I was acting all cute and adorable and the next minute I was mouthing off to Cory and Eric. Farkle will be okay, Stuart. He’s just going through a lot of stuff. He’ll get through this. I think he just wants to know that you’ll be there for him.” She leaned over and touched her friend by the shoulder.
Because of their radical differences in height, Morgan had to strain to touch Minkus’ shoulder. So he slightly lowered his posture to face her. His lips approached hers and he was about to fall into a kiss. Morgan’s lips were about to meet his when Minkus stood back up and returned to his desk.
“Now about the metadata composition.”
Morgan moved towards Stuart. “Are you okay, Stuart?” she asked.
“I’m fine,” Minkus said.
“No, I just uh we were here to discuss your store right?” Minkus asked stammering.
“Yeah we were,” Morgan agreed. “Then you got all kind of…weird and goofy on me.”
Minkus laughed. “Oh no it’s just umm something that Eddie said yesterday-He says a lot of things. I wouldn’t worry about it.”
“But you are worried about it,” Morgan suggested. “What did he say?”
“Uh it’s nothing really,” Minkus said. “He just thought that you and I were giving off some unspoken signals that we were- I guess subconsciously flirting.”
Morgan laughed bitterly. “You’re kidding?” She asked. “Why would he think that?”
“I know right?” Minkus agreed. “I mean it’s silly! I remember when you used to have tea parties with your dolls.”
“I don’t want to brag but I made a pretty good cup of air if I do say so myself,” Morgan boasted. “Well I remember when you came over that one time because you were upset about some math problem and you were freaking out to Cory and Shawn about the answer.”
“Oh yeah,” Minkus remembered. “As I recall, they used your Barbies to recreate the process.”
The two laughed good naturedly but then looked at each other in an awkward silence.
“Well you share a few laughs and memories, talk about business, and suddenly you’re a couple,” Morgan said.
“Shows how wrong people can be,” Minkus answered. “You know I have an appointment soon-“
“-Of course,” Morgan agreed.
“-Sure but if you want to meet after work, maybe tomorrow night over coffee,” he suggested. “or if you want to go sightseeing or something-“
“I’ve been to New York a number of times,” Morgan said dryly. “[I][ou’ve seen one large green lady in a harbor holding up a torch you’ve seen them all.”
“Okay no sightseeing,” Minkus realized. “But if you want to meet for coffee or something work on the project, catch up, just as a meeting among friends.”
“Yeah okay,” Morgan said. “Sure around 7ish will be fine?”
“Yeah 7, you want me to pick you up at Cory’s or meet me here?” He asked.
“Here is good,” Morgan pointed at the office.
“Sure Farkle will be with Lucas tomorrow so he should be alright on his own,” Minkus said. “I’ll
meet you then.” If he isn’t knocking over a convenience store with his new persona, Minkus thought bitterly.

Morgan rose from her seat and Minkus walked her to the door. He held the door open for her and she smiled. “So I’ll see you tomorrow,” Morgan said.

“Tomorrow,” Minkus agreed. They shook hands and Morgan left into the gray afternoon.

Eddie smirked at Minkus. “Still just friends?” he asked playfully. Minkus simply rolled his eyes. “Don’t you think you and Riley think you’re going a bit overboard, Farkle,” Lucas asked. He was confused. First Farkle had become Donnie Barnes and now Riley was turning into Morotia M. Black. Wasn’t anyone the same person that they were before?

“You don’t get it do you man,” Farkle said. “I’m not Farkle, I’m Donnie! You have to get that!”

“I don’t want to get that if it means saying good-bye to my best friends,” Lucas said. After a long pause, Lucas had to ask. “Does this have anything to do with your Mom?”

Farkle stopped walking long enough for Lucas to catch up. “Mo- Jennifer doesn’t have anything to do with this.”

“Come on, Far uh Donnie,” Lucas said his new name sarcastically. “It can’t be a coincidence that this is happening after what your Mom did! I don’t blame you for acting like you do, but don’t you think that it isn’t fair for your dad?”

“Not everything in my life has to do with those people,” Farkle said bitterly. “Look I can understand why you’re mad at your mom,” Lucas said. “But your dad doesn’t deserve you to be angry at him! He’s a good guy, he’s trying to look after you!”

“Yeah such a great guy,” Farkle said sarcastically. “A good guy who keeps asking where I’m going. Who has to count all of my pills, who has to constantly text me! He can’t keep his eyes off me for one minute!”

“Well can you blame him?” Lucas asked. “He doesn’t want you to-“ Farkle and Lucas stopped talking and Farkle turned away from him.

“Hey! Farkle!” Lucas called. Farkle rolled his eyes. “He won’t let me forget it,” Farkle said. “I know what I did! I still have these-“ He raised his arms. “-to remind me! I have everyone at school reminding me what I did! I have you, and Riley, and Maya reminding me what I did!”

“We don’t treat you any different,” Lucas said.

“Maybe not intentionally,” Farkle said. “But I’ve seen the way you look at me. You three are afraid I’m going to blow up or something! I don’t need anyone else reminding me what I did!”

“We’re all just trying to protect you,” Lucas said. “So is your dad. He wants to protect you!”

“Why didn’t he protect me then?” Farkle asked. His mouth dropped open as he realized that he said aloud something about his father that he never had articulated before. “I mean, forget it. It doesn’t matter.”

“The hell it doesn’t matter,” Lucas objected. Farkle was about to walk away from Lucas, but the taller more athletic friend forced his friend to stop. “Are you asking why didn’t he keep you from killing yourself or why didn’t he protect you from your Mom?”

“Does it matter?” Farkle asked. The two of them stopped in front of Topanga’s Bakery. “I just said forget it okay? I don’t want to talk about it. I just want to move on. Let me move on, even if he hasn’t.” Lucas didn’t have to ask who Farkle was referring to. He knew.

Farkle was about to hold open the door to Topanga’s Bakery, but then closed it abruptly. “Uh I’m not hungry. In fact, I’m going home.”

“Farkle, what’s wrong?” Lucas asked concerned about the sudden change in his friend’s tone.

“Nothing, I’m just outta here,” Farkle said. “Don’t try to follow me!”

“What’s wrong, Farkle?” Lucas asked in his concern forgetting to call his friend by his assumed name.

“I’m gone,” Farkle said. He nodded at the door. “Clearly he’s moved on more than I thought he did. Maybe I ought to do the same!” Farkle stormed off and surprisingly for a non-athletic student, avoided his friend following him. Though Lucas was faster and well built, Lucas knew that Farkle was clever and sneaky. He could sneak into places and hide where Lucas could never find him. He wondered if he should follow him just to make sure Farkle returned home safely and didn’t make
any unnecessary or dangerous detours. He was however curious to see what it was that made Farkle so uncomfortable outside Topanga’s. Lucas looked through the window, but didn’t have to look very far. Sitting in a corner booth were Farkle’s father, Stuart Minkus with a blond woman that Riley had said earlier in the week was her Aunt Morgan. At first Lucas would have thought that they were just having a friendly conversation, but they were also holding hands and looked at each other the way people in love looked, the way that he and Riley looked at each other sometimes. Oh no, Lucas knew this was not going to be good at all! He turned around and ran in the direction that his friend had moved towards.

Minkus and Morgan walked inside Topanga’s Bakery. They complimented each other with Morgan’s periwinkle blue floral print dress and Minkus’ navy blue blazer and black turtleneck. “Hi, Stuart,” Katy called jovially.

“Hi Katy, I’ll have a mocha latte,” Minkus said. He nodded at the blond woman by his side.

“Oh I’ll have an espresso thanks,” Morgan said.

“One latte and one espresso coming up,” she said.

Minkus was about to take out money to pay for both, when Morgan stayed his hand. “Don’t, I can pay for my own,” she said. She then took out her money to pay for her drink.

“Suit yourself,” Minkus said with a shrug. They accepted their drinks with thanks and sat down at a corner booth.

Minkus didn’t want to meet Morgan’s gaze as he spoke. He didn’t want her to be upset, so he came forward right away. “Katy’s just a friend,” he hurriedly explained. “She’s Maya’s mother and we go to a support group together.”

“Why are you explaining this to me?” Morgan asked. “I don’t care.”

Minkus looked confused. “You don’t?”

“Come on, Stuart. We’re going out as friends. We’re not exactly dating,” Morgan reminded him. “Yeah I forgot,” Minkus said. “I guess I’m used to having to explain myself.”

“Even if we were dating, I don’t have ownership over you,” Morgan explained. “I have plenty of guy friends.”

“You do?” Minkus asked confused.

“I run a wilderness/outdoors store,” Morgan reminded him. “I have plenty of male friends who are staff and regular customers. Most of them are sporty, outdoorsmen. Not one of them would I dream of getting with. It was one of the things that drove my ex-boyfriend nuts.”

Minkus remembered that Morgan said that she had ended a bad relationship. “If I can ask, what happened with-?”

“Dustin,” Morgan said. “Well we were in business school together. We were together for about five years and were living together for two. He was really good-looking, flashy, you know the whole bit. One night I came home early and caught him in bed with an 18-year-old girl and her younger sister.”526

“Ouch, I’m sorry,” Minkus said sympathetically.

“Yeah well I should have seen it coming,” Morgan said reluctantly. “He was a big drinker as well and he liked to party more than he should have. We were getting into a lot of fights so-. Really it should have ended long before then!”

“Did he ever-?” Minkus asked putting his hand into a fist as an illustration.

“He only tried to do that once early in the relationship,” Morgan said. “But he learned really quickly that a woman who sells outdoors equipment for a living and hikes, mountain climbs, and kick boxes for fun is not exactly the best target for beating.” She said proudly. “I think he still has broken teeth from that encounter.”

“Atta girl,” Stuart said proudly. “So why did you two stay together for so long?” He wasn’t being judgmental having been in such a relationship himself and unlike Morgan, he hadn’t physically struck back. He just wanted to understand a fellow traveler down that familiar road.

“I don’t know,” Morgan hesitated. “Most of the guys I’ve been with or the ones I know treat me like a kid sister or they think that I’m a weird girl, or a strange girl, or not even a girl, because of what I do. They just think of me as one of the guys or they think I’m a lesbian so they don’t bother.
I don’t mind it, I like being a tomboy. But there is a part of me that likes to be dressy and feminine. You know that likes chick lit, rom coms, old love songs, and flowers. Dustin was the first guy who ever saw that. I guess I thought I loved him for it.”

Minkus held Morgan’s hand. “Well if it’s any consolation, I see you as a beautiful courageous woman.”

Despite herself, Morgan felt herself blush at the CEO’s comments. She didn’t remove her hand from Stuart’s nor he from hers.

The two were so caught up in their conversation that they didn’t notice the two teenage boys about to enter the bakery, nor see one run off with his friend following close behind. Katy did and she had a feeling that it was not going to be good for Stuart or Farkle when Stuart returned home.

Stuart and Morgan left Topanga’s and went on a walk around Greenwich Village finding a good place to eat, but mostly enjoying each other’s company. They bought hot dogs and sodas from a vendor and continued to talk. The two spoke of childhood memories. Morgan wrapped up her story. “And then after I asked her for her car keys, Mom told her that ‘it wasn’t the cost of the item, it was my sentimental attachment to it,’” Both she and Minkus laughed. “Of course Mom got her necklace back after that.”

“Just think you would have gotten a Mercedes for the price of a My Little Pony,” Stuart said. “That taught her to defile the ‘black, black no trades back’ law! Yes even as a youngster I learned the value of conspicuous consumption,” Morgan said. Minkus laughed again. “I’m sorry. I can’t get over that. They are friends of my former in-laws and I would have loved to see the look on her face!”

Morgan’s expression dropped and became somber as he mentioned his former in-laws. “Cory and Topanga filled me in on a lot of what happened between you and your wife. They told me about the abuse, Farkle being in the hospital, and the intervention. She’s still in rehab?”

Minkus nodded. “For another month. At least she agreed to stay for the 60 days.”

“I am so sorry,” Morgan said.

Well I can’t really go back in time and change it can I?” Minkus said. “It’s what happened.”

“God, she must have been crazy,” Morgan said.

“No it was me,” Minkus said. “For staying with her for so long. You spend many years trying to be happy. You even think for a few minutes that maybe you are, but then you keep hearing this voice telling you that you’re worthless, pathetic, and a nothing. I think it got to the point, where it wasn’t just that I couldn’t leave her. I think I didn’t want to. I believed every word she said about me. I was so indoctrinated by her that I think if it weren’t for Farkle, I probably would still be with her.”

“No, I think that she must have been crazy for not seeing the good man in front of her,” Morgan said. “She was crazy for thinking any of that about you. She certainly didn’t appreciate what she had.”

Minkus smiled at the compliment as the two walked by a saxophone player. The man was playing “Someone to Watch Over Me.” Minkus impulsively dropped the man a $5.00 bill inside his case. “Would you like to dance?” he asked in an attempt to change the subject.

“Sure,” Morgan said. She held Minkus’ hand then put her hand on his shoulder as he put his on her waist.

“I’m warning you, I’m not very good,” Minkus answered. “Farkle is a much better dancer than I am.”

“Really?” Morgan asked.

“Once at my wedding and a few times at public events,” Minkus replied sheepishly.

“Well you’re in luck,” Morgan said. “I am good. Here I’ll teach you. I’ll even forgo my feminism and let you lead.”

Minkus laughed as Morgan gave him some elementary waltzing lessons and kept count. “One, two, three. One, two, three,” Morgan kept in count. “One two-“

Minkus stepped on her foot. “Sorry,” he said.

“That’s okay,” Morgan said. “One, two three. One two, three.” After awhile she stopped counting and the two were lost in the song. She even hummed a few bars.
“I remember you liked to sing,” Minkus said.
“Yes I still do for fun and amateur competitions mostly,” Morgan replied. “I don’t really want to make a career of it, but I enjoy it.”
“Do you know this song?” Minkus asked.
“Mmm hmm,” Morgan said as she sang clearer. “There’s a somebody I’m longing to see/I hope that he/Turns out to be/Someone to watch over me” They continued dancing until she sang the last part, “Won’t you ask him please to put on speed/Follow my lead/Hope he turns out to be/Someone to watch over me.”
At the last repeat of the phrase “someone to watch over me,” Stuart sang with her and leaned closer for a kiss. The two then stopped dancing and held onto each other, their lips locked.
Minkus was happy kissing Morgan. He felt joyful, liberated, like he hadn’t felt in a long time. It felt good being with a woman who was smart, talented, had a good sense of humor, and was beautiful in a more natural way and not flashy like Jennifer. He felt the stirring through his whole body, the desire to be with this woman, hold her close, and make love to her. Suddenly words flashed in his head: You are pathetic! No one would take you seriously!...Do you really think that she would have you? You would never know what to say to a woman let alone get her to go to bed with you....You would never be able to get it up!....The only woman you have ever been with is your wife and she had ulterior motives for being pregnant by you....You are a weak, pathetic, nothing who couldn’t even protect your own son!”
Minkus pulled away from Morgan. “I’m sorry, I just I can’t.” He said terrified.
“Well that’s one I’ve never heard before,” Morgan teased.
“No I mean, this isn’t right,” Minkus said. “I want to, but I can’t.”
Morgan looked at him stunned, but she nodded. “Alright, it’s okay. I guess we can go back if you want.”
Minkus sighed. “Yes, it’s for the best.”
He walked Morgan back to Cory and Topanga’s apartment. Even though he wanted to kiss her again and possibly do more, he just looked downward and told her good-bye before she entered the apartment.
Minkus then unlocked the door to his own apartment feeling ashamed and depressed. For a few seconds, he was actually happy forgetting about his problems and enjoying himself. Then the reality caved in on him. He was a man who didn’t deserve happiness.
Feeling extremely vulnerable, he was about to walk towards his bedroom when he felt something crack underneath his feet. He looked downward and saw some black pieces of something that looked like a camera. Curiously, he turned on the hall light and saw the remains of Farkle’s baby cam in several pieces, broken barely beyond recognition. Minkus was confused about why the baby cam was in such a state when he looked up at the note taped to his door. Minkus removed the note and read: The next time you want to spy on me, make sure that the camera is charged!
Fury enveloped Minkus as he yelled, “Farkle!” The door to his son’s bedroom opened and Farkle reappeared dressed in a black t-shirt and pajama bottoms.
“You want to explain this?” Minkus asked holding up the baby cam. “What’s it doing on the floor?”
“I don’t know, what was it doing in my room?” Farkle asked bitterly. “If it weren’t for the battery going off, I wouldn’t have known it was there! How long have you been spying on me?”
“Since you returned home from the hospital,” Minkus said. “I had it hooked to my laptop.”
“Then I’m sorry I didn’t destroy it further,” Farkle snapped back. “What are you planning next? CIA surveillance? Maybe a satellite hookup. Perhaps the International Space Station can keep an eye on me now!” Minkus was about to object when Farkle continued. “’And from Russia here is the latest development the kid formerly known as Farkle Minkus is going to 8th period gym class! Good work, comrades!’” He finished his imitation but continued to rant. “You know, I would think for a genius you would have at least remembered to charge the battery. I wouldn’t have found it otherwise. But I guess you were too busy dating the bimbo to pay much attention!”
“She is not a bimbo,” Minkus said. “And Ms. Matthews is just an old friend! We were just going
out as friends!"

“That’s not what it looked like to me,” Farkle shot back. “I saw you two at Topanga’s. You might as well have been my age the way you two were holding hands and giggling! If she’s just a friend, Riley’s my sister!”

“I don’t have to explain my actions to you,” Minkus argued. “If I want to have some company, then I will!”

“So you decide to get over Mother by fucking Riley’s aunt,” Farkle jeered. Minkus hand lightly slapped Farkle’s cheek.

“I did not raise my son to talk to me like this,” Minkus said. “It’s not like that! Besides as you well know, your mother and I are separated! We haven’t had a marriage in the years before that!”

“Dammit, I don’t care about you having an affair on Jennifer,” Farkle yelled. “She can go to hell for all I care!” He looked closely at his father in silence. “She deserves it! But how can you move on so quickly and I-?” He couldn’t finish what he said when he returned to his room and slammed the door shut.

Minkus ran to his son’s bedroom and banged on the door. “Farkle, open this door! Farkle,” he called. The hell with it. “Donnie! Donnie!” He then ran to the kitchen to pick up a small screwdriver to pick the lock. He twisted it for a few minutes. When he succeeded in opening the door, he was stunned. Farkle’s room was empty and his window was wide open!

Minkus frantically knocked on Katy’s front door. “Where is he? Have you seen him?” he asked as soon as Katy opened it. “I’ve been by Riley’s and Lucas.’ He’s not at either of their places! We got into a fight and he ran off! Oh god, what if he ran away?”

“Stuart,” Katy said shaking her friend. “Calm down.” She nodded at the couch. “He’s over there.”

Minkus looked at the lump sleeping on the couch. “I think he just wanted to cool off. He was really upset and I told him that it was alright if he spent the night. On the couch of course, I’m not stupid.” Katy hesitated. “He saw you at Topanga’s with-“

“-I know,” Stuart said. “He told me. I’m really screwing up with him aren’t I?”

“You’re no different than the rest of us,” Katy said.

Minkus sighed with relief that his son was alright and with a friend. “Do you want to wake him and take him home?” Katy inquired.

Minkus thought. Farkle really did need some time to himself. Maybe Minkus had been holding onto his son too tightly and Farkle was trying to resist the way that most teenagers knew: by acting up. “No,” Minkus said. “Just send him home in the morning.”

“Of course,” Katy said as Minkus left.

Maya shook Farkle awake. “Get up,” she said. Farkle opened his eyes to see Maya standing over him. She was dressed in a dark blue tank and matching pajama bottoms. With her night clothes and messed up hair, Farkle couldn’t resist feeling a stir in him. He momentarily forgot where he was and wondered if Maya waking him up was a dream.

“Maya what are you doing in my-?” Farkle then looked around and saw that he was in Maya’s apartment. Her mother was in the kitchen already dressed for work at the bakery. He remembered. After he sneaked out of the fire escape in his and his father’s apartment, Farkle just wanted to get away for the night. He at first thought of Riley’s but he knew that her Aunt Morgan would be there and didn’t want to confront her. He then thought of Lucas’ but he was tired of Lucas pestering him about becoming Donnie, so he thought of Maya’s as a last resort. He knocked on the door in the midst of a panic attack when he entered. Katy helped him sit on the couch and Maya gave him water and told him to breathe.

Farkle then told the mother and daughter what had happened earlier that night and Katy said that he could spend the night, but not in Maya’s bedroom. He could sleep on the couch. Farkle didn’t mind. He really didn’t feel much up to anything. He couldn’t feel anything except anger at his father’s betrayal and a desire to escape from everyone and everything that was ever Farkle Minkus.

Maya spoke, “Mom wants you to get ready so she can send you home.”

Farkle looked around hurt by Katy deciding to send him home. “Whatever,” he said. He then looked at the plastic bag in Maya’s hand. It seemed to be filled with clothing and what appeared to
be a brown wig. “What’s all that?” he asked.
“Just a surprise for school,” Maya said furtively.
As promised Katy delivered Farkle home to his father, but the two didn’t say anything to each other. Minkus stayed up all night worried about his son and nodded off on the couch when he finally entered. Farkle just glared at his father then silently got ready for school and just as silently left to meet the subway. Minkus wasn’t sure which hurt more, the yelling or the silent treatment. He thought the one thing that he could count on was Farkle’s love and loyalty and now this was his reward: constant silence and bitter anger. Did Farkle hate him as much as Jennifer did? Was he really as bad a father as he was a husband? Could he ever count on anything in his life? Minkus rose and mechanically prepared for work. There wasn’t much else he could do except go through his daily routine and hope that Farkle or Donnie as he called himself now would be in a better mood when he returned.

Farkle and Maya were headed for Harper Burgess’ classroom after finishing up Cory’s when Maya pulled him aside.

“We need to talk, Farkle,” Maya said. They said very little on the way to school until Cory’s class. Farkle rolled his eyes and was about to walk away. What was with Lucas and Maya wanting him to be Farkle? What was so great about Farkle Minkus anyway? At least Riley/Morotia understood!

“Is this Maya or Riley talking to me?” Farkle snapped. In Mr. Matthews’ class, Maya transformed herself into Riley’s double. Even though she quit, after she said that “Lucas was like a brother to her.” Farkle wasn’t sure if Maya was referring to herself or Riley and he wasn’t sure how he felt about that.

“It’s your friend,” Maya argued. “If you won’t come back for me or your dad! Then think about what you are doing to Riley!”

“I’m not doing anything to her,” Farkle said.

“Are you sure about that?” Maya asked. She pointed at Riley’s direction. Riley was standing by her locker. She was still wearing the long black dress and Gothic style makeup.

“The truth is we are all going to die,” Riley said in her Morotia voice. “Death affects us all! The old and especially the young! No matter if it’s from the Fates or ourselves Death will find us! So it is unnecessary for us to joke about it! For Death is no joke!”

Farkle approached Riley. “Riley-"

“Riley is no longer here, as you know,” Riley said. “We said much in the dark ignoring the nightlight bunny! You have taught me to embrace the darkness, Donnie! Morotia and Donnie shall live in the darkness forever!” Morotia stormed into Harper’s classroom.

Farkle shrugged. “She’s just being the dark melodrama queen. It was her choice, after what they said about you and Lucas.”

“You think that’s all?” Maya asked. She pointed at Harper’s class with her brown wig. “I’m going to class! Whichever one you are better come with me!”

Before they entered the classroom, Maya pulled Farkle closer. “Farkle if there is one thing I learned from what my dad did to me, it’s this: Don’t let what your mother did define you!” Farkle shoved his hand away from hers and walked into the classroom without speaking any longer. He didn’t want to think about his parents or anything else! He just wanted to be as comfortably numb as he acted!

Harper Burgess welcomed her students in class. Now that the specter of Principal Yancy had been exorcised from John Quincy Adams, Harper continued her unique methods of teaching. This lesson was on the parent/child conflicts found in Maus by Art Spiegelman and Fun Home by Alison Bechdel. “What did you learn from these two graphic novels, Donnie?” Harper pointed at Farkle. In her favor, Harper took her students’ transformations in stride. Maybe because none of them were her children or she was closer to their age, but she instantly referred to them by their new names.

“Donnie Barnes don’t need to read,” Farkle quoted as he turned from the teacher. Actually he found both books interesting, particularly Maus. He was disturbed not by the subject of the Holocaust being told as anthropomorphic animals, (He had read and understood Animal Farm when he was six after all.) but about the story of Art Spiegelman and his father, Vladek. They seemed to
be trying to understand each other and failing.
Harper blinked in surprise but turned to Riley, “Morotia?”
“It is a cruel world for everyone even adorable mice,” Riley said dramatically.
“Cute adorable mice,” Maya chimed in. Even though she wasn’t wearing her Riley costume, she
was still trying to do her Riley voice as though she were trying to prompt her friend. “Cute adorable
mice that are treated badly by meanie cats and pigs!”
“Thank you Riley II,” Harper agreed. “It’s the kind of dark world where things are turned around.
Where the belief of home and family is changed into something dark and disturbing.”
“But they are trying to discover their identities in the darkness,” Lucas said. “Alison was able to be
honest about her sexuality when her father had to hide in the closet. Artie was able to discover his
father’s history and learn about how it related to him as an adult and his mother’s suicide.”
“Precisely, Lucas,” Harper said. She jokingly turned to the young teen. “It is Lucas right?”
“Yeah still me,” Lucas sighed. “Unlike these guys.” He pointed at the trio. Both Riley and Farkle
sneered at their friend.
“They lost their families because of deception and lies,” Farkle said. “I flipped through a few
pages. Alison’s father killed himself because he couldn’t be honest! Artie’s father kept reliving the
nightmares of the Holocaust because he couldn’t talk about them! Alison and Artie’s fathers kept
them in darkness and let their children stay there!”
“The darkness is too big to fight,” Riley said.
“You didn’t always think that,” Maya told her best friend.
“Is that what you think Donnie?” Harper asked. “Do you think that Alison’s father and Vladek
chose to avoid the darkness or was it inside them? Were they being intentionally
adversarial towards their children or do you think they just failed to understand them? Do you think
that their children understood them?” Farkle was silent as Harper continued to speak. “Everyone
has their own way of dealing with the darkness around them, whether it is an external force such as
the Holocaust or the internal force of conforming to an idea of family while having urges and
emotions that are considered unacceptable. Sometimes the darkness is in a young person becoming
familiar with the concept of death or near-death of someone close to them. Sometimes those
problems can’t be fixed in one generation and it takes the next one to come to terms with it. In
writing these memoirs to their parents, I think Spiegelman and Bechdel were trying to see their
fathers not as adversaries who were incapable of feeling or even the parental figures that they knew
throughout their childhoods. They were seeing them as men who had been hurt, but were unable to
express their hurt.”
Farkle looked down at his desk not wanting to think about Art and Vladek Spiegelman or Alison
and Bruce Bechdel and especially not himself and his father.
“Good morning, Jessie, Good morning, Eddie,” Minkus said. He noticed that the two had been
reading a newspaper and then quickly hid it behind their backs when Stuart entered.
“Hi Stuart coffee?” Jessie asked.
“Sure it’s my turn on the assembly line,” Minkus said remembering that he was working with the
Manhattan school district products. Not an exciting day, but one that required routine, precise,
detailed work. Work that could get his mind off of Farkle, Morgan, Jennifer, and everything else
that bothered.
Jessie and Eddie continued to look at their business partner. “Okay what are you doing?” he asked.
“Nothing,” they said. “We don’t know anything.”
“Are you hiding something?” Minkus asked.
“Hiding what?” Jessie asked.
“Yeah we’re not hiding anything,” Eddie said quickly. “Especially not the paper.” Jessie glared and
hit him over the head with said paper.
“Why are you not hiding the paper?” Minkus asked placating the two like small children.
They were about to answer when Lonny and Ali entered, papers in hand. “Hi Stuart,” Ali said. She
turned to Eddie and Jessie. “Would you believe this story about Stuart’s date last night?”
“Would you believe the girl, damn she’s fine,” Lonny said. It took them a minute when they
Remembered that Stuart was in the same room as they were. He then held out his hand in silence. Ali reluctantly handed him her newspaper turned to page 3. A photograph of Stuart and Morgan kissing and dancing to the saxophone player’s music was prominently displayed. “It looks like you had a nice time with the girl who’s not five anymore,” Eddie remarked. Minkus sighed and crumpled the paper in his hand. “I was afraid of something like this. Gosh I expect this but Morgan-“

“They don’t even know who she is,” Jessie explained pointing at the gossip item and the caption. “They call her the ‘Unidentified Blond.’ “

“Besides I wouldn’t worry about it,” Eddie said. “If no one knows who she is, it might stay a one-day story only.”

“You’re sure about that?” Minkus asked Eddie.

“No, but it might,” Eddie said. Suddenly the phone rang. Eddie answered it. “Minkus Technologies; Eddie Giatti speaking.” He then said a few “uh huhs” before he handed the phone reluctantly to Stuart. “Uh, it’s for you.”

After work, Stuart Minkus and Morgan Matthews sat in the Matthews’ living room as Cory read the contents of the paper. “Minkus who is currently separated from his wife, Jennifer and this ‘unidentified blond’ were seen dancing in the Village in a very cozy demeanor which ended in a kiss between the two. The U.B.-let’s call her ‘Ub,’ shall we-’s name has been withheld. But could she be the reason that the Minkus divorce is a certainty?” Cory then threw down the paper. “Now we know who the ‘Ub’ is don’t we?”

“I’m very sorry about this, Morgan,” Minkus said to her. “I didn’t think that we would be spotted.” “It’s okay, Stuart,” Morgan said. “I actually had a really good time.”

“Clearly,” Cory said. “Now perhaps one or both of you could explain yourselves?”

“We were talking, laughing, and having a good time,” Morgan explained. “We just started kissing. That’s all. It wasn’t a big deal.”

“The kiss wasn’t?” Minkus asked somewhat hurt. “No no the kiss was great,” Morgan said. “But that’s all we did. We didn’t sleep together. In fact Stuart took me home right after we kissed. That’s all.”

“That’s all?” Cory asked Minkus. “That’s all,” Minkus replied feeling a bit like Porky Pig. “We were just caught up in the moment, but we didn’t go any further than that.”

“I just want to be sure that you aren’t getting over Jennifer by groping my sister,” Cory argued. “Cory,” Morgan said shocked.

“It’s not like that,” Minkus said. “We were both very emotional and vulnerable last night. I was not taking advantage of her!”

“Even if he were, I’m an adult. I can make my own decisions!,” Morgan said.

“Are you in love?” Cory asked.

“Shes good company and we both had a lot of problems and were trying to help each other through them,” Minkus replied.

“Are you planning on seeing each other again?” Cory asked.

“I think that’s between me and your sister,” Minkus argued.

“It better not just be a fling that’s all I’m saying,” Cory warned pointing at Minkus.

Minkus grabbed onto Cory’s finger and rose bitterly. “I already have one family that hates me for having been with their daughter! I don’t need another one! If case you haven’t missed it, Morgan is a grown woman! Whatever we decide will be entirely up to us and won’t have anything to do with you or anyone else!”

“I’m concerned about my sister,” Cory said. “And in a way about my friend! I don’t want either of you getting hurt by this.”

“Well your concern is noted,” Minkus replied. “But Morgan and I will be the ones affected, so we should be the ones who will deal with it.”
“Cory it’s not a big deal,” Morgan said. “It’s just gossip. It doesn’t bother me! It will be forgotten about by tomorrow. Besides, it’s just in one New York paper. It’s not like everyone in the whole U.S. knows about it.”

Cory was about to add something when his phone rang. He answered it. “Hello…Dad,” Cory said relishing that word. Morgan and Minkus both lowered their heads in embarrassment. Cory handed the phone to his sister and friend. “It’s for the two of you,” he said handing the phone to Morgan. Minkus waited while Morgan argued with her father over the phone. “Look Dad it wasn’t like that…..I know I haven’t had a good track record with men, but…..He’s nothing like Dustin, okay?…..I don’t know, how I know! I just do…..Look if I want to see Stuart Minkus again, I will! I’m an adult now…….Well you never listen to anything I say, about the business, about the guys I’ve been with……I’m not your baby girl anymore, Dad!!…….” She handed the phone over to Minkus. “He wants to talk to you again.”

Minkus accepted the phone from Morgan. “Hello Mr. Matthews…..Yes I recall, you used to be in the Navy…..Champion boxer, second in your weight division? In the entire Navy? Well that is interesting, sir…..No I would not like to see my entrails….Now look that is not fair, sir, I would never hurt Morgan…..Well thank you for your support sir. Yes I know that you know that I physically could not hurt anyone. Well insult aside, thank you…..But Morgan is an entirely different story. In fact I think you’re dismissing her for a lot of reasons…She’s a sharp businesswoman and has a lot of good ideas, if you would just listen to them,” Minkus hesitated. “Listen Mr. Matthews, I have a son myself and I understand what you’re going through. It’s hard to watch them grow up and you want to keep them young, sheltered, and protected forever. I know you don’t see the woman who will one day run your business, you still see her as the little girl who played with her dolls. But Morgan isn’t that little girl anymore and the more that you try to keep her like that, the more she will push away from you. She wants the store to adapt to the changing times and she wants to adapt herself and so do I and so does-well that doesn’t matter. It’s more personal, but please Mr. Matthews don’t listen to the little girl that she was. Listen to the woman that she is.” He stopped talking for a minute and then responded with a few “uh huhs.” He then handed the phone over to Morgan. “He wants to talk to you…..about business.”

Morgan smiled as she accepted the phone. “Hi Dad…..Yes actually Stuart showed me some interesting platforms for ecommerce!.....I can show them to you if you like!...That’d be great, but you know I was thinking about that…You know how some stores offer specific sales for online customers and for walk-in customers, we could do that!....The winter sports stuff would be a good start actually….You know we have that ski equipment that everyone’s asking about…”

Minkus and Cory smiled at each other. “Between Mortitia Addams in her room,” Cory nodded at Riley’s room “and Morgan it’s kind of hard to watch people grow up.”

“Yeah I know what you mean,” Minkus agreed. “I haven’t been very good for Farkle lately. I’ve been sheltering him way too much. I’ve been spying on him, constantly badgering him. I’ve even taken to counting his pills to make sure that he doesn’t skip them or take too many.”

“Well I can understand that,” Cory replied tactfully not wanting to remind Minkus that he warned him about this. “You almost lost him.”

“I can’t stop worrying about him,” Minkus said. “Every time the phone rings, I jump up wondering if it’s the police. When he leaves the apartment, I keep having visions in my head of him in that emergency room. I keep wondering what if he isn’t so lucky this time. What if this time I had to say good-bye? You know for a few moments last night, Morgan made me forget about Farkle, well forget about worrying about him. It felt good to not be in this chronic state of anxiety. I felt happy and then I felt guilty.”

“Guilty about being with Morgan?” Cory asked.

“About feeling happy,” Minkus said. “What right had I to feel happy after my son attempted suicide? What right had I to feel good when my wife is in rehab and our marriage will soon be over? Emotionally we’re not, but technically and legally we’re still married and I quickly get with someone else. I don’t deserve happiness!”

“I think if anyone deserves happiness, it should be you,” Cory said. “Minkus you’ve been
miserable long enough. Maybe it’s about time you should remember what it feels like to be happy. If it means going out with my sister again, then yeah…go for it. But you know wait until it’s final alright?”

Minkus smiled at Morgan as she hung up the phone. “He loves the idea! I can’t wait to get the ecommerce store started!” She ran up to her brother and friend. “Thanks Stuart, you’ve been a big help!”

“You’re welcome Morgan,” Stuart said. “I’m glad to do it for you!” He stammered. “I mean not do that.. for you. I mean I would like to do that for you, but I meant to help you with your father and the business.”

“Stuart shut up,” Morgan said as she kissed him again. Stuart gladly returned the kiss. Riley looked at the sun shining through the window. It had been a couple of days since she had covered her windows with black crepe and lace, so she had to squint. She thought about what Maya said about how Riley brought light into the room. She missed feeling that light. She missed seeing that light. She gave one of her 100 watt smiles and asked Maya about the bunny and puppy that nuzzled noses.

“And what did you learn about me?” Riley asked.

“What?” Maya asked.

“What did you say that turned you back to you?” Riley asked.

Maya smiled shyly. “I discovered that you made a better you than I did.”

Riley let the matter drop, but thought. “It wasn’t just about you and Lucas being Favorite Couple you know.”

“Yeah I had a feeling,” Maya said.

“It was also what happened to Farkle,” Riley said. “I never really thought about someone our age dying. I mean you hear about it on the news, and occasionally some kid we may have had a class with was in an accident. But for someone, one of our best friends, to attempt suicide-. I just thought if there is that much darkness in the world to make someone like Farkle, who I thought was one of the most confident people that I knew, want to die, what hope is there for any of us? What is the good of all this light?”

Maya held her best friend’s hand. “That’s what you’re here for. You’re here to pull people like Farkle and me out of that darkness. Not to go into it yourself.”

Riley looked down at her black dress and made a decision. “I’m getting dressed and then we’re going to talk to Farkle.”

After Riley changed, she and Maya arrived in the kitchen to watch Morgan and Minkus kiss in front of Cory.

“Aww that is so sweet,” a familiar voice said. Riley and Maya reentered the living room. Riley was dressed in her blue dress.

“Hi Morotia,” Cory said. “The sun’s up. Shouldn’t you still be sleeping?”

“Daddy,” Riley said annoyed. “It’s okay now. Maya convinced me about the light that I bring into the world. How could I ignore that?” She said.

“That’s a good thing Riley,” Cory said. “Don’t ever let that light go out.”

“Plus we’re going to talk to your son,” Maya said turning to Minkus. “We’re getting Farkle Minkus back if we have to lasso and hog tie him!” She was stunned for a minute there. “Great now I’m starting to sound like Lucas!”

“Maybe I should come with you,” Minkus said but both Cory and Morgan held him down.

“Minkus, let it be Farkle’s decision,” Cory said. “Whatever he decides, he has to know that you’ll be okay with it.”

“It’s like what you said to my father,” Morgan reminded him. “Don’t listen to the boy he was. Listen to the man that he’s becoming.”

Farkle and Lucas reentered Topanga’s Bakery to see their female friends looking at them. They had been talking about Farkle’s transformation. Lucas finally understood that despite what he wore, his friend was still Farkle.

“It’s okay now,” Farkle answered. “Lucas and I talked about it. I don’t know who I am yet, but I’m
not Donnie.”
“That’s great Farkle,” Maya said.
“Thanks guys for putting up with me,” Farkle said to his three best friends.
“That’s what we’re here for,” Maya answered.
“Maya thanks for letting me spend the night and giving me the stern talking to that you did,” Farkle said. “I think I needed to hear that what I was doing and how I was acting wasn’t just affecting myself. I’m sorry that I didn’t listen to you.”
Farkle reached over to give Maya one of his flirtatious hugs or touches. She was about to resist, but smiled and gently chucked him on the shoulder.
“I love seeing friends make up,” Riley said sweetly.
“I love when you’re so cheerful Riley,” Farkle said. “I like that you make everything happy and bright and that things are possible. I’m sorry that for a few days I took that away from you.”
“It was my choice, Farkle,” Riley said. “Just like this is yours. No matter what you wear, I’m just glad to see you again.” She leaned over to Farkle to give him a warm hug and a quick peck on the lips. “We’re getting through this with you right?” Farkle nodded. “That won’t change.” Riley then pulled away from Farkle and sat down next to Lucas. “So Lucas and I signed each other’s yearbooks—” Farkle began.
Maya and Riley’s eyes lit up. “Really you did?”
“Yeah I was wondering if I could sign yours.” Farkle asked.
“And me?” Lucas inquired.
“Sure yeah,” the girls said. The four friends then exchanged their yearbooks.
When it was Lucas’ turn, Riley handed her yearbook to Lucas. “Hi,” she said in that slow dreamy way.
“Hi,” Lucas returned feeling the same thing. They held hands as they held onto each other’s yearbooks.
Maya and Farkle looked at each other and exchanged smiles. She slid her yearbook over to Farkle’s and Farkle handed his book to her. Their hands touched for a minute. “I’m sorry,” Farkle said as he withdrew his hand.
“Don’t be,” Maya replied with a smile. Farkle returned his hand.
Minkus watched the door drumming his fingers on the table. He held the cell phone in his hand. Should he text Farkle? A voice in his head told him not to. He put his phone back down but couldn’t stop worrying. Would Riley and Maya work in bringing his son back? Would he be Donnie Barnes, Teen Rebel for life? Would Stuart be able to accept that? He knew that he was also responsible for driving his son to this identity crisis, but would he be able to bring him back? Was this a natural part of a teen growing up and finding his own identity or was it a masquerade to hide deeper issues? Minkus had already been through the dance of watching someone that he loved spiral downward into madness and addiction. He was not going to let this happen to Farkle.
The door opened and Farkle reappeared dressed in the black clothing that he wore to school. Minkus tried to cover up his disappointment. He was going to have to start getting used to calling his son, Donnie. “Donnie,” he tested.
Farkle shook his head. “It’s Farkle…Dad. Farkle J. Minkus.”
Minkus sighed with relief as Farkle sat next to his father at the kitchen table. “Well that’s good.” Farkle looked downward. “I still want to dress like this though. I kind of like it. I want to be stronger than the kid he was last year.”
“Well who are you now?” Minkus asked.
“I don’t know,” Farkle said. “I guess I’m someone who’s older, someone who isn’t so naïve, someone who is trying to be stronger than the kid he was last year.”
“You are very strong son,” Minkus said. He held his son’s hand. He wanted to hold onto the wound, but he stopped awkwardly for a minute. “You’re just learning how to adapt to your environment.”
“Yeah that’s what I told Lucas,” Farkle said. “I’m a scientist and I have to test myself as an organism.”
“Everyone has to do that,” Minkus agreed. “Some in more ways than others. Farkle, I’m very sorry for the pestering and the spying. I have been so worried about you, that I haven’t given you a lot of breathing space. Maybe I felt guilty that I couldn’t protect you from the things that happened to you before and I wanted to protect you since.”

“I’m sorry that I got so angry with you,” Farkle said. “I was remembering and feeling so much pain from what she said to me and what I did to myself. I kept wondering why you didn’t leave her earlier. Why didn’t you stop it? Then I realized that you wanted to, but you weren’t able to. She hurt you too.”

Minkus lowered his head. “It was no excuse, Farkle. I should have put a stop to it a lot earlier than I did. I should have left her after you were born or when you were younger. We should never have stayed married, probably should never have gotten married in the first place. Of course if we hadn’t—” He didn’t want to finish that thought.

The father and son sat in silence when Farkle continued to talking. “You know, Dad, when I saw you with Riley’s Aunt Morgan, it didn’t bother me that you were with her. Riley says she’s nice and if you two want to be together, I’m okay with that. I guess it bothered me because I wondered how you could have gotten over Mo-Jenn- her so quickly. I thought there you were, with the new business and a new girlfriend. You were moving on and there I was with my scars, and my nightmares, and my black clothes. I envied you because you moved on and I hadn’t.”

Minkus shook his head. “Oh Farkle, it’s all surface.” He confessed. “Ms- Morgan and I did go out and we kissed, but we didn’t get further than that. I couldn’t bring myself to continue.”

“You mean-?” Farkle asked nodding in the guy’s way wondering if his father had “equipment failure.”

“Oh no that was working fine,” Minkus said quickly. “It was like I was looking at myself from beyond and kept hearing this voice calling me worthless, pathetic and telling me that I didn’t deserve to be with a woman like her.”

“Mother’s?” Farkle asked. He still hovered unsure about whether to call his mother, “mother” or by her first name. Farkle wasn’t sure if he wanted to still associate his mother with all of the positive connotations of the meaning of the word or whether he wanted to completely expunge her from his life even with the title.

“No,” Minkus said. “That’s probably where it started, but not now. The voice I was hearing was my own.”

Farkle lowered his head in shame and sorrow at his father’s own struggles. “You see, Farkle, in a way I envy that you are acting out your anger, frustration, even the despair that you have been feeling. You are articulating what I’m feeling every day, but can’t allow myself to reveal to anyone.”

“I hate her,” Farkle said. “I know we’re not supposed to. Jordan tells me that. In group that’s what we say: We’re not supposed to hate the abusers, just the abuse! But I hate her! I hate what she did to me! I hate what she did to you! I hate that she always got her way! I hate that she yelled and drank, and that she kept using us! I hate that she always got you to go along with her! I hate that you had to defend me! I hate that she hit you when you did! I hate that I almost killed myself! I hate how you feel! I hate her so fucking much!” Farkle gulped and sobbed sounding like a small child.

Minkus held his son close to him and rocked him back and forth. “I know, Farkle, I know.” He said. He hugged him tightly and kissed the top of his head. “I know, you just get angry okay? Just let it all out. It’s better to feel it than to bottle it up. You know sometimes I hate her too.”

“When will it go away?” Farkle asked. “When will it get better for us? When will we stop feeling like this?”

“I don’t know,” Minkus said. “It will take as long as it needs to. I guess it’s all part of adapting and evolving.” He continued to hold onto Farkle until he was all cried out.

Morgan had her suitcase packed. She turned to her older brother, “So Cory isn’t it about time to go to the airport? I have to open the store tomorrow morning you know!”

“Yeah about that,” Cory said to his sister. “I’m not going to take you.”
“You’re not?” Morgan asked.

As if being cued, a knock filled the Matthews’ living room. Cory rose to answer it. “Come on in, we’re expecting you,” Cory said. Minkus entered. Morgan smiled. “I think you two need to talk,” Cory said pulling his sister and his friend closer together. “Now get going, Minkus; Ub.” Morgan rolled her eyes at her brother’s nickname for her as Minkus led her out the door.

Minkus and Morgan walked inside the airport to the first security checkpoint. “So I will definitely show off Matthews’ new ecommerce store at the next SBOA meeting. Don’t be surprised if you get a few requests.”

Minkus smiled glad that his business was picking up by word of mouth at least. “I’ll be looking forward to it.”

“So this is it,” Minkus began as she nodded at the checkpoint.

“Yes this is it,” Morgan agreed. “You know, Stuart. Despite having our date plastered in the paper, I did enjoy it.”

“So did I,” Minkus answered. “After all, how many people have a date memento seen by millions?”

“Right,” Morgan said.

“Morgan,” Minkus said. “I would like to—”

“—So would I,” Morgan said almost at the exact time that he did.

Minkus continued. “But I can’t. Not yet. I’m still struggling with how I feel about a lot of things particularly about myself. I’m coming off my marriage and I still see myself through her eyes. I don’t always like that man.”

Morgan nodded. “It takes time. It’s still too early, I understand. And even so, we’re career people who love our jobs and our freedom. It’s a compromise. I’ll tell you what, you take as much time as you need. I’ll be back here possibly for Christmas and certainly for Riley’s graduation. If the requests come up, you’ll be coming to Philadelphia for business. In the meantime we can text, email, call each other. Let’s review our options then. I can’t promise that we won’t see other people or even that long distance will work, but let’s wait and see what happens.”

“I’d like that,” Minkus answered. He then leaned closer to her. “You’re worth waiting for.”

“So are you,” Morgan whispered back as they kissed a warm farewell that did not seem permanent. Instead it left the possibility of a return.

While playing chess later that night, Minkus told Farkle about what happened between himself and Morgan. “So she’s not my stepmother then?” Farkle teased.

“No I don’t think it was ever going to be that far,” Minkus answered honestly. “She has her life and business in Philadelphia and I have mine in New York. There’s the publicity to consider. Through no fault of her own, Morgan could get unfairly labeled as a home wrecker or slut or who knows what else. The gossips may do that still. Your mother and I still have to go through the divorce before I’m free to be with anyone else.

There’s also you—”

Farkle interrupted his father by holding up his hand. “-Dad, I know that you’re going to date a lot of women other than her,” Farkle said still unsure about how to refer to Jennifer. “They may be as nice as Morgan or they may be gold diggers like J….I mean the Kardashians. If I don’t like them, I’ll let you know. But promise me one thing, you will never use me as an excuse to be alone on a Saturday night or to not go out with someone.”

“Okay,” Minkus said realizing that his son was giving him permission to date. “Well anyway, Morgan and I just want to take things as slow as possible. Next time she’s here, or I’m down there, we might see each other again. We’ll see where it goes from there.” He moved his black rook forward and didn’t mind much when Farkle’s white pawn took it.

“Well did you feel it?” Farkle teased pointing downwards. Apparently there was still a bit of Donnie Barnes in him after all.

“Farkle,” Minkus said in shock.

“Come on you told me that’s what guys do,” Farkle said. “Besides haven’t you seen any porno ever?” At his father’s stunned and somewhat irate look, Farkle cleared his throat. “I mean, because
I haven’t! What are they like?”
“Uh huh,” Minkus said. “I think I’ll have a little chat with Rachel Friar about the movies that you and her son watch when we’re not home!” He felt somewhat chastised about having this conversation with his son, but also realized that the boy was growing up and experiencing these feelings. It was best if he heard them from a trusted adult rather than some trashy TV or Internet program or some obnoxious kid at school.
“Well let’s put it this way,” Minkus said tactfully. “At the airport, I made sure that I sat on a bench at the baggage carousel with my laptop in front of me for several minutes before I felt comfortable enough to stand up and move.” The father and son chuckled in that guy’s way about sharing a secret between men.
“Is that when you know?” Farkle asked bashfully “I mean you know that she’s right for you? When you feel it down there?”
Minkus smiled. “Not just when you feel it down there, Farkle. You’ll know it when you feel it all over your body and within. That’s when you know.”
Farkle nodded. “Good, because I felt that way….about one of them.”
Minkus smiled. The “Riley Vs. Maya” debate had gone on with his son for years. It never occurred to him that he would finally choose one. He guessed that Farkle would grow tired of choosing between them and just accept being platonic friends with the girls like Minkus was with Topanga now as well as other women like Katy and Rachel.
“Well this is a turn for the books! Now come on who’s my future daughter-in-law?”
“Dad,” Farkle groaned and rolled his eyes.
“Just kidding, son,” Minkus smiled. “Now tell me who is the lucky lady?”
Smiling, Farkle told him.
Chapter Summary

As the trial looms, Jennifer takes the offense and Morgan and the Minkus family become the targets of violence. Farkle has a romance with his special lady and Minkus grows apart from his lady.

The Lives of Genius
Boy/Girl Meets World Fanfic
By Auburn Red
Chapter Twenty: Drawing Lines in the Sand (Stuart Minkus Age 35; Farkle Minkus Age 13)

Author's Note: Morgan's rapist is none other than Kermit Clutterbucket, Maya's charming father. The other two rapists, J.J. Stone and Hector Suarez are original characters. Loni Boden-Holloway is the former salesgirl that worked for Matthews. Morgan sings a bit of the lyrics to "Big and Loud" by Andrew Goldstein and Randy Newman featured in the movie, Cats Don't Dance in which Lindsey Ridgway played the singing voice of Darla Dimples, the bratty child star/villain. (An out-of-movie experience provided by yours truly. :D) As mentioned, there is a reference to "Girl Meets Farkle" that takes into count the "Minkiad" AU version of events rather than the canon version. (Specifically, Jennifer is MIA when Farkle is tested for Asperger's since she's still in rehab in this timeline)

The Bassett's Mercedes pulled up to the driveway as Stephen, the family chauffeur, let Jennifer outside. Jennifer greeted her mother and father with a warm embrace. "How are you feeling, Jenny?" Eunice asked.
"Just fine, Mother," Jennifer said. "Now that I am out of that horrible rehab."
"And you have changed your ways haven't you dear?" Eunice said.
"Yes Mother of course I have," Jennifer replied. "I have been steady emotionally and I haven't had a drink in sometime."
"Congratulations, Princess," Edward said to his daughter. "Let's see how you enjoy your welcome home gift." He turned his daughter to the left and closed her eyes. She opened her eyes to see a white house across the field from her parents'.
"Oh Daddy, those awful Johnstons moved!" she said with delight. She hugged her father rapturously.
"Yes darling," Edward said. "That house is now in your name. Of course it's a bit big for one person."
"Well I will have friends over," Jennifer suggested.
"Oh dear Jenny, not those friends," Eunice muttered under her breath.
Both husband and daughter ignored her. "How would you like to share that house with someone very dear to you?" Edward asked.
Jennifer looked up delighted. "You mean-?"
"Do you really think that Stuart Minkus will be permitted to keep that boy after what he did to our family?" Bassett asked. Jennifer shook her head with a sly grin.
"But Daddy when I entered rehab, I told Stuart that he could have sole custody of Farkle," Jennifer reminded her father.
"There is nothing that says that you can't change your mind..," Edward told his daughter. "In your time at rehab, you have learned that you would like to be with your child and that you are capable of being the wonderful mother that you always were. You want a chance to demonstrate that, don't

"We have more important things to discuss, Mother," Jennifer said as she and her father slammed the study door on Eunice.

Jennifer shook hands with a small balding dark haired man. "What do you have for me, Thompson?" Bassett asked one of his aides.

Thompson pulled out the photos that he had taken of the new Minkus Technologies office and employees. "Your son-in-law- I mean former son-in-law has already started a new company."

"Yes I know that," Bassett said impatiently.

"But you won't believe who some of the latest clients are," Thompson said showing the information. "Look familiar?"

"Those were clients of our company," Bassett finished.

Thompson nodded. "I believe that Minkus and his cronies stole our information."

"Interesting," Bassett said. "A man who steals clients certainly cannot be trusted as a father."

"But wait there's more," Thompson said as he held up another photograph showing Minkus and a blond woman.

"Yes I know all about that," Bassett said.

Jennifer gritted her teeth. She would have at least thought Stuart had more taste than to be seen with a frump like that.

"We found out her name," Thompson said. "She is Morgan Matthews of Philadelphia Pennsylvania, third child only daughter of Alan and Amy Matthews. Proprietress of Matthews' Wilderness, an outdoor equipment store."

"Matthews?" Jennifer said. "You're kidding!" She definitely would have thought Stuart had better taste.

"This is also intriguing," Bassett said. "But I want some insurance. I think it's about time I called in a few favors."

"What are you going to do Daddy?" Jennifer asked.

"Don't worry your head about it, Jenny," Edward said. "Let's just say the trial will be in your favor." He looked his daughter up and down as if she were a piece of art work that he was inspecting. "We will have to do something to make sure that publicity is working for you though. Much of what we have achieved so far has now fallen to the wayside. The public is so fickle once something becomes old news. We need to intensify public support for you and against Stuart Minkus." He snapped his fingers. "I have it. How would you like to do an interview to give your side of the story?"

Jennifer affected a brave smile. "It would be my pleasure as long as it means getting that 'horrible abusive fortune hunter' out of mine and my son's life." She practiced a sob.

"Beautiful," Edward said. He turned to his top assistant, Hathorne. "Hathorne, place a call to Melody Starr. We would like an exclusive."

Hathorne bowed. "Of course, Mr. Bassett."

Edward smiled. "Well that's one part out of the way. We call your cousin's firm and that will take care of the divorce. I also want to make a charitable donation to A Safe House Domestic Violence/Child Abuse Prevention Center. Can you put me in touch with the director, Ms. What-s her name- Ferguson?"

"Absolutely, Mr. Bassett," Hathorne agreed.

"Good," Edward replied. "That still leaves this matter with the Matthews girl."

Jennifer looked at the picture. "Leave her to me."

"And what will you do?" Edward asked.

"Oh I have a few favors of my own to call in," Jennifer said. "Don't worry your head about her."

Minkus and his colleagues whistled the theme to the Bridge Over the River Kwai as they worked on the Manhattan School District laptops. Ali and Lonny even did an impromptu version of the
parody Jawa's version from Spaceballs. Minkus tightened the screws on the keyboard of a laptop then held up his hands for silence. "Quiet guys," he said. "This laptop right here is our last one and-" He laid it on top of the laptops and Feenixes that were going out to the district's students. "-It's now finished!" The staff applauded as Minkus shouted. "We are finished with the Manhattan Project and one month earlier than deadline! We put in long hours, long days, and did extra tedious work."

"-If I ever have to wire another laptop for those rugrats, it will be too soon," Mike called dryly faking a collapse. The others laughed.

"But it is worth it," Minkus said. "Now let's hope that Jonathan Turner thinks so."

Turner arrived an hour later and examined the fruits of Minkus Technologies' labor. He examined the products up and down, tested the apps, and checked them closely for flaws, glitches, or bugs. He then smiled, "Good job, Minkus! I can see we got our money's worth! That learning paid off."

"Indeed it did, Mr. Turner," Minkus said with a smile.

"I am very satisfied with the service," Turner said. "I am proud of you, Super Genius!" Minkus smiled and accepted the compliment graciously.

"We all did it, sir," he said modestly indicating the staff.

"The district will deposit your funding in the business account within the next day," Turner promised. They discussed times to deliver the items and to schedule a few training seminars in December to engage the faculty in using the equipment. Turner left as soon as the agreements were made.

After the door closed, the Minkus Technologies staff erupted into cheers as Jessie brought out a bottle of champagne. "I had a feeling that we would need this," she said. She popped it open, then poured the drink into several cups. The staff passed the drinks around.

Minkus held up his drink in a toast. "To Minkus Technologies' first success that counted!" The staff accepted the toast and clinked glasses and drank.

Eddie held up his drink and said. "To the Manhattan School District for knowing a good company when they see one." The staff clinked and drank to that.

Jessie held up her drink and said, "To a great group of people that I wasted a lot of late nights with, but that made things worthwhile enough to enjoy them."

"Speak for yourself," Lonny called amidst the others' laughter as they clinked glasses and drank. The staff laughed and drank. "This is only the beginning folks," Minkus said. "After this we will get tons of requests. Success is in our hands right now as we speak!" Minkus held up his hand as the postal worker arrived and put a stack of mail directly into his hand.

"Thank you," Minkus said jovially to the man who left shortly after. He looked curiously at the mail and sorted through. He put most of the mail on the table realizing that they were bills, requests, and other typical items. The last one, a large manila envelope, surprised him.

"Who is that from, Stuart?" Jessie asked.

"Didn't you hear him? It's Success," Christine quipped remembering Minkus' earlier comment about success being in their hands.

The others laughed good naturedly as Minkus looked at the address. "Rowan, Matheson, Bassett, & Clark, what the-?"

"Uh oh sounds like a law firm," Eddie said. The expression on Minkus' face confirmed the truth of that statement.

Minkus opened the envelope and took out several sheets of legal paper. He read the contents to himself and sank onto a nearby chair. Any signs of celebration or joy quickly dropped from his face. The rest of the staff looked from one to the other in confusion about their boss' sudden change of mood.

"Are you all right," Jessie asked. "Stuart?" Minkus looked up in surprise as if he realized that he wasn't the only person in the room.

He looked at the rest of the staff dazed. "Uh, where was I? Oh yes, finished the project early. Turner loves it, congratulations." The monotone and quiver in Minkus' voice disturbed his employees. He cleared his throat and tried to return to normal. "Tell you what, this is a good day
for everyone. Why don't you all take the rest of the afternoon off?"
"Are you sure, Stuart?" Ali asked wondering if his aura needed cleansing. She could see very sickly
and uncomfortable colors swirling around him.
Minkus nodded. "Yes, that's fine. It's a good start for the weekend. I have some personal things that
I need to work out." The technicians looked at each other confused, but then jetted out like children
being let out of school early.
Minkus remained with Eddie and Jessie. "Is something wrong, man?" Eddie asked.
"Yes, I mean no," Minkus struggled. "I don't know just some stuff. I need to talk to some people."
"Is there anything that we can do before we go?" Jessie asked.
Matthews?"
"Sure," Jessie said. "Do you want me to call Farkle as well?"
"No," Minkus said. "He's probably with his friends. I'll just text him to tell him to meet me at the
Matthews.' I have to tell him something very important."
Farkle was with Maya, Riley, and Lucas on the way home from school. He was very nervous.
During his mother's time in rehab, things had returned to somewhat normalcy with Farkle and his
friends going through their various adventures such as: the semiformal, the drive to keep creative
departments in the school, their Halloween adventures, Riley's encounters with a cyberbully and
cheerleader tryouts, and the kids' trip to Texas. Most importantly for Farkle was a recent test to
determine whether he had Asperger's syndrome. While he was revealed not to have it, Ms. Oben
and the officials made count of his emotional disorders like depression and anxiety, as well as his
home life saying that "he should require further testing."
Minkus of course remained a constant support for his son throughout the whole thing saying that in
absence of Farkle's mother, he was representing both roles in his son's life as mother and father.
Unfortunately because of his financial status, he had to downscale Farkle's genius party. (Too bad
he was looking forward to ordering complementary penguins for the guests.), but Farkle seemed to
enjoy it. Minkus also told his son that "even if Farkle had been diagnosed with something, it
wouldn't have changed how (he) felt about him."
Things had returned to normalcy between Farkle and his father as well. They had finally removed
all of the furniture that Jennifer had bought, tongue-in-cheek calling it the "Getting-Rid-of-
Jennifer-Bassett-Sale." They redecorated the entire apartment exactly as they wanted with
comfortable chairs and sofas, and posters that showed space images like constellations, nebulae,
and births of stars, early Golden Age of Science Fiction/Futurism artwork, and historic figures like
Charles Darwin and Albert Einstein. It was a sense of accomplishment in the father and son that
they could finally make their home into something that they liked rather than acquiesce to
Jennifer's changeable moods on the décor.
Lately though particularly since his and his friend's return from Texas, Farkle felt his feelings
return for the girl. He wanted to slap himself silly. Since he had made the decision over which girl
he had feelings for, he began to feel awkward around her. He had lately begun to feel
uncomfortable when he was near her. He still hadn't told her, though his father knew.
Stop it, you idiot, he thought to himself. It isn't like you don't know her. You've known her
practically your whole life! Of course he knew her, but since he realized that he was in love with
her, his behavior was different. He wanted to ask her at the right time and the right moment. His
breath caught in his throat. It's now or never, he thought. Now or never. He walked up to her, the
girl that he realized that he was in love with. The girl that somehow he always knew that he was in
love with.
"Maya?" Farkle asked the blond girl. "Can I talk to you for a minute?"
"Sure," Maya said with a shrug. "What's up?" She said when they were alone.
"I was just wondering, would you like to get something to eat or something with me," Farkle asked.
"Isn't that where we're going?" Maya asked.
"No I meant, some night just you and me," Farkle asked. "You know like a-
"Are you asking me out on a date," Maya said. "Me? Just me? Not like me and Riley?"
"Well I guess, I mean I am," Farkle said. Maya's face fell in confusion. "Farkle, that would be nice. But I-

"It doesn't have to be anything," Farkle said. "Take my Dad and Morgan. They just want to see where it goes. You and I can go out casually and see where things go from there."

Maya shook her head. "Farkle, I know where it's going to go. You're a good friend, one of my best friends." She held him up by the shoulder. "Don't try to make us any more than we are. You'll only get hurt." Riley and Lucas walked back to their friends.

"What kept you guys?" Riley asked.

"Yeah we almost got to the door before we realized that you weren't with us," Lucas agreed. Farkle looked at his friends stunned and hurt, particularly at Maya. He had finally decided that he was in love with Maya. They understood each other. They had darker souls than Riley and Lucas. They shared each others' pain as children of abuse and broken homes. They also bounced each other off well with Maya's more pessimistic, tougher, emotional nature neatly contrasting with Farkle's more optimistic, rational, intellectual nature. He had to admit ever since he saw Maya in her tank and pajama bottoms, he had plenty of interesting dreams about her. Of course it never occurred to him that Maya may not share the same feelings for him. Was she in love with someone else? Perhaps Lucas. Things had been awkward ever since the "Donnie/Morotia/Riley II" thing and even more awkward in Texas. He also knew that she had a thing for Riley's Uncle Josh, but Farkle attributed that to a crush on an older man and nothing serious. Plus with Josh having turned 18 and starting NYU, technically any relationship between them would border upon illegal. Maybe it WAS just him. After all, he grew up with Riley and Maya. Maybe neither of them could ever picture their lives with someone who was so close for all these years, that they felt he was like a brother to them.

"Maya and I were just talking-" Farkle said.

"About nothing," Maya said quickly. "Nothing at all." She gave Farkle a look.

"Right nothing at all," Farkle agreed feeling dejected. He was about to say more when his cell phone vibrated. He picked it up and read the text message.

His friends saw the concern on his face as he read. "What is it Farkle?" Riley asked.

"Dad wants me to come home right away," Farkle said flatly. "He says it's an emergency." He headed for his apartment with his three friends close behind. Farkle pulled Maya aside. "Look Maya, about what I said-"

"-Don't worry about it," Maya answered.

"Just forget it okay?" Farkle asked. "Forget about it."

"I don't want to," Maya said. "Not yet." Farkle gave a thin confused smile at his friend's words. Did she not want to go out with him yet or did she not want to forget that he asked her out yet? Whatever it was, he decided to explore the emergency with his father first. He would have time to talk to Maya later.

The four kids entered to see that Minkus, Cory, Topanga, and a red haired woman had already been seated in the living room. "Is it necessary for these kids to be here?" the woman asked pointing at Riley, Lucas, and Maya.

Minkus waved his hand. "The four of them are surgically attached to each other. I couldn't part them if I tried. Besides they are Farkle's friends and he'll tell them anyway. We might as well save him the trouble, Rosemary."

Rosemary Welles shrugged. She was a divorce attorney recommended by Topanga to aid the Minkus family in their upcoming legal struggles. She was a tall red-haired woman with a slight Southern drawl and a very take-charge demeanor. Like Topanga, she was dressed very professionally in a maroon blazer and skirt, and neat white top. She opened her briefcase and took out her copy of the papers Minkus gave her. Rosemary met the Minkus family shortly after Farkle's suicide attempt, before he returned to school.

She felt an instant like and rapport for the father and son. There was something natural and touching in their relationship so she said that she would be glad to represent Stuart in the divorce proceedings. Stuart called her right away as soon as he received the papers.
Minkus told his son and his son's friends to have a seat. Farkle sat on the sofa next to his father. "What's going on Dad?" Farkle asked.

Rosemary handed Stuart the papers to give to Farkle. Farkle read the names on the first one: "Jennifer Elaine Catherine Bassett Minkus Vs. Stuart Nathaniel Minkus."

Farkle looked up surprised at how calm he was after reading the names, "So it's official now: we're divorced. It's kind of a relief in a way. I don't have to worry about it anymore."

"There's more to it than that, Farkle," Stuart said. He relieved his son of the papers and flipped through them. "We are going to have to fight over quite a few things, money, and possessions. There is something or rather someone in particular that is most important that she wants to fight me over." He held up the last group of papers that was attached to the initial divorce papers. Even without reading it, Farkle knew who his father was referring to but he read the page. "Child Custody of minor, Farkle J. Minkus."

Farkle read through the papers as his father explained. "Your mother wants sole custody of you. She wants to take you to Rochester to live with her and your grandparents."

Farkle shook his head. "No, no! I won't live with her!" He said and stood up. "I want to stay here with you and with my friends, and my school! I won't live with her not after what she did!" Minkus held his son by the shoulders to calm his son down while he continued to say, "I won't live with her!"

"Farkle," Rosemary said. "You are old enough to make that decision and a judge will certainly take your preferences into consideration."

"So that's it then," Minkus said. "The matter has been decided right now. Farkle doesn't want to live with his mother. He wants to live with me. Full stop, end of sentence."

"Not quite," Rosemary replied.

"Stuart, Jennifer wants Farkle and she is going to fight for him," Topanga said to her friend.

"Then I will," Minkus vowed nodding at his son. "I won't let her take him." He absently gave his son's shoulder a tight squeeze.

"That's good that you have that determination to keep Farkle," Rosemary said. "But I am warning you both about what this will be like. Jennifer's attorneys will use anything and I mean anything against you to paint her as the ideal parent. Be prepared for character assassinations, people that you hadn't seen in years being called up as witnesses, conversations once playful and friendly being taken out of context into something ugly. There will be lines drawn in the sand."

"Well it's not like we don't have anything to say," Minkus said nodding at Cory.

"I know a few things already," Cory said.

"I'm just telling all of you that whatever you will do to her, be prepared for it to be done right back to you, and vice versa," Rosemary said. "I call it 'Lawyer Guided Karma.' I have had divorce cases that started out amicable and then became virtual bloodbaths with both parties out for each other's heads. They were about to kill each other and these couples didn't have anywhere near the amount of baggage that you and your ex-wife already have. Stuart, of course, you will be called to speak in your defense."

"Naturally," Minkus agreed.

"Topanga I know cannot, but Cory will you speak for the defense?" Rosemary asked Cory nodded in confirmation. "Now Farkle, we always leave this up to the kids, especially the ones who are old enough to understand how the legal process goes. Do you want to speak?"

Farkle nodded. "Yes, I want to speak on behalf of my father."

Rosemary smiled. "You are certainly a very single minded young man. Now Dad, Son, let's start talking some strategy." She pulled the small family closer as they began to talk.

Jennifer waited outside the apartment in the South Bronx to see her caller. This was hardly the place that she would be caught dead in. It was a good thing that she was dressed in a black wig and sunglasses and dressed intentionally dowdy with minimal jewelry, that would have singled her out as someone rich and connected. She even took a city bus and a cab to her location, so no one could point out her Mercedes. She looked at the streets trying to hold her nose from the sewage, meat cooking in a nearby steakhouse, and various other odors. A couple of rough looking tattooed thugs
approached her outside the apartment. "Hey lady looking for a good time," one said.
"Not with you Jose or whatever your name is," Jennifer snapped. She tapped her foot annoyed and impatient as the door opened and a blond white man appeared at the door. "Not interested, lady," the man said in an obviously stoned voice. His dilated eyes gave no doubt to what his activities were.
"Off the wagon, Kermee-"Jennifer said making her voice sound like Miss Piggy."Don’t call me that," the man threatened.
Jennifer laughed continuing with the taunting. "What will the Clinic say?" Jennifer teased.
Kermit looked at the woman confused. "Who are you, bitch?" Jennifer slightly removed her sunglasses so he could see who she was. "Jennifer?" He asked recognizing one of his fellow patients at the Rochester clinic.
Jennifer smiled icily as he let her inside. She glanced around his flophouse apartment. It had only a mattress as furniture and a dimly lit lamp on a broken table for décor. The sink was filled with rancid water. "Nice place" she said sarcastically.
Kermit sank on the mattress and reached over to the nearby table. A syringe, rubber arm band, and some very familiar substances caught her eye. Jennifer was quick to observe that there wasn't enough of the methamphetamine on the table. Soon Kermit would need a fix and was desperate enough for it. She could see puncture wounds all over his arms. "It's the maid's day off," Kermit Clutterbucket said sarcastically. "My latest old lady kicked me out after the rehab was over."
Kermit’s well-off second wife paid for his rehab at the Rochester Clinic then filed for divorce when he fell off the wagon again.
"Keeps you close to certain activities, wouldn't you say?" Jennifer asked. The blond woman indicated her purse. "How would you like to make some real money, cash up front and more afterward as well as a ticket to a specific place?"
"Where?" Kermit asked suspiciously. "Why would you do this?"
Jennifer leaned against the wall. "You have a history with aggressions over the female species-" She began diplomatically.
"That bitch was asking for it," Kermit declared angry at his ex-wife's accusation. As a father he had every right to do what he did to Maya!
"Of course," Jennifer said in mock sympathy. "I need you to give a repeat performance if you will. I need you to visit Philadelphia."
"What for?" He asked.
"There’s a certain woman there who needs taken care of," Jennifer said.
"Who and what do you want?" Kermit asked. Jennifer held out the newspaper photograph of Stuart Minkus and Morgan Matthews. "She’s a blond," Kermit said awed as he fingered the picture almost erotically.
Jennifer nodded knowing Kermit’s weakness for blonds. Those were often the women and girls he attacked. He would be perfect for the job and of course Jennifer knew his history. He had been married to Katy Hart, Stuart’s other slut! Not only would it hurt this girl and Stuart, but Jennifer could also stick it to Wendy Waitress! It was a win-win-win situation for her. "I want you to take care of her. Her name is Morgan Matthews. I will give all the information that you need." She then opened her purse and took out $5,000 in cash. "I will give you this as a down payment. Then I will be in Philadelphia for one day to give you another 10,000." She crossed her legs and moved one of her feet up to Kermit’s thigh. "I will also give you another payment if you succeed."
"Could I have an advance?" Kermit asked fondling her.
"Not until the job is complete," Jennifer said moving far from him. “I’m warning you. She’s one of those butch types. You may want to get a couple of your friends to hold her down. I will pay them $2,000 each.”
"You forget," Kermit said. "I get caught I go in for a long time."
"I’m sure it’s worth the risk," Jennifer said and nodded at the meth on table. "You know you want to, let's not pretend. The only thing you learned at rehab is that you're an addict." She dangled the cash away from him like a cat with string.
"I won't be arrested for it this time," Kermit insisted. "Not if you do it right," Jennifer declared. "You won't even be caught."
"You want her dead," Kermit said matter of factly.
"Not necessary," Jennifer said. "Just rough her up, scare her. I want her to be out of Stuart Minkus' life and I don't want her to speak for him."
Kermit nodded. "Alright I'll do it." He said as he collected the money Jennifer gave him. He knew a couple of guys that would help. Hector Suarez was a violent type, a former gang member and J.J. Stone, may be a rich Senator’s son but he also had a history with women. He had about as low of an opinion of women as Kermit had. They would be perfect for the job. Plus, they were dumb enough to accept only $2,000.
"Good," Jennifer smiled. "Now you have some travel arrangements to make. I will be checking up on you and give you what I know about her." She stood up and put on her dark glasses. "I will contact you," she said as she stepped out of the apartment.
Jennifer took out a cheap cell phone that she bought just for the occasion. She found Morgan Matthews' contact information and sent a quick text message: Violets are Blue, Roses are Red, if you don't get rid of Stuart Minkus, then I will bash your pretty little head!
She then vanished into the crowd until she could be certain that she wouldn't be recognized. She would then leave South Bronx and head for Manhattan. She had to make herself look presentable. After all, she had an interview to give in a few days.
Morgan's hands involuntarily shook as she read the email. This one was the creepiest one yet. It featured four images with captions. First she saw a picture of her apartment with a caption that read, "This is your home." Then the message showed a picture of her parents' house that read, "This is where your family lives." The next image was her store with the caption, "This is where you work." The final image showed the alley behind the store with the eeriest caption, "This is where your pretty head will get bashed in if you don't dump Stuart Minkus!"
After the picture of her and Stuart was published, there were a few thoughtless comments online labeling her a "slut," a "gold digger" and other names. But since they didn't yet know who she was, it was all talk. Since her time in Philadelphia, she and Stuart had called and texted each other quite often. Stuart even sent her a bouquet of flowers that was now on the desktop of the store. Morgan told Stuart about the names. He was apologetic about it, saying that if he had known that it would bring this much trouble then he would have stopped from kissing her. Morgan told him that it wasn't his fault. There were two pairs of lips after all and since they didn't know who she was, it would probably fade out. Besides she was so used to comments about her, that it rubbed off of her. But no sooner did the rumors about their kiss fade, than the new cyberstalking began to occur. This frightened her more.
At first she tried to laugh at the cyberstalking messages. The first "Violets are blue, roses are red" one made her laugh in a dark comedy way. Then they began to get more personal referring to her work address and saying that the stalker was following her home. They also became even more descriptive and graphic in the violence that would fall upon her if she didn't break things with Stuart Minkus. They insinuated things like her vagina would be ripped open and her breasts would be cut off.
Morgan didn't want to admit that she was scared. After all, she could hold her own in a fight. Morgan considered herself a tough strong independent woman. She sold outdoors equipment, exercised, and volunteered for causes that helped women in trouble like Take Back the Night. She knew that she had a lot of courage to stand up to her former boyfriend, Dustin, when she realized that their relationship was damaged beyond repair. Still this cyberstalking was new territory and it frightened her, especially specific messages like this.
She didn't let her family in on what had been happening. After all what good would it do? The texts and emails were anonymous and she had no way of learning who sent them or how they were sent. Her parents and brothers would worry of course, but it was her problem not theirs. Her father would probably blame Stuart for the mess.
Morgan certainly wasn't going to tell Stuart about this either. He had enough on his mind what with
Farkle and his divorce. He couldn't help her anyway. It wouldn't do any good to worry him even further about something that was beyond his control.

Morgan wondered who the cyber stalker was. She figured that since most of the threats zeroed in on her relationship with Stuart that the stalker recognized her as the "unidentified blond" or the "ub" as her brothers referred to her, the woman who was seen kissing Stuart Minkus over a month ago. Morgan had her suspicions that it might be Jennifer, Stuart's ex-wife. From what Cory, Topanga, and Stuart told about her, she was certainly loony tunes enough to attempt something like this. But how could she prove it?

"Morgan you okay honey?" the voice of a blond female customer in her forties interrupted Morgan's thoughts.

She felt her throat go dry but struggled to regain her composure, as she picked up the online order for her customer. "I'm fine Loni," Morgan answered as she showed her the item.

Loni Boden-Holloway looked at the hunting bow and arrow with a practiced eye. "It's perfect," she said. "Zack'll love it and if he don't, I will!"

Morgan laughed. Loni, a former sales associate, was a regular customer. She ordered a gift at the ecommerce store for her husband's birthday. Morgan remembered when Eric crushed on Loni hard. Despite being married and having given birth to five children, Loni was still attractive. She was a bit fuller around the waist and was rounder facially, but she certainly still aroused most of the male and certain female customers and staff, as Josh demonstrated. He was staring at her while putting away some flannel sweaters.

"You think this looks good, Joscie?" Loni asked the teen.

"Real good," Josh stammered. Morgan rolled her eyes. Her kid brother was practically salivating all over the merchandise.

"Well I'm glad you got exactly what you wanted," Morgan said delighted.

"Hey thanks for the discount," Loni said.

"You're a regular customer and a former employee," Morgan reminded the older woman. "We like to reward such loyalty and thank you for using our online store."

"My kids helped me with that," Loni said as she handed her the bow and arrow so Morgan could wrap it up. "They know all about the Internet. I only get as far as turning the dang thing on and off."

The two women laughed as Morgan handed her customer the merchandise.

Loni nodded at the flowers, "Oh, I'm sorry I just noticed them flowers! Those are lovely!"

"Thanks," Morgan replied.

"Who sent them?" Loni asked.

"Oh just a close friend," Morgan replied. Both she and Stuart decided to make their relationship rather low key. The card that accompanied the flowers was even signed by "Your Favorite Handsome Genius New Yorker (Guess Who?) :D"

"Close friend or more, he has good taste," Loni remarked admiring the pink and blue flowers. "He seems like a real keeper." Loni thanked Morgan again for her husband's birthday gift and left with her new find.

Morgan locked the register and drew the shades. Josh picked up the box with items that he and Morgan were going to drop off for their father. Josh held onto his box and turned to his sister.

"Morgan remind me again why I am wasting a perfectly good relaxing Fall Break working at the store," Josh complained.

"For three reasons," Morgan answered simply. "One: My regular associate has a family emergency this week and we are short handed. Two: You're a loving little brother who will do anything for your big sister, especially if it's financially beneficial for you. Three: Said big sister will pummel you if you don't!"

Josh gulped. Being the baby of the Matthews family certainly had its disadvantages. "As I was saying those are good reasons," Josh said "Don't forget the flowers." Josh reminded her. Morgan nodded and held onto the bouquet and her box before she punched the security code and locked the door. The siblings then exited the store into the cool autumn Philadelphia night.
Josh and Morgan put one box inside Morgan's jeep. "I'm hungry," Josh said. "You want I should get something from the drive-thru?" He nodded over at the nearby fast food place.

"I could eat," Morgan agreed actually feeling a bit hungry herself. "I'll have a Pirate Burger and a diet." Josh nodded as he entered his car and drove to pick up their food.

Morgan then bent down and picked up the other box for her father and lay it next to the first box in her jeep. She then lay the flowers on top of the boxes. Even though she made a show of it, she was nervous about being alone. The cyberstalking messages were starting to get to her. She turned her head to look closely at the jeep ignoring the alley that was featured in the last picture. Morgan whistled to keep her composure. She even sang the first song that entered in her head, a song from some animated movie that she hadn't seen in years about cats working in the movies. "Big and Loud," she said trying to be nonchalant but knowing that she was failing. "You wanna make your Mama proud/Make it big and loud …" She looked at her watch hoping that Josh would show up and she could get out of there.

She then felt someone grab her from behind and hold a knife to her throat. A large hand covered her mouth and she heard a man's low voice said harshly to her, "Morgan Matthews," he said.

"Don't say anything if you don't want your pretty head to get bashed in!" Morgan's screamed inside the man's closed hand and she struggled to kick at him. Another man, the one who spoke, stood across from Morgan patting a baseball bat in his hand. "Is this the bitch, Frog?" the man holding onto Morgan asked. The man with the bat nodded. He was in his late 30s and had blond hair "That's her!" He said.

Without much thought, she raised her foot slightly and managed to kick the other man in the shin. Out of surprise, he relaxed his grip enough to let the woman go. Morgan then faced the man in fighting stance and gave him a good leg kick of which she hoped her kickboxing instructor would be proud. Frog grabbed her neck in an attempt to subdue her, but she managed to turn around clumsily and elbow the guy. When he approached her, she reached up and kicked him in the family jewels.

Morgan managed to sneak away from the two stunned perpetrators and back away to her car. She was about to climb in the driver's seat when another man, a bald Hispanic man with a gold earring grabbed her from the front. Morgan was about to back up when the first guy grabbed her from behind. Now that she saw him up close, Morgan could see that he was white and had an eagle tattoo on his forearm.

Morgan continued to struggle as Frog appeared at her side. He stroked her blond hair in a way that could be described as eerily tender. "I am looking forward to this," the man with the bat said. "Now lay your legs wide open, bitch!" He then nodded at the others and motioned at the alley behind the store.

"Get off me," Morgan yelled. "Get away from me, motherfuckers!" She screamed every word that she could conceive. She remembered that unfortunately bystanders didn't intervene when someone yells, "rape," but they will if someone yells, "fire!" Morgan yelled at the top of her lungs, "FIRE, HELP, FIRE!" She didn't get very far when one of the men forcibly put a gag in her mouth. "That will shut you up, bitch," Frog threatened. The three men then forced the young woman on the ground of the alley. Though, she screamed through the gag and pushed with her legs and arms, the men managed to take off her flannel shirt and unzipped her jeans. She shivered inside her white panties and undershirt. She managed to kick the bat man good and hard as he undid her ponytail. Two of the men grabbed her arms and pushed them to the ground. "Bet you don't get this from that geek Minkus!" the bat man said as he was the first to mount the woman. Morgan continued to yell and use her feet and hands to struggle. If they were going to take her, she was certainly going to give them a hell of a time with it. Frog managed to get inside and mounted her giving a satisfied grunt.

A gun shot rang through the air near the wall. The men looked up from the attempted rape to hear a voice, Josh's voice, say out loud, "I think she's over there officer behind the alley! I heard her!"

The two men let go of Morgan and ran off. "Where you going?" Frog asked grabbing Eagle Tattoo's arm.
"I ain't going back to prison man," Eagle Tattoo whined. "Boss Lady ain't paying me enough for that!"

He followed his colleagues. Frog looked confused but reluctantly followed his acquaintances. Morgan wasn't going to let him have the final say. Even though she was still on the ground, struggling to rise, she reached up and kicked him again. "Bitch," the man said and was about to mount Morgan again by himself, when another gunshot filled the air. The man apparently decided that it was a lost cause and ran into the shadows.

Morgan sank down in the alley as her younger brother ran up to her. Josh helped her stand, "My god, are you okay?" he asked hugging his older but shorter sister. Morgan nodded. She tried to be brave and hold her emotions in check, but her lip quivered and her eyes filled. Before she could do anything, she began to sob. Josh held his sister tightly and comforted her. "It's okay, Morge, it's going to be okay," he said. "Let's get to Mom and Dad's."

Morgan shook her head. "No, I'll be okay. Just take me home," she said. Josh looked closely at his sister. "Morgan, even the toughest woman occasionally needs her Mommy and Daddy."

Morgan laughed through her tears. Sometimes Josh's working with children, during his pediatric neonatal care studies, came out when he dealt with adults. But he was concerned and she didn't want to be alone. She nodded. "Okay. Where are the police officers that were with you?"

Josh smiled. "You think I had time to call a cop after hearing that? We'll call them when we get to Mom and Dad's. We'll take my car," Josh offered. "You can get yours tomorrow." Josh picked up his older sister and helped her stand.

"Thanks Josh," Morgan said.

"I should have shot the bastards, unfortunately, I only got the wall," Josh growled as he led his sister to his car. He pointed at the .22 caliber in his hand.

"That's the one from the register," Morgan realized. "It wouldn't have done any good. It only has blanks in it."

Morgan sat in her parent's living room surrounded by Josh, her father Alan, her mother Amy, two police officers, and their neighbors, George and Lila Feeny. Lila Bolander-Feeny gave the young woman some herbal tea as Morgan explained her attack and gave a description of the men. "There were five of them," she said. "I think they were of mixed ages, between twenties and thirties. One was older and had a bat. They didn't look very old. One was Hispanic and had a shaved head and he had a gold hoop earring in his ear. Another was white with dark hair and had a tattoo that looked like a bird, a hawk I think- no, an eagle definitely an eagle! The main one was older probably in his thirties and had blond hair and a beard. He had the bat. I think one of the other guys called him, 'Frog' or something like that."

"Did you know any of them previously?", the male police officer, Sgt. Jones asked.

Morgan shook her head. "No. I have no idea who they were."

"They didn't rob you?" the male officer inquired.

Morgan shook her head. She sipped the tea in her fear. "I don't think that's what they were there for, if you know what I mean."

Amy held her daughter's shoulders tightly. The female officer, Lt. Ramirez approached Morgan. "Now Morgan I know this is difficult for you, but can you remember anything specific that they said? Anything might help us identify them."

Morgan shrugged. I don't know, it's all a blur," she said. "I remember one telling me that I was going to get my 'pretty head bashed in.' " She started. It was the same phrase that was in her cyberstalking messages. Were these men her cyberstalkers? While she hardly considered herself a criminal profiler, she didn't think that they were the type. Why would they have warned her before they raping her? They probably would have done it without the scare tactics. She remembered that they mentioned "Minkus" by name. They knew that she was the "Ub!" She also clearly heard them say something about a "boss lady." Were they working for her cyberstalker?

"Morgan," Ramirez prompted.

Morgan looked upwards at the concerned faces. "I'm sorry I was trying to remember. That was the
only thing that stuck out that they said except for threats, 'bitch,' 'lay your legs wide open' that sort of thing. I don't know who they were."

"Now this is a delicate question," Jones asked. "How far did they manage to get with you?"

Morgan shook her head. "Not very, the first guy, Frog, he got in, but I tried to fight him off. I managed to get a few kicks in, some where it really counted."

"Atta girl," Lila supplied. Amy patted Morgan on the shoulder and Lt. Ramirez smiled. Alan, George, Josh, and Sgt. Jones said nothing but did cover their private areas, probably in sympathy of a particular sore spot that all men would feel.

"No, they didn't do very much," Morgan interpreted. "I was able to fight them off and Josh, my brother, managed to get their attention."

The police officers took a few more notes. "Alright well we'll keep an eye out for these guys," the male said. "Thank you for helping us, Ms. Matthews and thank you for aiding your sister, Mr. Matthews."

"Yeah thanks," Morgan said kindly to her brother. Josh smiled in return.

"We'll find them. Don't worry about it," Ramirez said.

Amy saw the police officers off as the door closed. She then sat down next to her daughter and held her hand. "You ought to spend the night here," she offered.

Morgan nodded. "Okay." She was too nervous and frightened to argue.

"Is that all that happened, Morgan?" Feeny asked.

"Yeah, it was all I could remember," Morgan said.

"Everything," Feeny said like he didn't believe her.

"George," Amy said defending her daughter. "Don't you think she's been through enough?"

Feeney held up his hand. "I know I was just trying to help."

"Well thank you, George," Alan said. "But I don't think that this is the time."

Morgan shook her head. "Would you excuse me? I left my cell and purse in the kitchen," she said.

"Then, I'm going to go to bed. I'm kind of tired."

Morgan entered the kitchen where her purse lay. In the confusion of entering the house in a jumble of tears, she and Josh breathlessly telling their parents, and calling the police, Morgan left her purse and cell phone on the table. She entered the kitchen and picked up her purse. Panic entered her soul as she felt her phone vibrate. She didn't want to, but something inside compelled her to pick up the phone. Morgan picked it up and read: Did you like it? More will happen if you don't dump Stuart Minkus!

"Ms. Matthews," Feeny's voice interrupted her causing the blond woman to jump about a mile. She faced her brothers' teacher. "My wife wondered if you wanted anymore tea before you went to bed."

"No, Mr. Feeny," Morgan said nervously. "I'm fine. I'm just about to go upstairs. Thanks anyway."

"You need your sleep," Feeny said as the young woman turned away from him. "It was a trying time almost having your pretty head bashed in."

Morgan started and turned to the older man. "What?"

"The way you mentioned those words and drifted off implied you remembered something," Feeny said.

"Do you really know everything?" Morgan asked incredulously. Since Feeny moved ahead when Cory, Eric, and Shawn were students, Morgan never actually got to experience him as a teacher, but she did know him as a neighbor and family friend. She had heard Cory and Eric described him as someone who was "freaky in knowing everything." Even in his 80's, he seemed to possess that intuitive nature that confounded all of the former children who were familiar with his methods.

"Close to it I imagine," the retired educator said with his characteristic pomposity. "Something about that phrase bothered you. Did the rapist use it before?"

"No," Morgan said. "I never knew them before tonight. It was-someone else."

"What is it, Ms. Matthews?" Feeny said. When Morgan remained silent, Feeny came near her. "Morgan, either you tell me and I do my part in helping this go away or you don't and it remains inside you and never leaves."
Morgan sighed and handed the phone over to Feeny. She showed him the text messages. Feeny read through them without commenting, until he finished the last one. "Amazing that people could use such bastions of information to intimidate and frighten. News travels fast enough to make a simple private moment between two people public and for others to transform that moment into something vulgar."

"You know about the gossip between Stuart and me," Morgan said. "Cory, Topanga and Mom and Dad guessed, but we didn't tell anyone. But you know."

"All I saw in that photograph were two lonely people who found their way to each other and expressed their love," Feeny said. "They just happened to be one of my former students and my neighbor. It's no justification for these messages, nor for what happened to you tonight."

"I never said I was in love with Stuart Minkus," Morgan said. "We just kissed once, well twice, because another time was at the airport. We were acting very romantically and it just happened for a minute. It was a stupid mistake."

"Will you do as they suggest?" Feeny asked.

"I don't know," Morgan said. "He has enough problems to worry about without me and if my cyberstalker is his ex-wife, there could be more problems. I probably should. It would be better than him thinking that we have a chance."

"I suppose," Feeny said. "Now about all of this-"

"You're not going to tell my parents are you?" Morgan said.

"No," Feeny said honestly. "Because you are a grown woman and you know that you should. You should also tell someone else."

"Stuart," Morgan realized.

"If for no other reason than he deserves to know the real cause over why you wish to end things with him," Feeny said.

"Before anything real even started," Morgan sniffed.

"It looked real to me," Feeny suggested. He then left the kitchen no doubt to leave Morgan to think over what he said. Morgan's lip quivered as she glanced at the flowers Stuart ordered for her. The pink ones were the same as the flowers on the skirt she wore when she was in his office. The blue were the same color as she wore the night that they kissed. She shook her head and rather than think anymore about Stuart Minkus, Morgan picked up the flowers and threw them in the trash can.

Minkus picked up his cell phone and read the caller's name: Matthews, Morgan. He answered it confused. "Morgan?" he asked. "What's up?" They had called and texted often. While the conversations were mostly friendly and non-committed, some of the latest had become flirtatious, even borderline sensual. Last time, they talked, Minkus said that he couldn't wait to see the most beautiful Christmas gift that he could ever imagine.

"Knock it off Millionaire," Morgan teased then.

"What I'm just speaking the truth," Minkus teased back. "I know you're pretty. You know you're pretty."

Suddenly, there was a tense silence and Morgan sounded uncomfortable. "I have to go," she said sounding upset.

Minkus was confused about the abrupt change in her voice. He wondered if he said something to offend her. "Morgan, I'm sorry. You're more than pretty. If you think I objectified you, I'm sorry."

"No it's not that," Morgan said. "It's just-I can't talk about it!" She then hurriedly hung up before Minkus could explain.

That conversation was a week ago and Minkus hadn't heard from her since. He thought of calling her back, but receiving the divorce papers and his sessions with Rosemary knocked that clean out of his mind. He should apologize. At the very least, he hoped she got the flowers. While he had ordered flowers for her before, he partly ordered them this time to apologize as well as to be friendly.

"Morgan I'm sorry that I've been unavailable this week. I meant to call but I received the papers from Jennifer. We're beginning divorce proceedings."
"I know," Morgan said quickly. "That's okay. It's just-Stuart, I can't see you anymore!"
"What's wrong, Morgan?" Minkus asked confused. "Is something going on?"
"No," Morgan said desperately. "It was just one big mistake, one big stupid mistake! A mistake
that isn't worth repeating! We lost our heads and there isn't any need to make a big thing about it,
okay?"
Minkus shook his head. "I don't understand, Morgan. That isn't what you said before."
"Forget what I said before!" Morgan snapped. "Just don't call me, don't text or email me and don't
try to see me okay? It's over!"
Minkus' heart sank. He knew that he and Morgan were only casual wanting to see where things
went and neither was in a hurry to press the matter further. But, there was something final about
her words. She wanted to end things before they could have ever begun. "Morgan, is it the
publicity?"
"Yeah just leave it at that," Morgan said in a way that made Minkus think that it was more than the
publicity. "Please, Stuart, don't ask me again. You have enough to go through. I'm just not ready to
go through it with you!"
"Morgan? Morgan," Minkus asked as the woman hung up the phone. He was confused. Why
would Morgan break things with him? Had he implied or said too much or not enough? Had she
been hounded by reporters? That would make even the strongest person reluctant if they weren't
used to being in the public eye. He would have to talk to Cory Matthews about his sister. Maybe
she told him something.
He was about to text Cory's number when the door burst open and a jumble of kid's legs and arms
ran into the apartment as one. "Come on in, gang," Minkus said dryly to Farkle and his friends.
"Dad have you heard about the TV?" Farkle asked at the same time that the others were telling him
to turn it on.
"No, I've been working most of the day," Minkus replied. "What's the matter?"
Riley reached over and flipped on the remote. She chose the right channel and Minkus could see
Melody Starr, the local TV reporter seated in a comfortable armchair in a studio. Seated across her
was his former wife, Jennifer Bassett-Minkus dressed primly in a navy blue dress. She had her
arms folded in an almost prayer like position. She wore a golden cross necklace to complete the
ensemble. She looked like a novitiate shy of a habit. Our Lady of the Divine Bitchiness, Stuart
thought bitterly. "So you believe that Stuart Minkus married you because he was after your
money?" Melody Starr asked her.
Minkus sank down on the sofa and watched the interview in silence with his son and friends. "I
know he did," Jennifer said. "He told me himself. When we first dated, he said that he had a good
chance of becoming a millionaire before he was twenty-one and my father was the ticket to get him
there. I was just now what did he say, 'a benefit in allying himself with the Bassetts.' "
"I never said that," Minkus said aloud.
"When did the abuse begin?" Melody asked in sympathy.
Jennifer sighed. "Almost as soon as we became engaged. We had a fight over him using his cell
phone while he was taking a business call. I felt that he wasn't spending enough time with me. We
had words and he called me a 'crazy bitch.' We fought over the cell phone and unfortunately I
struck him to get him off of me!
"That is not how it happened!" Minkus yelled. He quickly dialed Topanga's number. He could hear
the television noise in the background. "I take it you're watching this."
"Uh huh," Topanga replied. He could hear two men's voices in the background. Minkus vaguely
remembered that Shawn Hunter was visiting as well. He could hear Topanga through the phone,
"Cory turn it down."
"No, I want to hear the rest of this," Minkus said dryly. "I ought to put in a 'For Your
Consideration' to the Emmy Committee."
He then watched the interview as Melody asked her about the alleged abuse in their marriage.
Jennifer continued to affect a hurt pose. "I dropped out of college when we became married and
because of our move was unable to look for any sort of employment-"
"-Because you didn't want to find work," Minkus yelled at the screen.
"-My former husband said that I was lazy and was spending all his money the wrong way," Jennifer said with tears in her eyes.
"It was when you moved to New York that you got involved with alcohol and drugs," Melody reminded her.
"Yes," Jennifer replied. "I was so unhappy in my marriage and I felt like a stranger in a strange land. I turned to things that weren't good for me, I'm aware of that now and I want to bring my life together for myself and my son."
"Speaking of your son," Melody began. "How did your former husband react when he found out you were pregnant?"
"Oh no," Minkus paled. He turned to Farkle. "Farkle turn it off." Farkle didn't move. Instead the TV remained on.
"She's going to mention it isn't she?" Topanga asked over the phone. Because Topanga defended Stuart during his abuse charges, he told her about Jennifer's pregnancy and his earlier ambivalent feelings about it. Cory also knew about it, because when Minkus wrote Jennifer's intervention letter, he almost included a sentence about suggesting the abortion. Cory suggested that Minkus delete that sentence because "I know it's a medical procedure. You know it's a medical procedure and Farkle knows that. But he's coming back from attempting suicide because he believed his mother didn't love him. The last thing that he needs to hear is that his father didn't want a baby either."
Instead Minkus changed the sentence to, "instead of looking forward to a joyous upcoming event, all I could think about was the additional pressure that a baby would add," to soften the words and to describe Minkus' concerned feelings rather than his suggestions for an alternative.
"He wasn't happy," Jennifer said. "He told me that he wanted me to have an abortion."
There was a silence in the room as Lucas, Riley, Maya, and Farkle turned towards Minkus. Minkus could only look at Farkle who paled and looked at his father accusingly.
"What I don't understand is why would you stay married to him if he was that horrible?" Melody asked.
"Why would any abused wife?" Jennifer said. "I was afraid that he would come after me. I will say this for him. Stuart Minkus is clever. The abuse was mostly verbal. He hurt me with words, and you don't always show evidence of that do you?"
Melody turned to the camera. "We'll be right back to discuss how infidelity rocked the Minkus marriage after this." Minkus had a feeling that it wasn't going to be Jennifer's infidelity that was the topic of discussion. It was going to be his almost infidelity with Sam Russo and possibly even his current relationship with Morgan Matthews. He wondered now about Morgan's call. Did she know about this interview? Is that why she wanted to end things with him?
The interview changed to a car commercial featuring young affluent people in their young affluent car speeding down the highway. Minkus turned to his son. Farkle still looked at him with those accusing eyes in deep silence.
Minkus turned to the phone. "I'll have to call you back, Topanga." He said as he hung up.
"Is it true?" Farkle asked hoarsely. "You didn't want me?"
Minkus shook his head. "No, Farkle, I did want you. I do want you."
"But you told her that you wanted her to abort me," Farkle said his voice as ashen as his face. "Farkle we were young and starting out," Minkus began. "We didn't have a lot of money then. She was spending a lot of money to the point that we were going to go broke. I was working all the time and wasn't spending enough time with her. We were having a lot of marital problems."
"Clearly things have changed," Farkle said sarcastically indicating the TV.
"The final straw was that Grandpa Ginsburg was going to be evicted from his home because I didn't have the money to pay for his care. When she told me that she was pregnant, I was exhausted, confused, and scared. I was staring at a pile of bills and a wife that I wasn't even sure that I wanted to live with any longer. I told her that there were options and we didn't have to go through with the pregnancy if we didn't want to."
"Why did you then?" Farkle asked. Riley stood up as though she were about to say something when Lucas and Maya held onto her as if to tell her to be quiet.

"She wanted to go through with it and after much thought I decided that I did too," Minkus replied. "Farkle, what I said and what I felt then was a knee-jerk reaction and it's a reaction that I have rued ever since. It was from a young kid who was completely terrified about the prospect of being a father."

"Well learning that neither of my parents wanted me terrifies me," Farkle demanded. "Farkle," Riley said standing up to hold onto him. Farkle ignored his friend and turned to his father. "Is there anything else that I need to know from this interview? Were you sleeping around too like she was?"

"No just considered it once," Minkus said then winced. Farkle was clearly being sarcastic, but his expression dropped when he realized his father was serious. Minkus held his breath and realized that he might as well come clean with his son. "There was a woman who worked at Minkus International. She was a video game designer. Her name was Sam Russo and she made the first video game-"

"-The Goddess Wars," Farkle said. "I have that game! That was made 8 years ago when I was five."

"It didn't get very far," Minkus replied. "We were interested in each other and we kissed but we both knew it was wrong. It ended before it ever became anything else."

"Why didn't you ever tell me about it?" Farkle asked. "If it wasn't anything more than a kiss?" "Because I didn't want you to think badly about me or your mother," Minkus replied. "Mine and Sam's relationship lasted to our Christmas party that year and your mother attacked us."

"When I was five that was when she was in the hospital," Farkle said. "She was sick in her mind. That's what you told me! Later, you told me that she attacked you and the police were called in. She found out! You were having an affair and she found out!"

Farkle was about to storm out when Minkus pulled him back by the elbow. "Farkle, all of this was in the past! None of this changes how I feel about you now! Your mother is just trying to divide us!"

"It's working," Farkle said sarcastically. He pushed himself away from his father. "At least I always knew that I made her miserable. But you too-Why didn't you ever say so?" He ran out of the apartment slamming the door behind him.

Minkus turned to his son's friends. "Would you please turn that off?" he asked bitterly. Riley reached over and turned off the TV. "I'd better go get him," Minkus said.

"No," Maya spoke up. "We'll go get him. You do and he may just get mad again." She nodded at her friends and they followed her out the door. Minkus sank back down on the couch and lowered his head in shame and regret for past sins that he knew could never be healed.

Maya searched for her friend and saw him sitting on a nearby stairwell. "Is this step taken?" she asked.

Farkle rolled his eyes, but moved so Maya could sit next to him. "How long you going to be mad at your dad?" she asked bitterly.

"I'm not mad at him," Farkle said.

"Okay your mom then," Maya said.

"How much time do you have?" Farkle asked as an answer to the question. "He lied to me, Maya. He never told me any of that. Instead he went on making me think that he loved me."

"I'm sorry," Maya said sarcastically. "I was under the impression that he did. I mean he practically forced himself into your life. The monster talked to you and read to you! And God what kind of bastard lets you pick your own friends and encourages you when you're down? What kind of creep sits with their kid after he tried to kill himself and was his shoulder to cry on when the kid's Mom left him? Why that demon stood by you when you thought you were autistic! Hell, call Family Services in that he accepted you getting all Donnied up and still lets you wear what you want!"

"Okay I get it," Farkle said sarcastically. "But I found out that he didn't want me! I mean I guess if..."
"Mom went through it, I wouldn't be in any position to be upset about it. I would just be an aborted fetus. But what made my Dad not want me?"

"You found out your dad wasn't as perfect as you thought he was," Maya said. "By the time I was old enough to understand what an abortion was, my mom told me that she got as far as the waiting room in the clinic and couldn't go through with it. She said even after I was born, she considered contacting an adoption agency. She was 17, a high school dropout, and wasn't sure that she would be a good mom. I can't even imagine what it must have been like for her then and you don't know what it was like for your dad either. They were different people than the people that they grew up to become. They became the parents who loved their kids and would cut off their arms before anything ever happened to them."

Farkle considered what Maya said as she moved closer to him, her knee next to his. "Look we both have one fucked up parent and one loving parent that stayed. Alright maybe I got annoyed with my Mom in that she works overtime and embarrasses me with her actress stories, but I wouldn't want her any other way. I know you feel the same way about your dad."

"We're both damaged goods aren't we," Farkle said. "Half screwed up and half-good."

"Together we make one good," Maya said.

"One whole good," Farkle agreed as he held Maya's hand. He started and was about to withdraw it. It was different than when he held Smackle's hand, Farkle could tell. With Smackle it was more encouraging, a gesture between friends, an emotional release that she needed. With Maya, it was more electric, the result of a long quest. "I'm sorry. I forgot that you didn't want to be any more than friends."

"Farkle," Maya corrected. "Did I say that I wanted you to stop? It feels nice." Farkle continued to hold Maya's hand. Riley and Lucas approached their friends. "Looks like you two found each other," Lucas said. Maya and Farkle smiled still holding hands. "Yeah I guess you could say we did," Farkle said.

Minkus sat with Cory, Topanga, and Shawn in the Matthews' apartment. They discussed Jennifer's interview and Farkle's reaction. "That was such B.S.," Shawn said. "I wouldn't have believed her if she swore she were lying!"

"Well we all know that she is a master manipulator," Topanga said. "She just has a wider audience in which to practice."

"Hard to believe that she has such a great kid," Shawn said. Minkus turned to look at Shawn. "I mean no offence. It takes two to make a kid."

"None taken," Minkus said.

"Is Farkle okay, Minkus?" Cory asked. Minkus shook his head. "I don't know. The kids caught up with him and they talked with him. So I hope he's okay."

"Minkus," Shawn asked. "Why didn't you level with Farkle about all of that stuff beforehand about the abortion and the affair?"

Minkus lowered his head in shame. "It's hard to explain. Ever since Farkle was born, I felt that it was the two of us against the world. We were united because we were afraid of his mother and outsiders because of our genius. For a long time we had each other with no close friendships, until the past few years of course." He smiled at his friends. "We had our own little world which belonged to us and no one else. To him in that world, I was Superman. Lately, he had lost so much but I didn't want him to lose me. I didn't want him to lose Superman."

"I'm sure that he didn't lose Superman when he found out he was Clark Kent," Cory observed.

"You made mistakes, but the important thing is that you learned from them. You set out to be a better father than the one that found out his wife was pregnant."

"I guess I never told Farkle because I didn't want to lose his love," Minkus said.
"You didn't," a voice interrupted him. The adults turned around and looked to see Maya, Riley, Lucas, and Farkle enter the living room. Minkus approached his son. "Farkle-I-
Farkle held up his hand. "Dad, remember when you took me stargazing the first time when I was five? I broke our telescopes and I was afraid that you wouldn't like me. You told me something that I never forgot. You said that you could never dislike me for anything. Did it ever occur to you that I feel the same way about you? Dad, you could never do anything that would cause me to hate you."
Minkus wrapped his arms around his son and kissed the top of his head. "I won't lose you, kiddo. Not to her, not to anyone."
The tender moment was interrupted by the sound of glass shattering in the air and the force of something that dropped. Riley and Topanga screamed and the group ducked to avoid the impact. Everyone talked at once. "What was that?" Was it a bomb?" "What happened?"
Cory examined the shattered glass on the floor and picked up the item: a brick with a piece of paper wrapped around it. "It's a good thing that we weren't anywhere near this," Cory said. Auggie entered the living room as his father opened the paper on the brick. "Mommy, Daddy what's going on?" he whined being woken up from his sleep. Topanga approached her son. "Nothing Sweetie. A window broke and scared us that's all." She shepherded Auggie to his bedroom to put him back to bed. Cory read the note, "Attack All Abusers!"
"Someone must have seen me come in the apartment," Minkus reasoned. "We'd better go home. I'm very sorry for this. I'll pay for the window if you want. It's my fault."
"Don't worry about it for now," Cory said. "We'll just get rid of the glass." He then picked up a broom and dustpan as Farkle and Minkus left.
When Minkus entered work the next day, chaos already erupted from the outside. A protest group similar to the one outside Minkus International on the same day of Minkus' dismissal, now appeared outside the Minkus Technologies office. Minkus even recognized some of them, particularly their blond leader, Claire Ferguson. She led the shouts into her bullhorn. "Boycott Minkus!" She chanted. "Down with Domestic Violence! Attack Abuse!"
Claire Ferguson was speaking loudly for the benefit of her followers as well as the reporters. "He shouldn't be free to walk! Stuart Minkus shouldn't have his child! I have a list of businesses that are working with Stuart Minkus and we will boycott every one of them! Abuse makes abusers powerful! Abusers should be attacked so they can lose their power!" She then lead the chant of, "Attack Abuse!" "Attack Abuse!"
Minkus ran past the protestors and reporters until Melody Starr stopped him. Terrific the last reporter that he wanted to talk to. "Mr. Minkus do you have any comments about the interview with your former wife?"
Minkus was about to begin with a "no comment" but figured that he would have to answer Jennifer sooner or later. "I enjoy reading fiction, but I don't comment on it."
"Then you would say that Ms. Bassett's allegations are untrue," Melody continued.
"To paraphrase Mark Twain, half of the things that you hear about me are untrue and the other half are lies," Minkus said wanting to enter the building.
"Do you have any comments towards your upcoming divorce," Melody continued clearly not taking the hint.
"Ms. Starr, there are two responsibilities that are important to me right now, earning a living and raising my son. I can't do either of those things with this circus in the way. Now good day," he said as he entered the building without responding to any more questions. He met his colleagues as they greeted him. "Hi gang," Minkus said. "I take it you heard."
"Heard what that apparently you make Ike Turner look like husband of the year?" Eddie asked showing Minkus the newspaper headline: Bassett-Minkus Tells All About Ex.
"I'm very sorry, sir," Jessie said as she was speaking on the phone. "I hope that you will do business with us anyway. Hello? Hello?" She hung up the phone and crossed the name off their
"We have had five refusals already. The publicity is too much for them."
Minkus sighed and hung his head back. "Manhattan School District still good?"
"Yes they're still on our side," Jessie said.
"They'd better be. I don't know what else we are going to do with all of these laptops and Feenixes they paid for," Minkus said dryly indicating the technologies that were boxed and ready to be shipped out later that day. "It's probably only going to get worse. Everyone!" He called his employees over. "Everyone I would like to call an unofficial staff meeting!" Eddie, Jessie, and the technicians approached. "Gather around, gather around."
He waited until the staff had gathered before he spoke. "I'm not going to mince words. The publicity is getting bad and will probably get worse. We already lost five clients, maybe more before this is over. I wouldn't blame any of you if you wanted to walk out right now. We're not at crash and burn yet, but we will probably be very close. If you want to leave, now is the perfect time and I promise I will write you good references." He motioned for the door.
There was a tense silence as Minkus waited. Only two of the new technicians walked out. Most of the staff remained including Mike, Ali, Lonny, Christine, Eddie, and Jessie. "Well that's more than I expected would stay. You are either the bravest or the stupidest people alive. But thank you all."
He was about to dismiss the meeting when the glass to a window shattered upon impact. A collective gasp fell from the staff members as a rock bounced off the front and hit Ali square on.
"Are you okay?" Christine asked examining her colleague.
Ali rubbed her sore head. "Ouch, I didn't see that one coming," she said. "You think I would." She joked with her interest in psychic abilities.
"That will leave a good size lump," Jessie said. "You ought to go to a doctor."
Minkus had already called 911. "An ambulance is on its way," he said. He then turned to Ali and held up three fingers. "How many fingers am I holding up?"
"I see beyond the fingers," Ali said somewhat dazed.
"Well she's normal," Lonny Overton teased about his colleague and friend.
"You know how they talk about seeing stars," Ali said. "I actually saw them. You think it's just something in cartoons."
Eddie picked up the rock and held open a note. "Attack the Abuser."
"Another one," Minkus muttered. He heard the ambulance siren approach and slow down. The Minkus Technologies staff waited as paramedics entered and helped Ali into the ambulance and counted her vitals.
"I like Ali," Farkle said as Minkus explained about the attack. Luckily, though Ali was in great pain, she would be fine after a few days' rest in the hospital. "She's nice. Why would anyone do that to her?"
He unlocked the door. "I don't know. I'm sure they were after me! This is getting intense. First last night at the Matthews, and now with Ali. I'm sure Claire Ferguson's demonstrators did this."
"Can't they be arrested?" Farkle asked. "Breaking rocks and bricks into peoples' homes and businesses hardly counts as free assembly."
Minkus unlocked the apartment door as he spoke. "I called the police on both. They had the right to peaceful protest, but they crossed the line when they started attacking." He was interrupted when they entered the room. There was a strangled and pained meow from the floor. "Fluffy," Farkle gasped. Father and son ran to their white Persian. Fluffy lay on the floor blood pouring out of her small body. Minkus examined her up and down but the cat meowed in mournful pain. "What happened to her?"
"I don't know," Minkus said. "Farkle get her cat carrier. We'll take her to the vet!"
Farkle was about to obey his father when he stopped in his tracks. "Dad," he said.
"Oh Farkle please don't panic now," Minkus begged. "This is an emergency!"
"No Dad, look," Farkle pointed at the window. Minkus stood up and saw exactly what his son was pointing at. A bullet hole had punctured the glass and shattered one side of the window. Minkus
held onto the cat as he and his son put her in her carrier.

"She was in so much pain from the gunshot and they couldn't do anything for her," Minkus said to his friends. "So the vet gave her an injection and had her put down." Cory, Topanga, and Shawn listened sadly to their friend recount the death of the Minkus family cat. "I'm so sorry, Stuart," Topanga said.

"We had her cremated and bought a beautiful urn to put her in," Minkus said. "It's now on our living room table. Fluffy always liked to be the center of attention. Well now she is." "This is fucked up," Shawn said. "This is getting ridiculous!"

"Shawn where are you going?" Cory asked.

"I'm going to talk to Claire Ferguson myself and put a stop to this," Shawn commanded.

"Are you sure that's a good idea," Cory said.

Shawn looked at his best friend. "Come on Cory. You and I both know that it isn't Minkus that she's really after." Cory nodded understanding what his friend meant. Shawn left his friends behind.

"What did he mean by that?" Minkus asked.

"Just some personal stuff," Cory said diplomatically.

Minkus lowered his head in deep thoughts. "I have been examining myself over and over. Sometimes I'm beginning to wonder if what they say is true."

"Minkus you are the least abusive parent that I know," Cory said.

"I keep going over in my head," Minkus said. "Sometimes I lose my temper or I get sarcastic with people. Sometimes I ask myself 'Did I say something that upset Farkle?' 'Did I make him feel somehow inferior?' I haven't had a lot of patience with him lately and I've been preoccupied with work. Maybe that plays out when I talk to him. I sometimes get so frustrated with everything around me, that I want to hit the first thing I see and he's there."

"But you don't and you don't belittle him," Topanga reminded him.

"Minkus what you described isn't being abusive," Cory said. "That's being a parent."

"Everyone has bad days," Topanga replied. "I get annoyed with Cory and the kids at times."

"We all do," Cory said. "The difference is that Farkle isn't afraid of you. The evidence speaks for itself that you love him and don't abuse him."

"And Jennifer?" Minkus asked. "What if what she said about how I treated her was true?"

"I think you gave her a lot more than most people would have," Topanga said. "You have had tremendous patience to put up with her abuse for so long. It was all about power and control with Jennifer and she kept trying to take that from you. You may have fought back verbally, but what other choice did you have? It was self-defense and defending your child. Anyone could see that."

"I wish I could believe that," Minkus replied. Farkle entered the living room and wrapped his arms around his father and kissed his cheek. "What was that for?" he asked.

"Just letting you know that it's going to be okay," Farkle said. "No matter what." Minkus squeezed his son's hand.

"Like I said, the evidence speaks for itself," Cory said with a smile.

Cory and Topanga rose to leave the Minkus' apartment when Stuart called Cory over. "Cory, is there something going on with Morgan?" he asked.

"Not that I know of why?" Cory asked.

Stuart quickly explained about Morgan breaking things off with him before the interview. "She sounded pretty upset and shaken," Minkus replied. "I hope no one threatened her or anything. She wouldn't say why."

"I don't know," Cory replied. "She hasn't said anything to me. You know you might want to talk to Josh. He's been off for Fall Break and he was in Philadelphia. He might know something."

"I'll do that then, thanks," Minkus replied waving the two off.

Cory and Topanga returned to their apartment to meet Riley and Maya at the door.

"Mom, Dad," Riley said. "I have an idea!"

"What about?" Cory said suspiciously.
"Dad remember how you were talking about how the media manipulated events?"
Riley began.
"I think I can be trusted to remember a lecture in class that I gave just yesterday," Cory remarked.
In class, Cory showed the students various commercials and interviews such as Lyndon B. Johnson's "Daisy" ad, Reagan's "Bear in the Woods" ad, and clips of Katie Couric's interview with Sarah Palin, and 60 Minutes' 1992 interview with Bill and Hilary Clinton.
"Well you told us that the media can be used for good or bad," Riley reminded her father. Cory also demonstrated how the media grabbed hold of events like the 2009 earthquake in Haiti, the photographs of the Vietnamese girl covered in napalm, or the Tank Man in Tiananmen Square and made people aware of the events so they could create great change.
"Yes Riley," Cory said.
"Well what if we got the media on our side to work for Mr. Minkus and Farkle rather than against them?" Riley asked.
"You mean get Mr. Minkus to be interviewed in turn," Cory suggested.
"Well sort of," Maya said. "Actually Riley and I were thinking that maybe it's about time that we put a thorn in Farkle's mom's side."
Cory and Topanga exchanged sly glances. "Sometimes the answer is staring at us right in the face and we don't notice," Cory mused.
Topanga nodded. "I'll call him right away." She took out her cell and dialed a familiar number.
"T.J. Murphy please?" she said to the receptionist answering.
Shawn and Katy entered the domestic abuse center. They approached the director's room as she finished talking to a brunette woman with two children. "Don't worry," she promised. "We'll find a safe place. That's what we're here for." Claire Ferguson walked the woman out into the main room and introduced her to staff.
Claire then returned to her office as Shawn and Katy remained. "Hi Claire, long time no see."
"Hi Shawn," Claire said. "I'm really busy. I don't have a lot of time."
"What I say won't take very long," Shawn answered. "I'm here for Stuart Minkus."
"You want to join our demonstration then?" Claire asked. "We could always use more volunteers."
"No, I want you to cut it out!" Shawn said. "Stuart Minkus is a good guy and you're tearing into him!"
"He abused his wife and his child," Claire countered. "Boycotting is the least we could do!"
"No you're right," Shawn said. "I suppose you prefer throwing rocks and bricks into windows. How about shooting at them? You know one of those rocks hit one of his co-workers. You also shot at their cat! Christ what if Farkle was in there?"
"I had nothing to do with those incidents," Claire countered. "The ones who did that have been arrested and are not affiliated with A Safe House. They were rioters who were acting on their own volition and I denounced them. All I do is speak."
"You encourage it," Shawn said. "You keep hounding Minkus and telling others to attack him! How many people do you think are going to take you up on that?"
"I am not accountable for the actions of others," Claire insisted. "All I am trying to do is make people aware of domestic abuse."
"You have a good cause Claire," Shawn said. "I understand that. But you are picking the wrong villain!"
"He's a husband and father who has hurt his wife and child repeatedly and thinks that money lets him get away with abuse," Claire said. "I don't believe that because the charges were dropped, that makes him an innocent man! I don't think there is more that needs to be said. I can't believe you're defending him, Shawn."
"He's my friend," Shawn said. "And I know him. He would never hurt his wife or his son! I also know his ex and you can't believe anything she says!"
"I can't believe anything you say, Shawn," Claire said. "That man is the enemy! He doesn't deserve a chance to explain himself! All he will do is tell the press some bull story about how she's wrong and that his son deserves it! That's what they do!"
Her eyes quivered and she lowered her head. Shawn approached Claire and put his hand on her shoulder. "Claire, I know what your dad did to you. Remember, I helped you. I know that you probably see him in every abusive husband or father. But Minkus isn't like that. He's not some villain that you conjured up and held as a symbol. He's a person, a person who has been hurt by these protests."

Claire glanced up to face Shawn. "You know when I left my father's house and moved to my aunt's in Vermont, I swore one thing: I would never marry a man like my father. What did I do? I married a man like my father. If I hadn't the foresight to divorce him after I found out I was pregnant, I would still be with him. It's for my little girl, Stephanie, that I do this so she would never have to go through what I did."

Shawn hugged his friend. "I know, Claire. It's been tough. But Minkus isn't your father or your ex-husband. He's a good guy who loves his son. Hey, if you don't believe me, then maybe you should listen to her." He nodded at Katy.

"Claire," Katy said holding onto the other woman's hand. "I understand exactly what you are going through. Because I've been there and you and I aren't the only ones who have." She then sat next to the Non-profit director and told her about her and Stuart's involvement in the abuse support group. Minkus watched the news broadcast as Claire Ferguson was being interviewed saying that protests against Minkus Technologies have been dropped. "I know people will say that I was bought off or I'm selling out. But the truth is, I have learned some things about Mr. Minkus and his former wife that have made these protests no longer valid and have compromised A Safe House's involvement in them. I have gotten the public's attention towards the issues of domestic violence and child abuse and my work here is done. Instead, I prefer to fight abusers the way I always have with helping one abused woman, child….or man at a time." Minkus turned off the TV in amazement. He didn't know what Shawn said to Claire, but it seemed to work. His cell phone rang. Minkus read the caller I.D.: Murphy, Thomas.

"Hello?" he asked.

"Hello Mr. Minkus," he heard a man's voice ask. "You don't know me, but my name is T.J. Murphy."

The name sounded familiar to Minkus. Then he remembered. "Oh weren't you the reporter that helped with Eric Matthews' senate campaign?"

"Yeah that was me," T.J. replied. "Good Eric needs all the help he can get," Minkus quipped.

"Tell me about it," T.J. answered with a good natured laugh. "I want to talk to you about your former wife. I think I can help."

"Sure how," Minkus said. "Do you want to conduct a counter-interview?"

"That's a start," Murphy said. "But I also want to investigate some of her claims during her interview with Melody Starr. There are also some dealings with her and her father that I think require further investigation."

"I'm not surprised," Minkus answered. "I'd like to talk with you about this."

"Alright," Murphy replied. The two of them arranged a time to meet and agreed to exchange information.

His cell phone rang again. Stuart this time heard the voice of his attorney, Rosemary Welles. "Stuart, set your calendar for January 15th," she said. "That's the first hearing."

"Over a month away," Minkus said.

"It works for us," Rosemary said. "In that time, we can martial our forces, rally the troops, and prepare our strategies."

"Are we going to court or to war?" Minkus asked dryly.

"Believe me it's both," Rosemary replied. "We need to talk about this soon."

"Okay," Minkus said. "I'll meet you tomorrow and thanks for everything, Rosemary."

"Don't thank me," Rosemary said. "This isn't over yet. Just make your New Year's Resolution to keep your kid."
Chapter Summary

IT’s Minkus Vs. Minkus. The custody trial wages on as loyal friends spring to Jennifer and Minkus’ defense.

The Lives of Genius
Boy/Girl Meets World Fanfic
By Auburn Red
Chapter Twenty-One: Trials of Life (Stuart Minkus Age 35-36; Farkle Minkus Age 13-14)

Author’s Note: The conversation between Jennifer, Cory, and Topanga about Shawn from “Girl Meets Farkle” is a little earlier than in the actual timeline. Instead it is during her and Stuart’s reconciliation period in the summer of Farkle’s seventh grade. (The reason I included it was because I felt in these circumstances its pretty crucial evidence of Jennifer’s inability to accept personal responsibility, plus I questioned it myself. I mean seriously, “Ha ha! I committed a crime against your best friend, but it was because you were afraid of me! Wasn’t that funny?” At least it gets a pass because Cory gives her a look like “I can’t believe you’re bringing it up like that.”) David Clark, the prosecuting attorney, Dr. Wilcox, Jennifer’s psychiatrist, and Judge Boyer are original characters.

Minkus looked over the fact checking provided by T.J. Murphy over his former wife’s interview. He was quite fascinated that T.J. came through for him. He not only poked holes into Jennifer’s claims by referring to her hospitalization stays and child abuse report, but also did some research on Edward Bassett’s media contacts revealing that Melody Starr was a member of one of Bassett investment’s multimedia conglomerates. It was almost incestuous how tight Edward’s contacts were with the family. He sent the reporter a gracious email thanking him for his research and also to Cory and Topanga for contacting him.

While T.J.’s fact checking certainly poked holes into Jennifer’s portrayal as a loving mother and wronged wife, he wondered if it would be of any use during the custody trial. He hoped at least it would shed some light in his and Farkle’s favor.


Minkus looked up to see Lonny leaning over Minkus’s cubicle. “What is it, Lonny?” he asked.

“Some lady wants to talk to you,” the software designer said. “Said she’s Ms. Bassett.”

Minkus rolled his eyes. What could Jennifer possibly want now? He wondered if it would be of any use during the custody trial. He hoped at least it would shed some light in his and Farkle’s favor.


Minkus looked up to see Lonny leaning over Minkus’s cubicle. “What is it, Lonny?” he asked.

“Some lady wants to talk to you,” the software designer said. “Said she’s Ms. Bassett.”

Minkus rolled his eyes. What could Jennifer possibly want now? He stood up and saw the front of their office where an older woman waited patiently.

“Eunice,” Minkus said in surprise. He cleared his throat. “I mean Mrs. Bassett.”

“Please you may still call me Eunice,” the older woman said. She was visibly pale and looked around as though she were being followed. “I don’t have a lot of time,” she said. “May I speak to you alone?”

“Sure,” Minkus said confused. He led her to his private desk and invited her to sit across from him.

Eunice slid two wrapped gifts across the desk to her former son-in-law. “These are for you and Farkle. I hope you two have a Merry Christmas despite everything.”

Minkus accepted them with some reluctance. “They don’t tick do they?” He asked dryly.

Eunice gave a thin smile. “No, they’re perfectly harmless.” She looked around. “I love what you have done with this office. Business seems to be going well.”

“As well as can be expected,” Minkus said. “Eunice not to be rude, but what are you doing here? Your husband made it perfectly clear that I was no longer to have anything to do with the Bassett
“I’m not here on behalf of my husband or my daughter,” Eunice said. “I came on my own. How’s Farkle? I haven’t seen him since before he—well before—”

‘-Since before his suicide attempt,” Minkus said cagily. “He’s adjusting. He’s at school, right now.”

“I’m sorry for everything that has happened,” Eunice said. “I’m sorry for what my husband and my daughter have done to you and Farkle. No matter how much they may justify it, it’s not right. I just ache when I think about what she did to that boy.”

“You believe me,” Minkus said stunned. Eunice nodded so Minkus continued. “Eunice, did you know how Jennifer treated Farkle while we were married?”

“I had a feeling that something was going on,” Eunice replied. “I tried to deny it, but yes I knew. Deep down, I always knew.”

“Did you know what I was getting into when we got engaged?” Minkus asked.

“I guess I hoped that you would change her,” Eunice said sadly. Minkus wanted to be angry with this woman but he couldn’t deny it. “I guess I did too.” He stood up and gave his former mother-in-law a quick hug.

“You were very fortunate to get out when you did,” Eunice sighed. “After a few years you no longer notice the harsh words and criticisms, you ignore them. They don’t wound you, instead they just remain like scars and calluses that are ugly to look at but no longer painful. It doesn’t hurt you when the children that you once tried to shield from the anger and cruelty no longer turn to you. Instead they turn away from you towards the other parent, the hurtful one. Those children whose tears you once washed away and protected from monsters see you as the weak and foolish one, the one who is worthy of your spouse’s derision and anger. They accuse you maybe of not protecting them, but of being just a stone to step over. They no longer have any love for you or anyone. Those children that you loved and nurtured no longer feel or understand love. They only know pride and ownership. That’s what hurts you.”

Minkus held onto Eunice’s hand understanding what she was saying. “Eunice, I am so sorry. I am so sorry for Jennifer too.”

Eunice shook her head. “It doesn’t excuse what she did. Did you have a happy childhood?” Minkus shook his head, so Eunice continued. “You were able to be a better parent. She isn’t. That makes all the difference.”

“Eunice, why don’t you leave?” Minkus asked. “You can get out too.”

Eunice shook her head. “What would I know? I have been married for over 40 years, since I was 20. Women’s Lib completely skipped me by. It’s too late for me, but it’s not too late for you or Farkle. At least that I can be grateful.”

Minkus nodded understanding. “Eunice, if you want to, you can come and see Farkle anytime.”

Eunice smiled with tears in her eyes. “Really you would let me?”

Minkus nodded. “Yes, it would be nice for Farkle to have a least one grandparent in his life.”

Eunice smiled and laughed. “I would like that.” She looked at her watch. “I’d better be going. Edward will start to miss me.” She turned away then turned back to her son-in-law. “I just want you to know that not everyone in our family hates you and no matter what the outcome of the trial, you will have at least one supporter among the Bassetts.”

Minkus smiled and thanked his former mother-in-law before she left.

He thought for a minute and then decided to dial Morgan’s cell number to wish her a Merry Christmas. He sent her a gold rose necklace as a gift. He wondered if she was alright since things had been frosty since she called before the interview. Was she even coming up to New York? He dialed her number. “Hello?” He could hear her voice.

“Hi Morgan it’s Stuart,” Minkus said.

Morgan’s voice sounded strained. “I can’t talk to you right now, remember. We can’t see each other anymore!”

“I know but there’s nothing that says that we can’t be friends,” Minkus suggested.

“No, Stuart,” Morgan said. “We can’t even do that, I’m sorry! Thank you for the necklace but
please don’t send me anything anymore!”
“Are you coming up for Christmas?” Minkus asked.
“No, I have to mind the store,” Morgan said. “I’m sorry. Stuart just-what we had was nothing! It
wasn’t anything special, I told you! Let’s not make it bigger than it was!” She hung up before
Minkus could talk again. Minkus stared at the phone in thought. Morgan had once again blown
him off. How did she go from being so approachable and loving to being so terrified and worried?
What happened to her? Maybe it was about time he took Cory’s advice and asked Josh Matthews,
their youngest brother.
Joe Willis, the RA, called Joshua Matthews’ dorm number. “Josh, there’s some old guy here to see
you. I think he’s your dad.”
“Thanks Joe,” Josh said through the phone. He came downstairs, but instead of Alan Matthews he
saw Stuart Minkus. “Minkus? What are you doing here?” He asked.
“I want to talk for a minute,” Stuart said.
Josh turned to Joe. “It’s okay; he’s a friend of my brother’s.” He said before he left with the CEO.
Minkus however was a bit miffed by the RA’s earlier comment. “Do I really look old enough to be
your father?”
“No, I mean you’re like what, 40?” Josh asked.
Minkus glared. “I’m 35, the same age as your brother!”
Josh shrugged. “I thought he was 40!”
Minkus sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose. It was painfully obvious that Josh was a
Matthews brother. “Out of curiosity how old do you think Eric is?”
“I don’t know 50,” Josh guessed.
Stuart figured that he had better get to the crux of the situation before he found out how old Josh
thought his parents were. “Alright, I wanted to talk to you about Morgan.”
Josh paled. “Morgan who?”
“Morgan your sister,” Minkus started.
“Oh that Morgan,” Josh nodded.
“Yes that Morgan,” Minkus said. “Around the same time that Jennifer was being interviewed, she
said that she couldn’t see me or speak to me anymore. I tried calling her a couple of times but she
wouldn’t return my calls or answer my texts or emails.”
Did something happen to her?”
“I’m not at liberty to say,” Josh said.
“I just want to be sure that she’s okay,” Minkus said. “I’m concerned about her. Is she upset about
the publicity? Reporters haven’t been bugging her have they?”
“Not reporters,” Josh said. “Look I’m not at liberty.”
“So she is getting bothered by somebody,” Minkus said understanding the unspoken implication in
Josh’s words.
“No, I’m not at liberty!” Josh half-shouted. “If you called Liberty, I wouldn’t be there!” He calmed
down before he continued. “Look, Minkus, if Morgan didn’t tell you, I can’t. If you want to know
what’s wrong you’d better ask her.”
“I tried,” Minkus said. “She won’t give me a straight answer.”
“Okay,” Josh said. “Something happened to Morgan over Fall Break. Someone hurt her. I think
she’s trying to deal with it in her own way. That’s all I can tell you. Minkus, she’s my sister. I don’t
want her to get hurt anymore.”
Minkus shook his head. “Neither do I.”
Josh held his breath. “Then maybe you ought to stay away from her. At least for now.”
Minkus couldn’t find any further answers so he turned around and walked out of the dorm building
into the freezing December night.
When Josh was certain that Minkus wasn’t in ear shot, he dialed his sister’s phone number. “Yeah
he asked me….No, I didn’t tell him anything!….Look, Morge you deal with this your own way but
don’t push away someone who really cares about you….I’m not talking about me, Sis.”
“All arise,” the bailiff announced. The audience rose as the judge, an older gray haired man
entered. The bailiff continued in a bored voice. “This court is now in session, the honorable Judge Gilbert Boyer presiding.” Judge Boyer banged on his gavel and ordered the audience to be seated. “Will the prosecution call their first witness,” Boyer asked as David Clark, a dark haired handsome attorney stepped forward.

“The prosecution calls Jennifer Bassett-Minkus to the stand.”

Jennifer rose and held up her right hand as the bailiff asked “For the record please state your name and occupation.”

“Jennifer Elaine Catherine Bassett,” Jennifer emphasized. “I have recently gone back to my maiden name; Socialite.”

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?”

“I do,” Jennifer answered as she sat back down.

The prosecuting attorney, David Clark stood up to face her. “Ms. Bassett could you tell the court the circumstances of how you met with Mr. Minkus?”

Jennifer nodded. “It was fall of 1999, about early November, I believe. My father said that he wanted to finance Stu- I mean my former husband’s company. We attended the same high school and university, but did not officially become a couple until the night of Minkus Technologies’ launching party.”

“This was the original Minkus Technologies later to become Minkus International now Meese International,” Clark said. “The company that your former husband was the CEO and in which he had been removed.”

“Yes sir,” Jennifer said. “My family felt that he had no business being CEO because he had beaten me.”

“Objection,” Rosemary said. “Irrelevant, those domestic violence charges had been dropped based on no evidence.”

“Overruled,” Judge Boyer said.

David Clark continued to question the woman on the stand. “How would you describe your early marriage to Mr. Minkus?”

“Tense as the rest of it,” Jennifer said. “We had moved to New York and I didn’t know many people. I felt like I was nothing more than a trophy wife.”

“Did your husband ever beat you or drink?” David asked.

“No, but he could be rather verbally cruel,” Jennifer said.

“How so, Ms. Bassett?” David asked.

“Well in August 2001, when I attended a party with Mamie Van Houten, my former husband dragged me off and told me that I had embarrassed him. He also ordered me to go home.”

“Had he argued with you in public since?” David Clark asked.

“Yes in Christmas 2007 at the Minkus Office Party he had spent too much time with one of his employees, a female at that. When I challenged him about it believing that he had an affair, he told me that I was making much ado about nothing and that I needed help,” Jennifer said.

“You attacked me,” Stuart rose from his seat challenging his ex-wife’s account.

“Mr. Minkus you will get your chance,” Boyer banged his gavel. “Let her speak.”

“Mrs. Minkus, how would you describe your relationship with your son?” David Clark asked.

“Distant through most of his life,” Jennifer answered honestly.

“The same son that you wish for custody,” Clark prompted.

“Yes, my former husband had monopolized his time, turned him into a genius in his own image, and in effect turned my own son against me,” Jennifer said.

“I did not!” Minkus argued again.

“Mr. Minkus,” the judge said. “I don’t want to have to tell you again. If you don’t sit down, you will be held in contempt of court.”

“You told Melody Starr that your former husband and I quote ‘suggested that you have an abortion’ when he learned you were pregnant,” Clark asked.

“Yes that’s true,” Jennifer replied.

“Would you say his behavior towards your pregnancy was ambivalent then?” Clark inquired.
Jennifer nodded. “Very much so. He was very unhappy and showed a lack of enthusiasm for the baby.”

“Ms. Bassett,” David Clark asked. “When your son showed signs of being a genius, how did you react?”

“I was pleased,” Jennifer stated. “He could read almost as soon as he could talk and could count on his fingers before he was two. What parent wouldn’t be happy about that?”

“How did your former husband react?” Clark asked.

“He was jubilant,” Jennifer said. “He was glad to see his son inherited his exceptionality. I believe that was a slap at my perceived 'unexceptionality.'”

“Objection,” Rosemary said. “She is speculating the meaning of Mr. Minkus’ comment. It could have had other meanings.”

“Sustained,” Boyer agreed.

“Your former husband almost immediately enrolled him in a pre Kindergarten enrichment program did he not, Ms. Bassett?”

“Yes, he did. From the time that Farkle showed signs of genius, he spent most of his time studying or attending classes,” Jennifer said.

“Ms. Bassett, you admitted that your relationship with your son is distant,” Clark said. “Why do you wish to obtain custody of him?”

“I’m his mother,” Jennifer said. “I gave birth to him. I breast fed him so he could be close to me. I provided a beautiful loving home for him while his father was out all hours working. I’m his mother. I need no more reason than that.”

“No further questions, your honor,” Clark sat down.

Rosemary’s turn came next. “Ms. Bassett, you alluded to the Christmas party of 2007 when you said that your husband accused you of making much ado about nothing, but you left out some important details.”

“Objection leading the witness,” Clark argued.

“Sustained,” Boyer agreed.

“I apologize your honor,” Rosemary said. “But Ms. Bassett is it true that earlier that week you had been arrested for driving under the influence?”

“Yes,” Jennifer agreed.

“And is it also true at that self-same party you referred to, you attacked your husband with a knife in full view of several employees of then-Minkus International?”

“I had a drinking problem,” Jennifer argued. “That’s no secret.”

“After you had been arrested from this party were you or were you not institutionalized and further diagnosed with ‘borderline personality disorder’?” Rosemary asked.

“Yes but I have been medicated for it,” Jennifer began.

“Answer the question were you or were you not diagnosed with borderline personality disorder?” Rosemary asked.

“Yes I was,” Jennifer replied.

“Do you still have a drinking problem, Ms. Bassett?” Rosemary asked.

“No, I do not,” Jennifer answered.

“Are you still considered mentally ill?” Rosemary asked.

“No,” Jennifer said. “I have been stabilized because of my medication.”

“How long have you been sober?” Rosemary asked.

“Four months now,” Jennifer replied.

“Did you have a drinking problem in August 2001?” Rosemary asked.

“I don’t recall,” Jennifer hedged.

“Did you have a drinking problem in August 2001 when you attended Mamie Van Houten’s party, the self-same party where you claimed that your husband dragged you off and told you that you embarrassed him?,” Rosemary asked.

“I established that I had a drinking problem,” Jennifer said testily.

“Objection,” Clark said. “I fail to see the relevance in this situation since it was before the minor,
Farkle Minkus, was born.”
Rosemary turned to the prosecuting attorney and the judge. “I am establishing a characterization of Ms. Bassett, your honor.”
“Sustained,” the judge said.
“How long have you had your drinking problem?” Rosemary asked.
“I don’t know, off and on probably over 15 years,” Jennifer counted.
“And you became sober four months ago, you stated, Ms. Bassett,” Rosemary asked.
“Yes, that’s true,” Jennifer answered.
“Do you really think that four months is long enough to recover from a drinking problem that has lasted longer than your son has been alive?” Rosemary challenged.
“I have had help with it,” Jennifer said. “In the past, I have quit cold turkey and was unsuccessful. Since I have returned from rehab, I no longer have the desire to drink.”
“Ms. Bassett, charges have been filed against you for child abuse,” Rosemary began.
“The sentence was lifted after I completed my rehab,” Jennifer answered.
“Of course but Ms. Bassett do you recall the events of September 15, 2015 after those charges had been filed against you and you then in turn filed charges against your former husband,” Rosemary asked.
“Yes,” Jennifer said testily.
“Where was your son during that time?” Rosemary asked.
Jennifer was silent so Rosemary asked again. “Where was your son during that time?”
“At Mt. Sinai Hospital’s intensive care unit,” Jennifer answered.
“What was he doing there?” Rosemary prompted.
“He had attempted suicide,” Jennifer said reluctantly.
“Right, now Ms. Bassett, where were you during this time?”
Jennifer looked straight ahead at the defense attorney. “I was in fear of my life! My son had been driven to suicide! My father advised that it wasn’t best to be with him!”
“Ms. Bassett,” Rosemary interrupted her. “I ask again, where were you when your son was in the hospital recovering from an attempted suicide?”
Jennifer looked downward. “I was at my family home in Rochester.” She continued hastily. “But I was worried about him! I thought he was dead!”
“Yet you didn’t call the hospital or your former husband to find out,” Rosemary said. “Instead you crawled inside a bottle!”
“Objection leading the witness,” Clark argued.
Rosemary turned to the judge. “No further questions your honor.”
“The prosecution calls Dr. Gregory Wilcox to the stand,” Clark said.
Farkle’s eyes widened at the name. Why did the name Greg sound familiar? He saw the man announce his name, occupation, and vow to tell the truth. He was a tall man with long thick black hair right above his shoulders. A memory entered Farkle’s mind: I can’t wait to run my fingers through your long black hair. His mother spoke to a lover on the phone several months ago, a lover whose name was Greg and had long black hair, just like this man! Could this be him? Farkle was so caught up in the recall that he nearly missed the line of questioning.
“Please explain your relationship with my client, Jennifer Bassett,” Clark said.
“She was my patient at the Rochester Mental Health & Addiction Treatment Clinic,” Dr. Wilcox stated. “I was her primary psychiatrist.”
“What was her condition when she first arrived?” David asked.
“She wasn’t well,” Greg said. “She had a severe drinking problem and had very strong emotional disorders, hovering between rage and depression. I believe she even spoke of suicide.”
“That sounds terrible,” David said. “How was she treated at the clinic?”
“We use a myriad of different styles,” Greg replied. “Some of it is cognitive therapy and we also use medication. With Je, I mean Ms. Bassett, we used a great deal of talk therapy and started her on regular doses of lithium.”
“What were some of the things that you discussed, Dr. Wilcox?” Clark asked. Wilcox opened his
mouth to say something, but Clark interrupted him. “Please remember that you are under oath, so doctor-patient confidentiality is a moot point.”

“Well Ms. Bassett spoke greatly of her isolated feelings from her husband and son,” Dr. Wilcox began. “She also spoke what she wanted to accomplish in her divorce.”

“So she had a plan after she had been released?” Clark said.

“Yes of course,” Dr. Wilcox said. “That is something that we encourage all our patients to work towards: having some sort of goal or plan to achieve once you have been released whether it’s finding solid employment, taking a vacation that they have wanted to take, or others. It gives the patient something to look forward to.”

“For the court’s benefit can you explain what some of the symptoms of ‘borderline personality disorder,’ the diagnosis that Ms. Bassett had been given during her first hospitalization in 2007?” Clark asked.

“Let’s see,” Greg Wilcox considered. “There is a charming superficiality, the ability to manipulate others, a very emotional, possessive, and violent nature, a tendency to self-destruct.”

“Yes yes and so on and so forth,” David Clark continued. “Would you have said that Ms. Bassett exhibited any of those symptoms when she was under your care in the months between September to November 2015?”

“Once she had become sober, I would say no,” Wilcox said.

“So you’re saying that her biggest obstacle was actually excessive drinking which has been treated and not being mentally ill, which would require further treatment in your professional opinion?” Clark asked.

“She is still seeking treatment for the drinking and still seeing a psychiatrist, namely me on a regular basis,” Wilcox said.

“So her status has been downgraded to an outpatient status?” Clark asked. “She is able to go out into the world and be with others.”

“Absolutely,” Wilcox answered. “She has made fine progress and is able to accomplish all of her goals.”

“So if her status has downgraded and she has made fine progress then in your definition should she be permitted to have primary, if not sole custody of her son, Farkle J. Minkus?” Clark asked.

“Yes, I believe so,” Wilcox replied.

“No further questions,” Clark said.

Rosemary stood up holding a form. “Dr. Wilcox, you said that Ms. Bassett has made fine progress and you authorized her release from the Rochester Clinic. How did you base this observation?”

“She was cooperative, helpful, and was willing to accept responsibility towards herself and others,” Greg Wilcox replied.

“How was she willing to accept responsibility?” Rosemary asked.

“She said that one of her goals was she wanted to be a better woman and a better mother,” Greg replied. “She had accepted that she had been rather ‘a bit short-tempered’ with her son and that she wanted to change.”

“So towards the end of her stay you had observed no misconduct and no difficulties that would cause her stay to be extended beyond the 60 days?” Rosemary asked.

“Nothing,” Greg answered. “I would have reported it if there had.”

“Yes you would have,” Rosemary said as she opened the file. “Are all staff and personnel required to put in writing any difficulties with patients particularly any that question their release?”

“Yes that’s a requirement from all staff from the custodian all the way up to the district manager,” Dr. Wilcox said.

“Is the review board supposed to take into account these written reports and decide from them whether the patient should be released or be required further hospitalization?” Rosemary asked.

“Yes, that’s correct,” Dr. Wilcox said sounding a bit tense.

“Your honor,” David Clark said. “I fail to see the relevance of repeating the Human Resources Handbook of the Rochester Clinic. It’s clear that Dr. Wilcox understands the protocol of his own profession. It is a waste of the court’s time and my client’s.”
“Please indulge me your honor,” Rosemary said. “I would like to call Dr. Wilcox’s attention to some interesting evidence of which he should be aware.”

“Proceed, Ms. Welles,” Judge Boyer prompted.

“Dr. Wilcox is it or is it not true that one of your attendants whose name has been withheld filed a disciplinary report towards Jennifer Bassett less than two weeks before the date of her scheduled hearing to determine her release?” Rosemary said.

“I have not heard anything about it,” Dr. Wilcox said.

“Well then there is no harm in you hearing it for the first time is there,” Rosemary said. She opened the file and read out loud. “The attendant writes that Ms. Bassett had physically and verbally attacked her. She said and I am quoting from the report, ‘she drew blood on my arm and called me names that I cannot repeat on account of being a Christian woman.’ Does this report sound out all familiar to you, Dr. Wilcox? Had you received it before Ms. Bassett’s hearing?”

“No, I did not,” Dr. Wilcox said.

“Do you know anything about this encounter between Ms. Bassett and the attendant?” Rosemary asked.

“This is the first time that I have heard of it,” Greg answered.

“Did any of the other personnel on the Review Board call the report to your attention?” Rosemary asked.

“As I said this is the first time that I had heard about it,” Dr. Wilcox said.

“Your honor it’s pretty clear that Dr. Wilcox had not heard about this written report against Ms. Bassett prior to the hearing so it has no basis whatsoever towards her eventual release,” Clark said bored.

“I agree,” Judge Boyer said. “That will be enough on this matter, Ms. Welles.”

“Dr. Wilcox, did you work at Bellevue Hospital in the years between 2004-2007?” Rosemary asked.

“It’s on my resume,” Greg answered. “Of course.”

“So you were present when Jennifer Bassett was hospitalized the first time in fact you assisted in her treatment?” Rosemary asked.

“I served in a junior capacity at the time yes,” Greg answered. “I worked there during my residency.”

“But you observed her behavior and wrote in an earlier report, ‘Ms. Bassett is an attractive and charming woman, however she can be very manipulative and emotional. It is best to proceed with caution.’”

“Yes I wrote that,” Greg replied.

“Then a few weeks into this hospitalization, you wrote that she is quite charming and shows no outward symptoms of borderline personality disorder,” Rosemary asked. “Some of your notes in Bellevue towards Ms. Bassett continue in this manner spoken in an almost admirable tone.”

“She has a resilience and strength of character along with her very obvious charm,” the psychiatrist said.

“I also have a written report from the Rochester Clinic that you specifically requested to be Ms. Bassett’s primary. Is that true?,” Rosemary asked.

“It is not uncommon for a patient to be comfortable seeing a doctor that they had a prior acquaintance,” Dr. Wilcox answered cagily. “Jenn I mean Ms. Bassett opened up because of our history together.”

“Earlier you stated that among the symptoms of borderline personality disorder are superficial charm and a manipulative personality. Is it entirely possible that you yourself had been fooled by Ms. Bassett’s personality during your residency at Bellevue?”

“Well I was young then-“ Dr. Wilcox stuttered. “BPD had only been considered a mental illness in the past few years. It’s a very tricky one to diagnose and tricky to treat the patient.”

“I can see that coming from a resident,” Rosemary said. “But is it also possible that Ms. Bassett remembered your devotion to her during her previous hospitalization and managed to charm you yet again?”
“I am a seasoned professional,” Greg Wilcox said.
“Is it possible that you either ignored or even covered up the report from the attendant at Rochester so that Ms. Bassett could be released,” Rosemary said.
“That would be highly unethical,” Dr. Wilcox interrupted.
“You were Ms. Bassett’s primary,” Rosemary said. “Whether she would be released would have been dependent upon your opinion. Ms. Bassett as you stated is an attractive charming woman. Did you maneuver the hearing at Rochester Clinic in her favor, yes or no?”
“I didn’t have anything to maneuver,” Greg Wilcox protested. “The attendant had been removed from her job after the altercation had taken place!”
Rosemary asked. “You mean the attendant whose name I did not even give? The one who filed a report that you claimed that you heard for the first time as I read it here in court? So how would you know what had happened to this attendant if you hadn’t heard about her report beforehand?”
Greg Wilcox looked stymied. Farkle sickly looked over at his mother’s direction. The way that she looked at the psychiatrist told Farkle that he wouldn’t be calling her any time in the near future or ever. Farkle almost felt sorry for him. “Well uh-I-”
Rather than let Greg continue the humiliation, Rosemary looked towards the court. “No further questions.”
“The prosecution calls Elizabeth Harper-Chastain to the stand,” Clark said.
Libby appeared in front of the courthouse and swore to tell the truth saying her name and occupation as “realtor.”
“Ms. Chastain, how long have you known my client Ms. Bassett?” Clark asked.
“Since we were in high school together,” Libby replied. “She’s one of my best friends.”
“Will you say that you have observed a great deal of the Minkus marriage and their relationships with their child?” David asked.
“Of course,” Libby replied.
“How would you describe it?” David asked.
“Toxic,” Libby answered. “They were constantly sniping at each other or talking badly about one another when the other wasn’t around.”
“How did Farkle fare in this toxic environment?” Clark asked.
“He spent a great deal of time either in his bedroom or hanging out with his friends,” Libby replied. “Of course who could blame him?”
“Would you say that the toxicity was because of one of the parties more than the other,” Clark asked.
“Yes I would say that,” Libby answered.
“Which party?” Clark asked.
Libby paused for emphasis. “The father, Stuart Minkus.”
“Was the marriage in the same manner that Ms. Bassett described fraught with how did she put it-‘verbal cruelty?’ “
“Absolutely,” Libby said. “I saw much of it myself especially around the time of Ms. Bassett’s miscarriage.”
“For your honor’s indulgence,” Clark translated. “This was in March of 2010 when Ms. Bassett suffered a miscarriage of her second child.” David hesitated. “Why does that time strike you as particularly unhappy?”
Libby continued. “Well for one thing, Mr. Minkus took the opportunity to tell her that they could always try again.”
“Some would call that reassuring,” David remarked.
“Not the way he said it,” Libby remarked. “It was less of ‘it’s okay, honey’ and more of ‘you failed so let’s do it again.’ “
“Objection,” Rosemary said. “Speculation.”
“Sustained,” Boyer continued.
“Were there signs of strain afterward,” David inquired.
“Absolutely, sir,” Libby replied.
“How so?” David asked.
“Mr. Minkus spent more time at work and less time with his family,” Libby replied. “Jenn-Ms. Bassett was often depressed and in mourning for her lost daughter and he didn’t care.”
“So do you think that Mr. Minkus is a fit parent?” David asked.
“No, I do not,” Libby answered.
“No further questions, you honor,” Clark replied.
Rosemary faced the realtor. “Ms. Chastain, how far would you go to protect a friend?”
“Objection,” Clark said.
“Sustained,” Boyer answered. “There will be enough of your shenanigans, Ms. Welles.”
“I’m sorry your honor,” Rosemary continued. “But Ms. Chastain, there have been recent allegations against you towards real estate fraud.”
“It was settled out of court,” Libby declared.
“Objection irrelevant,” David argued.
“I am revealing the witness’ character,” Rosemary said. “And pointing out a potential link between the witness and the prosecution.”
“Objection overruled,” Boyer replied. “Proceed Ms. Welles.”
“Ms. Chastain, was it true that one of your legal advisors for this settlement was Eugene Bassett, cousin of the plaintiff, Ms. Bassett?” Rosemary inquired.
“In a very small capacity,” Libby answered.
“Were there any discussions towards this trial?” Rosemary asked.
“A few private comments,” Libby replied. “Just shared sympathies here and there.”
“Shared sympathies of course,” Rosemary nodded. “And in sharing those sympathies, did you happen to mention the plea deal that was made between yourself for a settlement on your charges if you agreed to be a witness for this trial?”
“Like I said this custody trial came up,” Libby replied.
“So in getting yourself off a lesser charge did you agree to get your friend, Ms. Bassett off as well?” Rosemary asked.
“Objection leading the witness,” Clark replied.
“No,” Libby said. “I did this because Jennifer is my friend.”
“Overruled,” Boyer said.
“No further questions,” Rosemary answered as she sat back down.
“For the record please state your name and occupation.”
“Dana Pruitt-Livingstone, Secretary John Adams High School, Philadelphia.”
David approached Dana and began to ask her. She was clearly very thin and possibly sickly. She jumped in surprise as Clark began his questioning. “Ms. Livingstone, like Ms. Chastain, you have been friends with Jennifer Bassett since high school correct?”
“Yes sir,” Dana said. She practically gulped a glass of water.
“And you have had plenty of chances to observe the marriage between her and her former husband?”
“Absolutely,” Dana replied.
“Would you agree with Ms. Chastain’s account that the relationship was and I quote ‘toxic, particularly from Mr. Minkus towards his former wife, the current Ms. Bassett’?” Dana looked confused at the question. She glanced nervously at the prosecution chair and stammered before answering. “Is the question too difficult for you to answer?”
“No sir,” Dana said nervously. “I mean yes sir! I mean yes it was very toxic sir just like Ms. Bassett and Ms. Chastain said!”
Dana began to breathe in and out practically hyperventilating before Clark continued his line of questioning. “When Ms. Bassett suffered her miscarriage in March 2010, did you see an increase of toxicity?”
“Her miscarriage?” Dana asked as though she had never heard of the word. “I mean yes of course. After the baby had left, they weren’t happy. I think of it as the time when I knew things were going to end between them.”
“Why is that, Ms. Livingstone?” Clark asked.
“Because Jennifer li-uh I mean lost the baby and she and Mr. Minkus withdrew further from each other,” Dana said. “It’s one of those things you just know.”
“No further questions,” Clark said.
“Ms. Livingstone, have you told the court the entire truth?” Rosemary asked.
“Yes of course I have,” Dana answered.
“This is not your first time in a courtroom is it, Ms. Livingstone?” Rosemary asked. “It is your first time from the witness stand. But you were once an attorney, almost district attorney correct? You were disbarred. Would you care to tell the court as to why?”
“I had an addiction to speed,” Dana replied. “I was caught with some in my purse.”
“Ms. Livingstone,” Rosemary said. “You are currently in a rehabilitation program in Philadelphia not only for the addiction but for an eating disorder correct?”
“Yes Anorexia Nervosa,” Dana answered. “I had been having these problems for a long time. They have increased ever since my husband and I lost money during the Recession.”
“But you and your husband are working now, but not in Manhattan?” Rosemary prompted.
“Yes,” Dana answered. “He sells insurance and I work as a secretary in Philadelphia. We, my husband, my children, and I live near my parents. They have helped us quite a bit.”
“Have your relationships and your health improved?” Rosemary asked.
“They’re getting there,” Dana answered.
“Objection,” Clark said. “While I applaud Ms. Livingstone’s decision to seek treatment, I fail to see the relevance in this line of questioning towards Ms. Bassett and Mr. Minkus.”
“I am trying to uncover some of Ms. Livingstone’s character,” Rosemary said.
“Sustained,” Boyer answered.
“Ms. Livingstone, in your time as an attorney surely you know the penalty for perjury,” Rosemary asked.
“Yes I do,” Dana replied.
“Did you commit perjury just now?” Rosemary asked. “When you were asked about the status of the Minkus marriage, did you commit perjury?”
N-no,” Dana asked.
“Objection,” Clark said. “Badgering the witness.”
“Sustained,” Boyer agreed. “Rephrase the question, Ms. Welles.”
Rosemary approached Dana in a “between us girls” pose. “Ms. Livingstone, you have been in rehabilitation, surely it must have taught you that to begin a new life you have to end your former patterns. Are you still holding onto some of those former patterns? Are you telling the complete truth?”
Dana paled and swooned before she leaned closer to the microphone. “No, I am not.”
“Which parts have you lied about Ms. Livingstone?” Rosemary asked.
“All of it,” Dana said. “Mr. Minkus had never been anything but kind to Ms. Bassett. It was she who hurt him, not the other way around. She would often threaten him or manipulate him into buying her things especially after-“ Dana broke down into tears.
“-After her second pregnancy, Ms. Livingstone?” Rosemary asked.
Dana shook her head through her tears. “She was never pregnant, the second time. I was there when the OB-GYN treated her! There wasn’t a baby on the ultrasound! It was a phantom pregnancy and she got the doctor, Libby and I to go along with it! She used us and she used Stuart!” She sobbed, “I am so sorry Stuart! I am so sorry Farkle! I am so sorry that she hurt you and I helped her!” She continued to cry as Rosemary told the judge that there were to be no further questions. The bailiff and Dana’s husband Ethan Livingstone helped the hysterical Dana move from the witness stand and exit the courthouse.
“The prosecution calls Samantha Russo-Amano to the stand!” David Clark said.
Stunned, Stuart looked at the woman that he hadn’t seen in years! Sam’s hair was shorter in a bob cut and she looked more slender than she had before. She was still dressed very businesslike in a black outfit. Stuart would have done a double take before he recognized her.
“For the record please state your name and occupation,” the bailiff said.
“Samantha Joanne Russo-Amano, Development Manager Playstation, Tokyo, Japan,” Sam answered.
“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you?” the bailiff asked.
“I do,” Sam answered. Sam sat down as Clark began to speak.
“Ms. Amano you worked at Minkus International November-January 2007-2008 where you designed the concept for the video game, the Goddess Wars, correct?”
“That’s correct,” Sam answered. She clearly didn’t like being called up. She looked very nervous and uncomfortable.
“You worked directly under Stuart Minkus?” Clark asked. “How was your working relationship?”
“It was very encouraging,” Sam answered. “He gave me a lot of space to create the game and I was able to work with it.”
“That was your professional relationship,” Clark began. “How was your personal relationship?”
“Well um he was a good friend and a mentor in many ways,” Sam replied.
“Do you recognize the plaintiff, Jennifer Bassett, Ms. Amano?” Clark asked.
“Yes she’s Mr. Minkus’ former wife,” Sam said.
“Did you ever have any encounters with her before?” Clark asked.
“Yes at the Office Holiday Party in 2007, she believed that her husband and I were having an affair and she attacked me,” Sam answered.
“Did she say anything?” Clark asked.
“She said ‘stay away from my husband, you slut!’” Sam recalled.
“Was she by any chance justifiable in that claim?” Clark asked.
“Objection leading the witness,” Rosemary interrupted.
“Sustained,” Boyer said. “Please rephrase the question, Mr. Clark.”
“Did you have any feelings beyond professional for Mr. Minkus?” Clark asked.
“Well,” Sam began. “We kissed once!”
“So would you say that goes beyond being a good friend?” Clark asked.
“No, it was just an infatuation,” Minkus said. “I felt something but it was never repeated!”
“Are you married now, Ms. Amano?” Clark asked.
“Yes of course,” Sam replied.
“Is your marriage happy?” Clark asked.
“Well why don’t you ask, Ken, my husband since he’s sitting over there in the front,” Sam pointed to the smiling Japanese man sitting in the front row giving his wife a thumbs up. “Yes I would say so.”
“How would you feel if your husband had kissed another woman that he worked with,” Clark said.
“Wouldn’t you react with anger? Wouldn’t you feel the anger was somehow justified?”
“Maybe,” Sam said. “But I wouldn’t attack the other woman in front of several people! No matter what Mr. Minkus and I did not justify what Ms. Bassett did to me or to him! Nothing would have ever justified that!”
Clark then removed himself from the witness stand. Rosemary then stood. “I have no questions your honor.” Judge Boyer invited Sam to be seated.
Cory stood at the blackboard in front of his students as he read one of the four names that he had written. “Alfred Dreyfuss, what do we know about him?”
“The dude that played Mr. Holland?” Zay asked.
“No that was Richard Dreyfuss,” Cory corrected. He pointed at another name. “Sacco and Vanzetti, what do we know about them?”
“Made leather purses?” Maya asked.
“Try Dolce and Gabanna,” Cory added. Before he could ask about the other names “The Salem Witches” and “The McCarthy Hearings,” and receive more sarcastic comments (probably about the latest found footage film and the trial against the clown, Ronald no doubt), Cory continued with his point. “What these names all had in common were they were famous trials in which the people in
them were considered guilty less based on evidence and more because of public perception.” He pointed at Alfred Dreyfuss’s name. “Alfred Dreyfuss was believed to be railroaded through his trial because of Anti-Semitism. Many believe that Sacco and Vanzetti were executed not because they were guilty of their crime, but because they were immigrant Socialists in a time when both were held under public scrutiny. The women and men who were found guilty in the Salem Witch Trials were either outspoken independent women, town outsiders, or had made enemies of the powerful people in the village. Those who were brought before Senator Joseph McCarthy were accused of being Communists based on some of the flimsiest accusations. In all cases these were considered miscarriages of justice.”

Maya raised her hand. “Then don’t these cases prove that justice doesn’t always work?” Cory pointed at his daughter’s best friend. “Justice is imperfect. Unfortunately sometimes good and innocent people are put to prison and sometimes bad people often walk. How can we challenge the courts and find real justice?”

“How can we ever expect there to be any justice?” Farkle asked.

“By telling the truth and looking at the evidence,” Riley suggested.

“Listen to both sides and make a decision fairly,” Lucas said.

“Trust those who are being tried and believe in them,” Farkle said knowing that it was not coincidence that Cory chose this particular lesson in this particular time.

“Above all see beyond the fear,” Cory said pointing at the names. “The people on this board were tried because they were seen as an enemy. They had a different religion, came from a different place, had different politics, or just were considered odd or eccentric. Based on public fears of Judaism, Anarchism, Communism, and Witchcraft, many who were innocent lost their reputations, their livelihoods, and in some cases their lives. Through the writings and public perceptions that people had, their societies had created their own monsters. In trying to rid their societies of the elements that they believed were destructive, those that tried them proved to be even more destructive. In later writings on the Salem Witch Trials Cotton Mather wrote, “In our own anger and hatred, did we in fact bring the Devil to Salem Village ourselves?”

“Some would question how you consider that psychological abuse,” Rosemary asked.

“It was as she described it tense,” Minkus said. “No, that’s an understatement. I would describe it as abusive.”

“Abusive towards your wife?” Rosemary asked.

“No, abusive towards my son and myself,” Minkus answered.

“Was the abuse physical, verbal, or sexual,” Rosemary asked.

“Predominately verbal and psychological,” Minkus answered. “Though sometimes it became physical, if I challenged her.”

“What type of things would she do that you considered psychological abuse?” Rosemary asked.

“Jenn- my former wife used to spend our money to the point where I had to file bankruptcy when she told me that she was pregnant,” Minkus said.

“How did you get out of bankruptcy,” Rosemary asked.

“Ed- Mr. Bass- my former father-in-law provided the money to pay our debts provided I would make him a partner in my business,” Minkus replied.

“Some would question how you consider that psychological abuse,” Rosemary said.
“It is when I found out later that my former wife had planned on getting pregnant without consulting me so her father could be a partner. That’s when I made the connection,” Minkus answered. He hesitated before he wanted to bring it up. He made sure that he told Farkle about it. Surprisingly, the teen didn’t take that revelation as bad as he did when he learned his father suggested an abortion. Maybe Farkle had been through so many revelations through this trial that he was becoming numb to them.

A loud murmur fell over the courtroom as the judge banged on his gavel. “Order in the court, I will have order! Order!”

“How would you describe the conception then if it was without your consent?” Rosemary asked.

“We had been using birth control up until that night,” Minkus answered. “That night she didn’t use any.”

“Did you question this odd change in pattern?” Rosemary asked.

Minkus shook his head. “No, she had a lot to drink that night and had experimented with cocaine. I attributed it to that.”

“Just to clarify, this was the same night as the Van Houten’s party that your former wife alluded to in her testimony,” Rosemary said.

“Yes Ma’am,” Stuart answered.

“How did you find out about the ulterior motives towards her pregnancy?” Rosemary asked.

“She told me months later,” Minkus said. “Actually she bragged about it.”

“How was your former wife’s relationship with your son?” Rosemary asked.

“She didn’t get along with him,” Minkus replied. “She repeatedly verbally abused him. She often called him names like ‘nothing’ and was often envious of the time that I spent with him. She complained that ‘he got the best of everything and she didn’t.’ “

“Is that true that your wife didn’t get the best of everything?” Rosemary inquired.

“Not a bit,” Minkus said. “I bought her gifts, gave her my credit cards and cash whenever she wanted. There wasn’t anything that I wouldn’t have given her.”

“When your son recovered from his suicide attempt, did he ever state any disagreements or arguments he had with his mother preceding the event?” Rosemary asked.

“Yes he did,” Minkus answered.

“What did he say?”

“He said that his mother told him that she wished that he was never born and that it would save everyone the trouble if he had just killed himself,” Minkus answered.

Rosemary waited until the surprised murmuring around the courtroom died before she began her next line of questioning. “What were you doing while your son was recovering from attempted suicide?”

“I was with him in the hospital until the day he was sent home,” Minkus said.

“You had been recently removed from your position as CEO of your former company, the one that your father-in-law had been a partner,” Rosemary asked. “Would you have said your financial status was good then?”

“I would say so,” Minkus replied. “It was seven figures.”

“Since you have been removed you have started another company, a smaller one which does not have quite the same figures as the previous one,” Rosemary replied.

“That’s correct,” Minkus answered.

“Why the change?” Rosemary asked. “After all there is quite a wide gap between the money you made then and the money you make now.”

“Well my former father-in-law didn’t give me much of a choice, now did he?” Minkus asked dryly.

“But if he had, do you think that you would have stayed with them?” Rosemary asked.

“Objection,” Clark said. “Speculation.”

“Sustained,” Boyer answered.

“Mr. Minkus, when your wife was taken for intervention, the conditions were that you would not challenge your removal and that you would allow your in-laws to keep their shares of your former company, shares that you had every right to sue for. Why didn’t you?” Rosemary asked.
“It was more important to me that I keep my son,” Minkus said. “I didn’t want to challenge my dismissal if it meant that I couldn’t have Farkle in my life.”

“Why do you want to keep your son, now?” Rosemary asked. “Your wife has been in rehab. Do you think that she could change that she perhaps deserves another chance?”

“I have given her over 15 years of second chances, I don’t think I can give her anymore,” Minkus said plainly. “I love my son but I do not want to take the risk that she hadn’t changed. That’s too big a risk for his life. He’s been through enough as it is. I want to provide a stable comfortable life for him where he could grow to become the happy loving man that I know he could be.”

Rosemary nodded. “No further questions.”

David Clark stood next to Minkus. “Mr. Minkus, you said that you didn’t want to risk your son’s life if your former wife hadn’t changed.”

“Yes, that’s what I said,” Minkus replied.

“But you did risk it,” Clark asked. “If the marriage was as bad as you said, you could have left any time.”

“I had my son,” Minkus began.

“Objection,” Rosemary argued.

“Overruled,” Boyer said. “Continue your line of questioning Mr. Clark.”

“Mr. Minkus how long would you have described your marriage as abusive?” Mr. Clark asked.

“Since my wife was pregnant with Farkle and I studied the signs of a person in an abusive relationship,” Minkus answered. “I answered all of the symptoms point by point.”

“So over 14 years,” Clark answered. “In that time, it never occurred to you to divorce your wife? The woman you claimed verbally and psychologically abused you?”

“I felt that it wasn’t right to leave my son without a father,” Minkus replied.

“You could have taken your son with you,” Clark said. “But you didn’t. It never entered your mind did it?”

“Objection leading the witness,” Rosemary argued.

“Overruled,” the judge continued.

“No one asks why an abused wife doesn’t leave her husband,” Minkus said. “No one thinks her strange if she doesn’t. She stays to protect her children, because no one would believe her, or a myriad of other reasons. All of those reasons applied to me. On top of those reasons, I was afraid of exactly what is happening now. That I would be seen as the abuser rather than her, because I am a man and nearly everyone assumes that all abusers are male!”

“Come on Mr. Minkus,” Clark said. “You were not some young high school dropout on welfare with nowhere to turn but a battered woman’s shelter. You were a multi-millionaire CEO. You had resources at your disposal. Don’t tell me that you couldn’t have packed up and left one night.”

“Her family controlled my company,” Minkus said.

“And there’s the rub,” Clark said. “Is it possible that you didn’t leave because it wasn’t true that neither you nor your son were being abused or is it possible that you enjoyed the financial benefits too much? Not until that status was removed, did you consider breaking ties with your in-laws. To you were the money and status that you received marrying a Bassett more important to you than the life and safety of your child?”

“Objection leading the witness,” Rosemary argued.

“Overruled,” the judge said. After a tense silence, the judge prompted, “Answer the question, Mr. Minkus.”

Minkus looked at Clark severely. “Nothing is more important to me than my son. I stayed in the marriage because I thought that I could protect him. I wish I could give you a better reason than that. It wasn’t right, it wasn’t healthy, and I have hated myself ever since. You are right, I should have left her long ago but I didn’t. But I’ll be damned if I give my ex-wife even the slimmest chance to hurt him ever again!”

“No further question your honor,” Clark said.

Dr. Rachel McGuire-Friar, pediatrician, was called next. “Can you describe the injuries that Farkle Minkus had sustained from his suicide attempt, Dr. Friar?” Rosemary asked.
“He had two identical scars on the insides of both his arms,” Rachel explained. “He has had migraines and his larynx has suffered from some slight damage. He has also had some digestive issues, possibly long term.”

“That’s his state physically,” the defense attorney said. “What would you say is his psychological state?”

“He has both depression and anxiety disorder and has been given to frequent panic attacks,” the doctor explained. “He has been prescribed Paxil and Trazodone.”

“Did Mr. Minkus or his son tell you about any of the problems in the Minkus household?” Rosemary inquired.

Rachel nodded. “Absolutely, they told me about the abuse and Farkle even told me what his mother said before he tried to kill himself. I also received confirmation from Farkle’s teacher, Mr. Cory Matthews that DFS charges had been filed against her.”

“Your son is also close friends with Farkle correct?” Rosemary asked.

“That is correct,” Rachel replied. “They are best friends.”

“Was he aware of any reports of violence or abuse?” Rosemary asked.

“For the most part no because Farkle spent a great deal of time at our house and did not open up much about his family life,” the doctor said. “But my son did tell of one incident that concerned him.”

“What was that, Dr. Friar?” Rosemary asked.

“Earlier this past school year, Farkle showed my son, Lucas, his mother’s wedding ring. He told him that the ring cost $78,000 but he got it for free. My son asked how come and Farkle replied that it was the ring that his mother kept throwing at his father but that she always wanted it back by Thursday.”

“Are you aware of this incident before Farkle was in the hospital?” Rosemary asked.

“No, I was not,” Rachel answered. “My son did not tell me of this incident until after Farkle was in the hospital.”

“Does this telling detail in the Minkus family marriage confirm Ms. Bassett’s abilities as a parent, in your professional opinion, Dr. Friar?”

“It confirms that she shouldn’t be,” Rachel said. “And even if that hadn’t, certainly her son’s current state does.”

“No further questions your honor,” Rosemary said.

“Dr. Friar,” Clark began. “You were not the only primary physician treating Farkle Minkus as he lay in the hospital were you?”

“No, I was not,” Dr. Friar answered. “When he was in a coma in intensive care, he was being treated by Dr. Benjamin Sinclair.”

“Who has not been called to testify,” Clark said. “Did you two share information on this case?”

“Doctors often do when a patient has been moved from one physician’s care to another,” Rachel said. “It saves on the guesswork to determine the means of treatment.”

“Did Dr. Sinclair speak of his interactions with Farkle’s father, Mr. Minkus?” Clark inquired.

“Yes he did,” Rachel answered.

“What did Dr. Sinclair feel were Farkle’s chances for survival?” Clark asked.

“He felt that Farkle’s chances of survival were less than 10%,” Rachel remarked.

“Did he recommend that Farkle Minkus’ life support be turned off?” David asked.

“Yes he did,” Rachel answered.

“And how did Mr. Minkus react?” Clark asked.

“He didn’t sign the form,” Rachel said. “He didn’t want his son to be turned off!”

“Dr. Friar,” Clark said. “What was Mr. Minkus’ initial reaction when the doctor told him to turn off his son, his only child’s life support?”

Rachel sighed. “He considered it. He is a very logical person and felt intellectually that if Farkle’s probable chance for survival then perhaps he should be. But emotionally he felt otherwise. In the end, he couldn’t bring himself to do it.”

“But he still considered it,” Clark said. “Hardly the characteristics of a loving father as he would
like us to think.”
“Objection,” Rosemary said. “No parent wants to go through their child’s impending death. We can no more judge Mr. Minkus’ mental or emotional state at that moment than we could someone who had just been told their spouse has died.”
“I think that we can judge it in this case,” Clark said. “A man who has a cold-blooded intellect towards his child contradicts the image that he has sold as a man who loves his son!”
“Overruled Ms. Welles,” Boyer said.
“At least he was there to ask,” Rachel argued. Clark turned to the witness as she struck back. “Mr. Minkus was with his son, the whole time! He never left his side! Ms. Bassett wasn’t able to give her opinion one way or another was she?”
“No further questions your honor,” Clark continued.
“Shawn Hunter.”
Shawn approached the bench and stood next to the bailiff. “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?” the bailiff asked.
“Sure whatever,” Shawn said. The court laughed at Shawn’s irreverence.
“Now Mr. Hunter,” Rosemary asked. “How long have you known Mr. Minkus?”
“I have known Mi uh Mr. Minkus since elementary school,” Shawn answered.
“Would you have considered yourself friends?” Rosemary asked.
“Not then he was a major nerd,” Shawn said. The court erupted into laughter. Even Minkus offered a thin chuckle and a shake of his head.
“Had he grown out of his ‘major nerd’ status,” Rosemary asked.
“Nah, he’s a bigger nerd,” Shawn said as the court laughed again. “But he’s a great guy too and a good friend.”
“So your relationship has evolved,” Rosemary asked. “May I inquire whether there was a specific reason for this?”
“Lots of them,” Shawn answered. “But I think the most important reason is simply we grew up. Sometimes people aren’t the same people they were in school.”
“Have you observed the defendant, Mr. Minkus’ relationship with his son?” Rosemary asked.
“You bet,” Shawn asked.
“Do you think he’s a good father,” Rosemary inquired.
“I can’t think of a better father for that kid,” Shawn answered. “He talks to him. Even though I don’t understand even half of what they are saying, I just know that they really love and understand each other.”
“You also assisted him during Farkle Minkus’ suicide attempt,” Rosemary asked.
“Yes he never left his side,” Shawn answered. “I don’t know where anyone else comes from, but that seems like the definition of a good father to me.”
“You also have a history with the former Mrs. Minkus, Ms. Bassett, correct?” Rosemary asked.
“And your relationship ended rather badly,” Rosemary asked.
“Yes my friend Cory-Mr. Matthews didn’t like her. She heard about it and wanted me to stop being friends with him,” Shawn answered.
“Did you stop being friends with Mr. Matthews?” Rosemary asked.
“Briefly but I realized that if a girl didn’t like my friends to the point that she made me stop seeing them, then she wasn’t worth being a girlfriend to me,” Shawn answered.
“This wasn’t your last encounter in your high school years was it?” Rosemary asked.
“No it was not,” Shawn replied.
“When was your last encounter with her in high school?” Rosemary inquired.
“In February 1998, Ms. Bassett and two other women had kidnapped me and handcuffed me to a boathouse,” Shawn answered.
“Can you identify the other two women?” Rosemary asked.
“You bet,” Shawn replied. “Ms. Chastain and Livingstone.” He pointed at Libby. Dana was still absent from the court.
“What was their motive for this prank?” Rosemary asked.
“I had dated all three of them previously and was dating a different girl,” Shawn said. “They wanted to make it seem that I wouldn’t show up for the date, so the other girl would dump me.”
“So they manipulated the situation to Ms. Bassett’s advantage,” Rosemary translated.
“Objection,” Clark said. “This is completely irrelevant. What is the correlation between a juvenile prank as compared to Ms. Bassett’s current position as a parent?”
“Indulge me your honor,” Rosemary said.
Judge Boyer sighed. “Proceed Ms. Welles.”
Rosemary then approached Shawn. “In subsequent years, has Ms. Bassett ever alluded to this situation in which she and her friends kidnapped you?”
“Yes Ma’am she has,” Shawn answered. “Once a couple of years ago, in front of my friends Mr. and Mrs. Matthews.”
“How did they recall the conversation?” Rosemary asked.
“They said that she laughed about it and refused to take responsibility for the situation,” Minkus replied. “She said it was because ‘Cory was afraid of her because he thought she was bigger than everyone else.’ “
“Did you ever warn Mr. Minkus about your history with Ms. Bassett,” Rosemary asked.
“Yes once when they were engaged,” Shawn replied. “I told him that she would mess him up and break his heart.”
“Did he listen?” Rosemary asked.
“Obviously not,” Shawn said waving his hands around the courtroom.
“So in your observation,” Rosemary asked. “Who do you think is the better parent for Farkle Minkus?”
“His father, Stuart Minkus 100%,” Shawn answered.
“No further questions,” Rosemary replied.
David Clark rose and approached the freelance writer/blogger. “Mr. Hunter when referring to your friend Stuart Minkus you said that “sometimes people aren’t the same people that they were in school.”
“Yes I did,” Shawn answered.
“Do you believe that could apply to Ms. Bassett as well?” Clark asked.
“It could if she wasn’t,” Shawn answered.
“Now in the years between 2001 to 2014, you have had very little contact with your friends, the Matthews or Mr. Minkus, correct?” Clark inquired.
“I was a travel writer and was on the road a lot,” Shawn answered.
“You even expressed surprise that Mr. Minkus even had a child,” Clark asked. “Your words were and I quote, ‘Minkus reproduced?’ “
“Yes that’s true,” Shawn replied.
“You have not been in contact with the Minkus family in that time while Ms. Chastain and Ms. Livingstone had,” Clark asked.
“Objection,” Rosemary said. “Shawn Hunter is not on trial here and what would be the charge, being an absent friend?”
“I am establishing a pattern towards his account,” Clark replied.
“Objection overruled,” Judge Boyer told David Clark to proceed.
“So during the Minkus marriage you were unable to observe any actual evidence of abuse from Ms. Bassett towards either her former husband or her son.”
“Not during most of it no,” Shawn said.
“Then how do you base your opinion on whether you think that Mr. Minkus is the superior parent on your own juvenile escapades?” Clark asked. “Is this testimony less about your concern for a friend that you admitted you have lost touch with or is out of revenge against a woman who once played a prank on you?”
“What the hell kind of question is that?” Shawn asked he mumbled and trailed off at the end of the sentence.
“I’m sorry Mr. Hunter could you repeat that answer,” Clark asked. “Louder so the court can hear?” Shawn spoke loud and clear. “I said WHAT THE HELL KIND OF QUESTION IS THAT, YOU DILLHOLE!” The court erupted into such laughter that Judge Boyer banged his gavel repeatedly to silence the crowd.

“Answer the question Mr. Hunter,” Boyer asked. Shawn sighed. “If I was only basing it on what Ms. Bassett had done to me, I wouldn’t care. I would say yes give her a chance. I certainly deserved it because I did a lot of shitty things when I was in school. But I owned up to it, I sought to change myself and be a better person than I was back then. No, I was not there while Ms. Bassett and Mr. Minkus were married, but I have been with them in the past few months, almost a year and I can see for myself what had gone on. I saw Farkle in the hospital and I have seen him recover. I have seen his Dad with him every step of the way. I have been a part of Ms. Bassett’s intervention and have seen her return. I have seen her slap and yell at her son during the intervention when Mr. Minkus’ and his great crime was simply revealing the truth. I have seen Mr. Minkus pull his son out of countless panic attacks and depression episodes. I have seen Farkle and I know which parent he is closest to and which one he is afraid of. The difference between Mr. Minkus and myself and Ms. Bassett is we grew up, Ms. Bassett hadn’t. It isn’t about what Ms. Bassett did to me that’s the reason I’m talking to you. It’s about what she did to Farkle.”

“Cornelius Matthews.” Embarrassed at the reveal of his full name, Cory rose to the bench and swore to tell the truth. He stated his name and occupation as “Cory Matthews, History Teacher John Quincy Adams Middle School.”

“Mr. Matthews,” Rosemary asked. “How long have you known the Minkus family?” Cory nodded in Shawn’s direction. “Like Mr. Hunter, I too attended elementary school with Mr. Minkus and high school with Ms. Bassett. I am also Farkle Minkus’ history teacher and the father of one of his closest friends. I would say I consider Mr. Minkus a good friend of mine.”

“Were you consistent friends from elementary school on up to the present?” Rosemary asked. Cory shook his head. “No we drifted apart and didn’t speak until his son, Farkle became friends with my daughter, Riley. We were acquaintances mostly until the past couple of years when his son Farkle became one of my students.”

“How much in the way of abuse did you observe in the years amongst the family?” Rosemary asked.

“Not as much as I should have, I will be the first to admit,” Cory said. “Farkle spent time at our place with my daughter. So for a long time neither I nor any of the rest of my family ever got to observe him in his home or hear interactions between him and his parents.”

“Did you find this odd?” Rosemary asked.

“At first I did,” Cory answered. “But Farkle’s father explained that since he had worked odd hours and his wife was not often home, then it was better for Farkle to be at our apartment instead of Riley coming to theirs.”

“When did you first begin to suspect that there were signs of abuse in the Minkus home?” Rosemary inquired.

“Well I questioned it particularly as Farkle became my student,” Cory said. “I would notice some tension within him such as a drive for perfection and a reluctance to go home. Even some of his personality traits such as overconfidence could be seen as defense mechanisms to cope with an abusive home life. Many a middle school teacher becomes aware of the symptoms of a child in a troubled background. It became apparent after he had been bullied and rather than remain at home, Farkle had remained inside the janitor’s closet listening to the lectures. I scheduled a parent-teacher conference with his father and that’s when Mr. Minkus had told me that his wife,- well ex-wife now, had verbally abused their son.”

“What did you suggest in the situation?” Rosemary inquired.
“I gave Mr. Minkus the number for an abuse support group and gave him some breathing space to fix the problem or I would call DFS,” Cory replied.
“Was the problem fixed?” Rosemary asked.
“Briefly, Mr. Minkus and Farkle attended the group and Ms. Bassett had quit drinking cold turkey.”
“When did you call DFS, Mr. Matthews?” Rosemary asked.
“September 15, 2015,” Cory said. “I saw Farkle appear in class with a black eye. I called DFS after class ended.”
“This was the same day that Farkle Minkus had attempted suicide?” Rosemary asked.
“That’s right,” Cory answered.
“In your DFS report, you cited both verbal and physical abuse towards Farkle Minkus from Ms. Bassett?”
“Yes Ma’am,” Cory replied.
“Did you also participate in the intervention so Jennifer Bassett could attend rehab?” Rosemary asked.
“Yes I did,” Cory answered. “I even edited the letters that Stuart and Farkle Minkus wrote for her and made suggestions for improvements.”
“In your professional opinion, do you think that Jennifer Bassett should obtain custody of Farkle Minkus or do you think that he should remain in the custody of his father, Stuart Minkus?”
“He should remain with his father, no question” Cory said. “If any of you were to see them together, there would be no trial at all.”
“No further questions your honor,” Rosemary answered.
Clark then approached the teacher. “Mr. Matthews, you stated that you witnessed no signs of abuse in the Minkus family until after Farkle became your student is that correct?”
“Yes that’s true,” Cory answered.
“You did not actually become aware of any signs of abuse until you were told of it by the defendant, Stuart Minkus correct?” Clark asked.
“I had my suspicions but I cannot act on those alone unless I receive confirmation,” Cory replied.
“Have you known Mr. Minkus to exaggerate or lie?” Clark asked.
“Objection leading the witness,” Rosemary said.
“Sustained,” Judge Boyer answered. “Rephrase the question, Mr. Clark.”
“How successful would you say that Family Services is in putting a stop to an abusive situation that is primarily verbal?” Clark asked.
“I don’t work for Family Services so I really couldn’t say,” Cory began.
“In your professional opinion as an educator,” Clark prompted.
“Unfortunately not as often as we would like it to be,” Cory sighed.
“Why is that,” Clark asked. “What are the stumbling blocks to reporting verbal abuse?”
“It’s between two parties,” Cory said. “Three or more sometimes, when the children are involved. Words can be taken back, said to be exaggerated or taken out of context-”
“Or considered he said/she said,” Clark translated. “So you were not aware of any abuse going on in the Minkus home until Mr. Minkus told you?”
“Mr. Minkus is one of my friends,” Cory said. “I have every reason to believe him!”
“A friend that you admit that you had drifted apart from that you only became close friends within the last two years,” Clark interjected. “Is it possible that you only saw what you wanted to see, what Mr. Minkus wanted you to see?”
“Objection.” Rosemary said.
“Overruled,” Boyer said.
“No I knew myself,” Cory answered.
“Based on Mr. Minkus’ word,” Clark said. “We all know that Mr. Minkus is a genius. Surely a genius could manipulate events so you could see what he wanted you to see: that he was the victim and his wife was the abuser. Is it entirely possible that it could have been the other way around?”
“I have seen it for myself,” Cory snapped. “At Ms. Bassett’s intervention when she threatened to
hurt Farkle and her former husband stood in front to keep her from doing so. I had seen it in Mt. Sinai when his father sat by him and begged us to help him so he couldn’t be hurt anymore. If he is a liar or an actor, then he is the most gifted actor ever because he never stops showing love for that boy. Above all I know people and I know the way Farkle and his father act around each other. It’s love, real love and trust towards each other. I have never seen Farkle look at or interact with his mother in that way.”

“No further questions,” Clark was about to sit down but he stood up again. “Except one. Would you characterize Mr. Minkus as being faithful to his wife?”

“Yes I suppose so,” Cory replied.

“So were you aware of any infidelity from his part towards her during their marriage?” Clark answered.

“No,” Cory answered.

“No actions,” Clark said.

“No,” Cory answered.

“Or thoughts considering it,” Clark replied.

Cory shook his head, “No.”

“Has Stuart Minkus ever expressed any interest in your wife, Topanga Lawrence-Matthews?” Clark inquired.

“When we were kids he had a crush on her yes-“Cory began.

“Not as adults,” Clark asked.

“No,” Cory insisted.

“So during your School’s Career Day in March 2015, did Stuart Minkus say in front of several people and I quote, ‘I run Minkus International, I own a helicopter and she chose you.’ “

“Well yes but-“Cory replied.

“And did later Farkle Minkus confess to you that his father told him that Topanga Lawrence- Matthew should have been his mother,” Clark continued.

“Yes but I don’t think that’s what he meant,” Cory stammered.

“Answer the question yes or no, Mr. Matthews,” Clark asked. “Please remember you are under oath.”

“Yes he said both of those things,” Cory said.

Clark smiled smugly. “No further questions your honor.”

“For the record, please state your name and occupation.”

“Katherine Hart, Manager Topanga’s Bakery,” Katy said before she sat in the witness stand.

“Ms. Hart, how do you know my client, Mr. Minkus?” Rosemary asked.

“Well our children are friends. My daughter and his son go to the same school together,” Katy said.

“Is that how your interactions began?” Rosemary asked.

“No we hardly saw each other until the past oh year and a half or so,” Katy reasoned. “Now we’re good friends.”

“What changed your relationship from hardly seeing each other to good friends?” Rosemary asked.

“When Stu-uh Mr. Minkus and I met at a support group for abuse victims and we shared stories through that,” Katy said.

“So you yourself were a victim of domestic violence?” Rosemary asked.

“Yes my daughter and I both were,” Katy said.

“May I inquire some of the details towards these incidents?” Rosemary asked.

Katy took a deep breath and looked towards Maya and Shawn. They looked serious, but Maya nodded. Katy winced as she looked towards Minkus in the defense stand and Farkle behind them. She bit her lip. Farkle and Minkus were still living through the Hell. She and Maya got out, the least she could do was offer a hand out of the darkness. “My former husband, Kermit Clutterbucket, had molested my daughter. He touched her inappropriately and I caught him fondling her in her bed.”

“Did you stop him?” Rosemary asked.

“I tried,” Katy said. “Boy did I try. I would push him away from her or fight with him, but then he
would often beat me or attack me. In some ways it worked. After he was finished with me, he didn’t go after Maya. Mostly the urge would be gone and he would run out possibly to the bar or to a prostitute for all I knew.”

“Did this happen often during your daughter’s childhood,” Rosemary asked.

“More times than I would have liked it to,” Katy said bitterly.

“You had been hospitalized a few times after altercations with your former husband,” Rosemary prompted. “Did you tell any staff of the abuse?”

“No I did not,” Katy said. “I would say that I had been mugged or had a workplace accident.”

“So when was the first time that you made your abuse public, apart from telling your support group or telling your friends?” Rosemary asked.

Katy sighed. “Just a few minutes ago.”

“Your honor,” Clark said. “Ms. Hart has my sympathies but this is hardly germane to Mr. Minkus and Ms. Bassett’s situation.”

“Sustained,” Boyer answered. “Proceed Ms. Welles.”

“Ms. Hart,” Rosemary said. “You have observed the relationship between Stuart and Farkle Minkus. Would you say that Mr. Minkus is a loving father?”

“Absolutely, Mr. Minkus is devoted to him,” Katy said. “I have seen him through some pretty rough times and I know if anything had ever happened to Farkle, he would just die.”

“So having been in a situation of being an abused wife, would you describe Stuart Minkus as abusive towards his son?” Rosemary asked.

“No way in hell,” Katy said. The audience laughed at her answer. “I know abusive men and he's not one of them, not by a long shot!” Rosemary seated as Clark approached the bench.

“Ms. Hart how would you describe your relationship with Stuart Minkus?” Clark asked.

“I said he’s a good friend,” Katy answered.

“Nothing more,” Clark asked.

“No,” Katy said. “A straight man and woman can be friends with each other.”


“I don’t know what she thought,” Katy replied.

“She never confronted you or insinuated anything about your relationship?” Clark asked.

“Mr. Minkus said once that she thought my daughter and I were prostitutes, but-” Katy began.

“But she never talked to you directly,” Clark said.

“No well-“Katy reasoned.

“What did she say, Ms. Bassett and remember you are under oath,” Clark said.

“At her intervention she said that I looked like a drudge and that she didn’t know why my husband would waste time sleeping with me. She then looked towards my daughter and said that she could see.”

“So she believed that you or your daughter or both were having an affair with her former husband,” Clark translated. “How did you react?”

“I was about ready to kick the shit out of her,” Katy said. “No one insults my baby girl in front of me and gets away with it!”

“Did you?” Clark asked.

“No my friends held me off and the counselor reminded us that physical retaliation would only cause more trouble,” Katy said sheepishly.

“Was it in defense of your daughter or of yourself?” Clark said.

“Excuse me?” Katy asked.

“Were you secretly or perhaps not so secretly in love with Mr. Minkus yourself and fought with Ms. Bassett to disguise a truth that she knew?” Clark asked. “Was she in fact justifiable in her accusations towards you?”

“No she was not,” Katy said determined. “Stuart Minkus is simply a close friend and I will be damned if I let anyone like you or her-“ She motioned to Jennifer. “-malign any friend of mine!”

“You revealed a long buried secret in open court, Ms. Hart,” Clark said. “You revealed that your daughter had been molested and you had been abused by your former husband! Would you have
done that for someone who was just a friend?"
Katy looked at him determined. “I would have done more for anyone I ever cared about, you pompous ass!”

“Ms. Hart please,” Boyer said after the court’s laughter and Shawn’s whistle of approval died down.
“As a sufferer of domestic violence yourself did you question why Mr. Minkus never left his wife or why the evidence was never reported?” Clark asked.
“No,” Katy said.

“Why because it didn’t exist or because you didn’t see it for yourself,” Clark asked.
“No,” Katy answered through clenched teeth. “Because having been in that situation, I know how people act! Our spirits are broken to the point that the only thing we live for day to day is that our children would be safe! I am no different than Stuart Minkus even though he’s a man and I’m a woman and he had money and I didn’t! We and our children were abused! Anyone who has ever been in that situation know the pain and humiliation it is to live through it, the isolation that you feel when your partner makes you feel worthless, and the courage and nervousness that you feel when the partner is gone and you have to start your life over again! I have walked down that road before Mr. Minkus and the best thing that I can do for him is help him walk through it. I have no regrets about our friendship or being here talking to you.” She thought for a minute. “Oh except one.”

“What regret is that, Ms. Hart?” Clark asked.
“I still wish I had kicked the shit out of Ms. Bassett when I had the chance,” Katy said amidst the laughter. Judge Boyer then ordered the blond woman to be seated.

Morgan Matthews headed for her apartment after a busy working day and flipped on her laptop. Out of curiosity, she wanted to see how Stuart’s trial was going. She wanted to be there for him mentally if she wasn’t there physically. Even if she couldn’t sort out whether she was in love with Stuart, he was still her friend. He deserved her support.

She was still receiving intimidating cyberstalking messages. Once she sent back an answer saying that she had broken up with Stuart, what more did the stalker want? She received no reply. The police officers arrested two of the members of the gang that raped her and Morgan had to go to the station to identify them. That still left Frog, their leader. Morgan quaked in fear.

She read the latest account that Katy Hart had been called as a defense witness. Morgan didn’t know Katy at all, but she did know her daughter, Maya. She could tell by looking at the girl that she had a rough life. She read about Katy’s testimony including the mention that Maya had been molested and Katy herself had been abused. Morgan’s heart sank as she read about Katy revealing that it was the first time that she went public with this information and she did it because Stuart was her friend! “I would have done more for anyone I ever cared about,” she quoted.

Morgan shook feeling like a coward! Here she was, Morgan a tough fearless independent woman hiding in her apartment while her friend, possibly boyfriend, was in the most important trial of his life. She was staying away from Stuart for what reason? The threats and the attempted rape sure, but was she really hiding from Stuart because she was afraid how much he meant to her? Was she trying to deny their relationship by pushing him away from her? Wasn’t that what her cyberstalker wanted? Was she passively blaming Stuart for what had happened or herself for falling in love with him? She didn’t know but it all boiled down to one conclusion: She was being selfish staying away from Stuart now when he needed her the most. She quickly dialed her father.

“Dad, could you please mind the store for the next couple of days?” Morgan asked.

“Sure Honey, what’s up?” Alan asked.

“I have to go out of town,” Morgan said. “It’s an emergency.”

“Does this emergency involve a certain genius fighting for custody of his kid?” Alan asked.

“Dad please,” Morgan began.

“Morgan, hasn’t Stuart Minkus put you through enough?” Alan asked.

“I just want to be there for him,” Morgan said. “He needs all the support he can get.”

“Morgan just be careful,” Alan said. “I don’t want you getting more hurt than you are.”
“I know,” Morgan said. “I’ll be alright.” She said good-bye to her father then dialed Topanga Matthews’ number. “Hi Topanga, it’s Morgan I’m driving up to Manhattan. Could you meet me? Also, do you know of any way where I could be a witness in Stuart’s trial?”

Judge Gilbert Boyer relaxed feeling the steam from the sauna fill him. He sighed contented as he saw an old friend approach him. “Hello Ed,” he greeted Edward Bassett, his fellow club member, church parishioner, and drinking buddy.

“Hello Gil,” Edward said. “Relaxing are we?”

“I need it with this custody trial as you well know,” Boyer said.

“Ah yes the unfortunate marriage between my daughter and that man is finally ending and not soon enough I say,” Edward sighed happily.

“How do you think with maligning my daughter’s good name with that awful Internet rag and interviewed by that political muckraker no less” Edward said. “She is not well at all on top of being in the most stressful trial of her life. The poor girl is in complete crisis mode right now.”

“She could use more than that,” Edward suggested.

“Well this trial has been rather difficult for her,” Edward hinted. “It would be beneficial if the results would be in her favor.”

Boyer understood fully what Bassett was asking him to do. “Edward, that would be a violation of my role as a judge-“

“-Oh of course,” Bassett said leaning back as if the matter were closed. “It’s not like you ever did that before.” He then looked upward. “Oh but you have before.”

“That was a long time ago, Ed,” Gilbert insisted.

“Sure but still a man who was certainly guilty of assaulting a young woman was able to be released when he should still be languishing in prison,” Bassett reminded him.

“This is an entirely different circumstance,” Gilbert reminded him.

“Of course,” Edward said. “Wasn’t that young man’s father a Senator or a Mayoral candidate, ah, yes Jim Stone’s son J.J. wasn’t it and wasn’t the girl a store clerk or a housemaid or something? Oh, it was some time ago. I’m sure it will come to me. But anyway, such actions with that trial and certainly this one will be held into consideration when you are trying to get a seat in the state supreme court, possibly in the federal court as well.”

“What do you mean?” Boyer asked.

“Well when you are trying to get your campaign financed, it may behoove you to remember those who could have assisted you and did not because you were unable to do a favor for them,” Bassett suggested.

Gilbert Boyer leaned closer. “What exactly do you want me to do?” He listened as Edward Bassett told him.

Judge Boyer sat in the bench overlooking the crowd. “Does the prosecution have anymore witnesses?” Boyer asked.

“We do not your honor,” Clark said.

“Does the defense?” Boyer asked.

Rosemary stood. “Yes we have two more witnesses” She heard the door open. “And here comes one now!”

Inside the courtroom walked a blond woman with…… “TOPANGA!” Cory, Minkus, Shawn, and the others said with the same surprise.

“This trial isn’t over yet, your honor,” Topanga said as she sat down.


Rosemary approached the bench after Morgan swore to tell the truth. “Ms. Matthews, will you please tell the court of your relationship with my client, Stuart Minkus?”

“Yes Ma’am,” Morgan said. “We grew up within a few blocks of each other in Philadelphia. He was a classmate and sort of a friend of my brother’s so we’ve known each other
almost our whole lives.”
“Were you friends or more, Ms. Matthews?” Rosemary asked.
“Well we were just friends or specifically friends of friends,” Morgan said. “Recently, we have become more.”
“How recently have you become more than friends?” Rosemary asked.
“Since October of this previous year,” Morgan answered.
“How would you describe Mr. Minkus’ character?” Rosemary asked.
“He is very intelligent logical, a genius, but that’s not all he is,” Morgan answered. “He’s one of the sweetest kindest people that I know and his son Farkle is his whole life. I know that they should be together.”
“Ms. Matthews, could you tell the court the significance of your involvement with Mr. Minkus and how you know so much about his character?” Rosemary asked.
Morgan pulled a piece of paper out of her pocket and handed it to Rosemary. “Because I’m the Unidentified Blond.”
Some of the court spoke and whispered to each other in surprise. Rosemary gave a quick summary of the photograph and the kiss shared between Minkus and Morgan. “The court appreciates your candor Ms. Matthews but why have you never come forward with this information before? This photograph was taken in October, 2015.”
Morgan tensed as she spoke. “Because starting November 2015 I had been the victim of cyberstalking and also in the same month I was the victim of a rape.”
Another gasp filled the courtroom. Stuart visibly paled and looked worried for Morgan.
“Ms. Matthews, did the cyberstalking messages involve you and Stuart Minkus?”
“Yes Ma’am they did,” Morgan answered. “They told me various things that if I didn’t break up with or I defended Mr. Minkus then I would get my head bashed in and other ugly threats.”
“Was the rape connected to the threats?” Rosemary asked.
“I believe so,” Morgan replied. “The rapists used some of the same phrases that were in the messages.”
“Do you know if they were your cyberstalkers?” Rosemary asked.
“No I do not,” Morgan said. “They mentioned a ‘Boss Lady’ so I think they were working for a woman.”
“Have any of the rapists been charged for this crime?” Rosemary asked.
“Two have at this point,” Morgan said.
“Have they revealed who they worked for?” Rosemary asked.
“No they have not,” Morgan said.
“Do you have your suspicions?” Rosemary asked.
“Objection speculation and irrelevant,” Clark said.
“Sustained,” Boyer said. “This is not Ms. Matthews’ rape trial, Ms. Welles, please stay with the main issue.”
“Of course your honor,” Rosemary answered. She then turned to Morgan. “Ms. Matthews, you had been threatened with serious injury possibly worse if you spoke here at the trial or continued your relationship with Mr. Minkus and yet here you are. Why are you here?”
“Because I care about Mr. Minkus and his son,” Morgan said. “I believe that much in him. I know he’s a good father and I know that he should keep his son.”
“That’s an admirable trait to be willing to risk personal safety to help a friend,” Rosemary observed. “No further questions your honor.”
Clark stepped forward. Rosemary had to admit, David Clark was a good improviser. Even though Morgan was a surprise witness, he was able to think up some questions. “Ms. Matthews, your romantic relationship with Stuart Minkus began in October 2015, while his wife was in rehab?”
“Yes it did,” Morgan answered.
“Were you aware that Mr. Minkus was still married and his wife was in a rehabilitation clinic when you first dated?” Clark asked.
“Well yes but their marriage had been over,” Morgan hedged. “They were planning on getting
divorced when she left rehab.”
“Yes or no, Ms. Matthews,” Clark asked.
“Yes I was,” Morgan said.
“So you willingly went out with a married man, a wealthy married man at that,” Clark said.
“He is not wealthy not like he was,” Morgan said.
“How interesting that you would know that, Ms. Matthews,” Clark said. “You are the second
woman to have had a romantic relationship with Mr. Minkus during his marriage, possibly the third
maybe fourth if we count Ms. Matthews. You stated that you and Mr. Minkus knew each other
your whole lives but that it was never romantic until this past October?”
“Yes that’s what I said,” Morgan said through clenched teeth.
“Did you find any romantic interest in Mr. Minkus before he was wealthy or just afterward while
his wife was in a hospital with no resources to challenge you,” Clark said.
“Well it’s hard to find romantic interest in someone when you’ve known them since you were
five,” Morgan said dryly. “I thought boys were icky most of the time that I knew Stuart Minkus!
But yes since then I have had romantic feelings for Mr. Minkus, but as I said before money had
nothing to do with my feelings for him!”
“Did you find it convenient to be involved with him since his wife was hospitalized?” Clark asked.
“No,” Morgan began.
“Have you stayed away from Mr. Minkus now that his wife has returned?” Clark asked.
“That’s not the reason at all,” Morgan shot back. “I was being threatened!”
“Objection leading the witness,” Rosemary said.
“Overruled,” Boyer replied. “Proceed Mr. Clark.”
“Ms. Matthews how do you feel about Mr. Minkus now?” David Clark asked.
“I care very deeply for him,” Morgan said. “I want to help him.”
“Would you say that you love him?” Clark asked.
“I-,” Morgan began.
“Ms. Matthews you are under oath,” Clark prompted.
“Yes I do love him,” Morgan answered.
Clark said that there would be no further questions.
On her way to be seated, Minkus took Morgan’s hand. “Morgan I’m sorry. Why didn’t you tell
me?”
Morgan shook her head. “I couldn’t.”
She was about to say more when the judge ordered Minkus to be seated and Morgan to return to
her seat.
“The defense would like to call our final witness,” Rosemary said. “Farkle Minkus.”
Farkle looked towards his father who gave him a good luck smile and nod. Go get them, he
mouthed. Farkle smiled and raised his right hand. “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth,
and nothing but the truth?”
“I do,” Farkle answered.
Rosemary walked up to Farkle. “Now Farkle how do you get along with your father?”
Farkle shrugged. “He’s always been there for me. When everyone else thinks I’m weird, he never
does. We share puzzles, read together, talk about everything. I love him.”
Rosemary smiled. “Now how do you get along with your mother?”
Farkle looked downward. “Not as well. She yelled at me a lot and sometimes hit me. She always
wanted me to be someone else and I don’t think she ever really understood me.”
“Would you describe your relationship as abusive?” Rosemary asked.
Farkle nodded. “Yes, I would. Everything that has been said about her is true.”
“Now Farkle which parent do you want to live with?” Rosemary asked.
“My father definitely,” Farkle answered simply.
Rosemary smiled. “No further questions your honor.”
David Clark then walked up.
“Now if your mother had custody of you would you want to continue your relationship with your
father?” Clark inquired.
“Yes, definitely,” Farkle said.
“Now if it were the other way around and your father had custody of you would you want to continue your relationship with your mother?” Clark asked.
“I would want some time,” Farkle said. “It would be hard for me to be with her and probably hard for her to be with me. Maybe in the future, but not right away.”
“Farkle, you noticeably look different than you did about a year ago,” Clark said. “What accounted for the change?”
“Well sir, you see boys go through changes,” Farkle began dryly. “Their voices get deeper and—”
“-I understand that, young man,” Clark said dryly. “I meant changes in your dress and manner. What happened in the past year?”
“I didn’t want to wear what I wore before,” Farkle said.
“You changed from your bright colored turtlenecks to wearing dark colors, black mostly,” Clark said. “Was it a reaction to the difficulties at home?”
“Some,” Farkle said. “I also felt that after I returned from the hospital that my earlier clothes were no longer appropriate.”
“They fit a more darker persona,” Clark said. “One that rebelled against authority, against the father that you claim that you want to stay with!”
“Well yes but—”Farkle said.
“Your honor,” Rosemary said. “Farkle Minkus simply acted as any rebellious teenager. We have all been through that phase. I myself had a Goth look that I shudder to remember. This isn’t germane to whether Stuart Minkus is a good parent.”
“Oh I think it has everything to do with whether Stuart Minkus is a good parent,” Clark said. “I will allow it, proceed,” Boyer prompted.
“Farkle, do you think that you would have dressed in such a manner and rebelled against your mother in such a fashion?” Clark asked.
“If I were just living with my mother and not my father?” Farkle asked.
“Precisely,” Clark answered.
“No I wouldn’t get to,” Farkle said.
“How do you mean?” Clark asked.
Farkle shrugged. “Because I would no sooner enter dressed like that than my mother would have called me a little nothing, given me a black eye, and told me to change.”
“Which you would obey,” Clark hinted.
“If it were just her and me yes,” Farkle said. “Because my father wouldn’t be there to defend or support me like he has every day of my life. But if he was, he would have told me that it was all right and I could wear whatever I wanted.”
“During this rebellion,” Clark said. “You called yourself Donnie Barnes. While one can understand the desire to change from an odd name like Farkle, why did you also decide to drop the Minkus in your name?”
“No reason,” Farkle said. “Donnie Barnes sounded better than Donnie Minkus.”
“There must have been a reason,” Clark said. “After all you said that you loved your father. Why did you not want to have your last name? Were you angry at your father?”
“A little,” Farkle began.
“You are under oath,” Clark said patiently. “You are old enough to understand what it means.”
Farkle sighed. “I was angry with him.”
“What for?” Clark asked.
Farkle looked directly at his father. His eyes said, I’m sorry. “I was angry that he couldn’t protect me from my mother.”
“So the man that you claimed you love and understand failed you when you needed him the most,” Clark said. “You were so angry that you changed your name.”
“He was going through his own problems I realized that he wasn’t able to protect me,” Farkle said.
“Which justified the Hell that you went through,” Clark said. “Have you ever discussed your
feelings about your mother? Did you ever express hatred for her?"
Farkle shook his head. “No, we’re supposed to hate the actions not the person that’s what the abuse
support group tells us!”
“Farkle, have you?” Clark said.
“Yes I did,” Farkle answered.
“How did your father react?” Clark said. After a silence, Clark asked the question again.
Farkle bit his lip. “My father told me that it was better to let the emotion out rather than to bottle it
up. He said that sometimes he hated her too.”
Clark smiled smugly. “No further questions your honor.”
Judge Gilbert Boyer told both the plaintiff and the defendant to stand. “We have heard both sides
sling mud against each other, accusing both parents of being abusive, unfaithful, and have had loyal
friends and colleagues spring to their defense. While the importance of fatherhood is grossly
underestimated in this country, Mr. Minkus has not shown that he could properly protect or care
for his child.” Stuart gave an involuntary gasp and Farkle let out a small surprised wail of “No!”
before Boyer continued. “This court sees no choice but to remove custody of the child, Farkle J.
Minkus from his father to his mother, Jennifer Bassett. Since summer vacation is upon us, I
recommend that Farkle be placed in his mother’s care on August 1 in time for him to begin 9th
grade at his mother’s home. Visitation rights will be made upon review. Case dismissed!” He
banged his gavel as Jennifer’s side cheered and hollered in delight.
Stuart at first was stunned, but he ran forward to the judge. “This is outrageous! You can’t do this
to my son!” He said.
“You are free to appeal this decision,” Boyer said. “But it will be costly and unnecessary.”
Rosemary held Stuart back. “Stuart, no.”
“This isn’t over,” Minkus declared. “I won’t lose him!” He saw Farkle pale as he held him closer.
“I won’t lose you!”
“I thought we were going to win,” Farkle said.
Minkus held his son tightly and let him cry on him. Cory, Topanga, and the others approached
him. “I’m sorry, Farkle; Minkus,” Cory said.
Farkle angrily turned to his teacher. “You said that if we told the truth and looked at the evidence,
justice will win! We didn’t win!”
“I know Farkle, I know,” Cory said. “I’m sorry!”
“You said people change people, why doesn’t she?” Farkle asked pointing at his mother who was
being interviewed.
“I don’t know, Farkle,” Cory said. “Sometimes they change for the worst.”
One of the reporters ran up to Farkle. “Hey Farkle why not a happy picture with you and your
Mom?”
Farkle shook his head and was about say no when a throng of reporters surrounded the father and
son practically ripping Farkle from his father’s arms. They pushed and shoved on him until he
stood next to his mother.
“Ms. Bassett how do you feel about the judge’s verdict?” one of the reporters asked.
“Justice was done,” Jennifer replied. She put her arm around her son in a tight embrace. “Come on
smile baby, be happy that you’re going to live with your mother,” she said through clenched teeth.
She held Farkle so tightly that he felt like he would suffocate in her bony arms. He forced a weak
smile as his mother held him tight.
Minkus looked over the reporters and Jennifer’s family and supporters but he already felt lost in a
crowd as though Farkle had already been removed from his life forever.
Farkle begins his life with Jennifer and finds it difficult to say the least.

Chapter Summary

The Lives of Genius
A Boy/Girl Meets World Fanfic
Chapter Twenty-Two: New Life, New Family (Stuart Minkus Age 36; Farkle Minkus Age 14)
Author’s Note: You may recognize a few faces among Jennifer’s party going friends. Of course we already know Dana, Libby, and Kermit. O.S. AKA Stuart is naturally the professor that seduced Topanga in the BMW episode, “Everybody Loves Stuart” and Sherry is Mr. Mack’s recruiter in “Cult Fiction.” (I suppose we could think of Jennifer’s gathering as the “Legion of BMW/GMW Supervillains.”:D Well super may not be quite the word for them. :D LOL) Yes, Farkle’s new name was inspired by his original name, Seamus Farkle before they made him Minkus’ son.

Farkle mechanically packed some of his things into a backpack. He didn’t hear or see his father enter until he saw his stuffed Nemo being gently tossed on the bed. “Do you want to take him?” Minkus asked.

Farkle shook his head. “No, he should be with Marlin. Marlin and Nemo belong together.” Farkle said sadly putting Nemo aside. He turned away. “It’s not fair is it?” he asked.

“No it isn’t,” Minkus answered.

“I’m going to miss you and everyone here,” Farkle said.

“I’ll miss you too,” Minkus said as he hugged his son tightly. They heard a movement coming through the window. Minkus saw Maya tap on the window and wave. “I think you have a guest,” he said.

Farkle shook his head and opened the window. “Gentlemen,” Maya said as she climbed through. “I have always wanted to say that.” It went unsaid that it would be the only time that she would say it.

“I’ll give you two sometime to yourselves,” Minkus said hoarsely. He left the bedroom and entered the living room where Morgan waited for him.

“Are you okay?” Maya asked.

“Why shouldn’t I be,” Farkle said. “I’m going to live with my Mom, not because I want to because a judge told me I had to. Dad won’t be there. Riley and Lucas won’t be there. Mr. Matthews won’t be there. You won’t be there.” He said. “I’m doing great,” he said sarcastically.

“It’s okay to be scared Farkle,” Maya said coming closer to him and embracing him.

Farkle pulled away. “Maybe I should just stop this! Maybe I should finish what I tried to do last year!” He was about to step out of the bedroom when Maya stood in front of the door.

“The Hell you are,” Maya declared. “You are not going to do that! You are going to pack and you’re going to move in with your Mom! You are going to call or text us every week and you are going to visit your Dad and us! You are going to remember us always as your best friends!”

“Farkle, Farkle,” Maya said coming closer to him and embracing him.

Farkle pulled away. “Maybe I should just stop this! Maybe I should finish what I tried to do last year!” He was about to step out of the bedroom when Maya stood in front of the door.

“You are not going to do that! You are going to pack and you’re going to move in with your Mom! You are going to call or text us every week and you are going to visit your Dad and us! You are going to remember us always as your best friends!”

“Even if we never see each other again,” Farkle asked. “Even if she hurts me!”

“Farkle you have to promise me,” Maya said. “I only want one promise. I want you alive, even if it’s away from us rather than dead! Promise me!” She held onto Farkle again and hugged him tightly. “Promise me,” she began to cry herself.

Farkle held Maya tightly. “I promise, Maya.” They held each other and looked into each other’s
eyes. Maya leaned closer to Farkle and the two kissed.
Farkle pulled away remembering what Maya said about how she wanted them to continue as friends. “I’m sorry Maya, I shouldn’t have—“
“Yes you should’ve,” Maya agreed and she kissed him in return.
Stuart sat next to Morgan. “Do you want anything to drink?” he asked.
“Just ice water is fine,” Morgan said.
Stuart nodded as he walked into the kitchen. Morgan followed close behind. “Stuart,” she said as her boyfriend’s back was turned. “I’m so sorry for the trial. I thought that I could help. Instead I probably made things worse by giving them more ammo to accuse you of being an abusive philanderer.”
“I’m glad that you defended us,” Minkus said. “It wasn’t your fault that things ended up this way.”
The two had slowly continued their long distance relationship and Morgan made sure to be there for Stuart and Farkle before he went to live with his mother. Surprisingly, the cyberstalking had stopped. Maybe if Morgan’s theory was correct that the cyberstalker was Jennifer, she had more important things to worry about plus she won what she set out to do: Morgan may have publically defended her former husband, but Jennifer won her son.
Morgan nodded. “How are you?”
“Farkle’s a wreck,” Minkus said “But I hope once he adjusts to living there, maybe he’ll be okay.”
“I didn’t ask how Farkle was doing,” Morgan said.
“I’m filing my third appeal this week,” Minkus said. “If it goes as badly as the others, I have a feeling that nothing will change.” He turned away completely shattered but not wanting to show it.
“Still one can hope.”
“Stuart you don’t have to hide your emotions. I’m right here! Tell me!,” Morgan begged.
Minkus took a few deep breaths before he spoke hoarsely. “What can I say? That Jennifer and her family have finally taken everything from me that they possibly could? That they finally did the one thing that they knew could really hurt me? That no matter what persona she gave to that judge, I know that the second that door closes that Farkle will be under whatever treatment that she can give and I no longer can stop her? That I can only spend a few hours once a month with him and two weeks in the summer and I’m supposed to be satisfied with that? That I have filed appeal after appeal and none of them have worked?” He leaned against the wall not wanting his girlfriend to see the tears falling from his eyes. Morgan approached Stuart and held him. “I don’t want to lose my son, Morgan.” She strained herself slightly to hold the much taller man but managed to bring comfort to him.
“I know, Stuart, I know,” Morgan said as she kissed and held onto her boyfriend.
Minkus decided to let Farkle spend the day with his friends as a good-bye gift before he moved into his mother’s house. While the gang was determined to make Farkle’s last day memorable, there was an air of sadness amongst them.
The four as well as Zay and Smackle were present at Topanga’s to see Farkle off. Cory also wanted to be there to say good-bye to one of his favorite students. Many of the adults in Farkle’s life including Katy, Morgan, Shawn, Rachel, and Topanga were there as well. Cory and Topanga also brought Auggie.

He opened the gifts from his friends trying to put on a brave face. “I mean it’s not like its forever,” Riley said trying to cheer up her friend.
“I know,” Farkle said clinging to that false hope. “I mean I’ll be coming back at least once a month and two weeks every summer. It’s like the National Guard!”
“Yeah and you’ll be here for Christmas,” Riley said. Farkle nodded. “And I will text you and call all of you every chance I get.”
“Right, it will be like you never left,” Riley agreed. This time she knew that the hope was false.
“You might like living with your Mom,” Zay suggested. “She may have changed.”
“You think?” Farkle said wanting to agree with him.
“Yeah I mean, you’ll be making friends with all of those snobby rich kids. Pretty soon you’ll forget all about us,” Zay said.
“I will never forget you guys,” Farkle promised. He approached Zay. “I know we haven’t known each other for very long, but you’ve been a good friend to Lucas and you are one to me.” He and Zay clasped hands. “Try to stay out of trouble.”

“I’m way ahead of that,” Zay said.

Farkle then approached Smackle. “It won’t be as much fun competing without my arch nemesis.”

“I’m sure there will be others,” Smackle said her monotone voice carrying some emotion.

“None like you,” Farkle said. “Thank you and your parents again for helping my Dad.”

“You have thanked me before for that,” Smackle reminded him.

“Still it needs to be said,” Farkle said. “I know you’re still working through how you feel about personal touch, but may I hug you?”

Smackle smiled. “To phrase the vernacular, ‘Knock yourself out.’” Farkle leaned over and hugged the genius girl. She wanted to resist, but relaxed in his arms. “I like that.”

Farkle pulled away and approached Lucas. “Lucas, you have been like a big brother to me. You’re my best friend and have always been the strongest most confident guy that I know. I’m going to miss you.”

Lucas’ eyes dimmed. “I’m going to miss my best friend, the weirdest best guy that I know.” He wrapped his friend in a tight hug. He pulled away. “And let me know if your Mama ever hurts you.”

“Promise you won’t go too Crazy Lucas on her,” Farkle said.

“I’ll try not to,” Lucas answered.

Riley then approached Farkle. “Everything will be okay, Farkle.”

“Are you sure, Riley?” Farkle asked. “How can you be sure?”

“Because everything always is,” Riley answered simply.

“I’m going to miss you being so cheerful and reminding me of hope,” Farkle said. “I don’t think I’m going to have too many happy days.”

“Try to, for me,” Riley said as she kissed her friend quickly on the cheeks and gave him a gigantic hug.

Maya was last. Farkle and Maya stood next to each other silently. “It’s funny just when I made up my mind,” Farkle said. “I have to leave you. I even had our idea for the prom.”

Maya laughed. Typical Farkle always thinking ahead of their relationship. “Listen I want one thing from you,” She said pushing him forward by the shirt. “I don’t want you to look at those rich prep school girls without even comparing them to me.”

“I don’t even see how they could compete,” Farkle replied. “They would always end up being the losers.” Maya pulled Farkle closer and the two kissed for a minute.

Katy watched her daughter and Farkle kiss until she called her name. “Maya,” she said being concerned mother. “He’s only going to Rochester not to Afghanistan. Maya, that’s enough. Maya!”

Maya then pulled away from Farkle as the two exchanged sheepish grins. Katy then approached Farkle. “You’re a good boy, Farkle. I would have liked you for my daughter’s boyfriend.”

“I would have liked to be him,” Farkle answered. He hugged Katy and then reached for Shawn.

“You look after them okay.”

“I will,” Shawn answered. “And I’ll keep your Dad from doing anything too crazy.”

“Actually I was hoping you wouldn’t,” Farkle said. “He could use some loosening up.”

Shawn smiled and hugged the teenager.

Rachel then approached Farkle. “I say this to all my patients, but you take care of yourself,” Rachel said.

“I will,” Farkle promised.

“And if your mother ever hurts you, us Friars’ll give her a good Texas-sized thrashing,” Rachel teased hugging her son’s best friend.

“Now I see where Lucas gets it,” Farkle joked. Rachel and Lucas smiled.

He then walked up to Morgan. “You’re good for my Dad,” he said. “I hope you two are happy.”

Morgan smiled. “I hope you are too, Farkle.” She said as she gave him a hug.

Topanga, Auggie, and Cory approached Farkle.
“Are you really going to go, Farkle?” Auggie asked.
“Yeah I’m afraid so, Auggie,” Farkle answered.
“Why?” Auggie asked.
“Because I have to live with my mother, the judge said so,” Farkle answered.
“I wish I knew,” Farkle replied. He then gave Auggie a big hug. “Hey you’ll probably get taller by the time I get back. I won’t even recognize you. Be sure to invite me to yours and Ava’s wedding alright.”
Auggie sighed. “Oh boy another name to add to the guest list!” He said with an eye roll.
Topanga then approached Farkle. “Farkle, you’re like another son to me,” she said. “It’s really hard to do something that the law says should be done but my heart knows isn’t right.”
Farkle nodded. “It’s like you and Mr. Matthews said. Sometimes the good guys don’t always get to win.” He then hugged the lawyer tightly. “You, Ms. Hart, Dr. Friar, and now Morgan are better than my real Mom.”
“Give her a chance,” Topanga said through the hug. “That’s all you can do.”
Farkle then turned to Cory. “We expect great things from you, Farkle. Remember, the best label that you can wear is your name.”
Farkle fell into Cory’s arms as the teacher hugged the young boy. “You’re the best teacher I ever had,” Farkle said. “There won’t be anyone like you.”
“There won’t be another Farkle,” Cory said. “Now you go and change the world.”
Farkle gathered up his gifts as Minkus appeared at the door. “Are you ready to go?” he asked. “I’ve got your things in the car.” Morgan gave her boyfriend’s hand a tight squeeze in support. He accepted it as Farkle picked up his backpack.
Farkle nodded and waved good-bye at his friends as they waved back.
Even though Minkus had sold his original car to open Minkus Technologies, he had purchased a used car. It was a far cry from the wealthy BMW that he drove when he was married to Jennifer, but he bought it so he could visit Farkle whenever he had the chance. He wanted these last few hours with his son even if it was just a car ride to say good-bye. The two played Continuation with U.S. cities, asked logic puzzles, and discussed various books that they read. The two tried to keep their spirits up, but knew that the end was fast approaching.
“This isn’t fair,” Farkle said. “Why are we pretending that it is?”
“I know,” Minkus said. “But Rosemary and I are working on an appeal. I promise that I won’t rest on this. If it costs me every dime.”
“Why can’t we just run away?” Farkle said. “Can’t we just get out of here? Let’s go, we have money to leave and start over! Let’s just go!” He caught his breath and began to panic. His breath came out short and desperate. Minkus pulled the car over to the shoulder of the road and let Farkle out of the car.
Farkle stumbled out of the car and staggered onto a grassy ditch. He then leaned over and heaved. Minkus leaned down, held onto his son, and patted him on the back. “I want to go home.” Farkle sobbed in his father’s arms. “They even asked me what I wanted and I still have to live with her. Why can’t they let me go home?”
“I wish I knew, Farkle,” Minkus said holding his son in his arms. “I wish I knew.”
It was dusk by the time that Farkle and Minkus approached the Bassett home. Jennifer was waiting at the door with her parents. “It’s about time you showed up,” Jennifer commanded her ex-husband.
“Farkle had an episode on the road,” Minkus replied. “I waited until he calmed down before I let him in the car.”
“Of course you did,” Jennifer said snidely as Minkus and Farkle removed Farkle’s luggage from the car. She turned to her chauffeur. “Simon-” “Stephen,” the chauffeur corrected.
“Whatever,” Jennifer said. “Help this man remove my son’s luggage and take them to his room.”
“Yes Miss Bassett,” the man answered. Stephen then picked up Farkle’s luggage and then moved them towards a house down the field from the Bassett’s home.
Jennifer smiled at the house. “Daddy bought me my own house on the compound. Isn’t it wonderful?”

“Terrific,” Minkus said sarcastically as he followed Jennifer and Farkle. Jennifer swerved around to face her ex-husband.

“Uh where are you going?” she asked.

“I want to stay until I can be sure Farkle is settled in,” Minkus said.

“He is settled in,” Jennifer answered pointedly. “You brought him here. Your job is done. Oh wait not entirely. I will expect your first child support check at the beginning of the month.”

Minkus was about to spit on this woman. He wasn’t permitted to be a part of his son’s life, but he still had to pay Jennifer. Farkle was right. It wasn’t fair, none of it!

“What’s in the box?” Jennifer asked about the cardboard box in Farkle’s hands.

“Just some gifts and things that my friends gave me,” Farkle answered.

“I have a special place for them,” Jennifer replied. She then called another servant. “John,” she said.

“James, Miss Bassett,” the man corrected in a tone like he had corrected her a million times already.

“I said that,” Jennifer answered. “Put these things away.” James picked up the box and removed them from sight.

“Where is he taking them?” Farkle asked.

“I told you I have a special place for them, now don’t ask questions,” Jennifer said fiercely.

Since Minkus couldn’t follow them, he stayed rooted to the spot until he could be sure that Farkle was gone. “I guess I’ll be going,” Minkus replied. Farkle turned to his father. “I’ll see you next month alright?”

Farkle nodded as his eyes filled. He ran to his father and the two wrapped their arms around each other. “I’m going to miss you,” he said.

“I’ll miss you too,” Minkus said.

“I love you, Dad,” Farkle sobbed.

“I love you too, Farkle,” Minkus said kissing his son on the temple. “More than anything.” He wished time could stop in that moment so Farkle could be frozen in his arms forever and would never feel the pain of separation and loss and would never be hurt.

Minkus drove off the Bassett compound trying his best to retain his composure. He got as far as the highway when his teary eyes made it impossible to see the traffic in front of him. He then slowed down and pulled to the shoulder of the road. He then stopped the car and caught his own breath. At first he winced looking upwards at the roof of the car as the tears streamed down his face. He then moved forward and rocked himself back and forth and sobbed. “Farkle,” he said through his tears. Jennifer led her son into the house as Farkle dropped his bag on the couch. “Put that in your bedroom closet, Seamus.” Farkle looked around. “What are you looking for?” Jennifer asked.

“Seamus,” Farkle asked figuring that she was referring to another servant. “Though it is kind of weird that my clothes would be in his bed-“

“-That’s your name,” Jennifer corrected as if Farkle was a slow study. “One thing you will learn rather quickly, Seamus, is that when someone gives you an order you are to obey it the first time.”

Farkle picked up his bag.

“Why is my name Seamus?” Farkle asked.

“Because that other name was selected by your father,” Jennifer answered. “Because you live with me now. Because we’re legally changing your name. Because Farkle Minkus is dead. You are now Seamus Bassett, well Bassett for now anyway.”

Farkle felt odd. He felt split it into two like Farkle Minkus really had died! Where did the other him go? He felt different than when he called himself Donnie Barnes. Donnie was another part of him but was still him. Seamus Bassett didn’t feel like him at all. He wondered if his mother was bent on changing his name, there could be a compromise. “Can I be Donnie?” he asked. At least it was a familiar name.

“No,” Jennifer said. “Seamus is who you are and it’s who you are going to be.” She dug her hand
into his arm so hard that the nails were clawing at him. Farkle winced in fear.
“Now get upstairs,” Jennifer said severely. “I want you to see your room.”
Farkle walked upstairs to his bedroom. He looked around at the double twin bed with navy blue bedsheets and blankets. He had a Plasma Big Screen TV, a WiiU, a PS4, hi-def satellite stereo system all of the latest in modern technology. Farkle noticed that the room didn’t have anything from Minkus Technologies or Meese International. He imagined that his mother wanted to deprive him of any reminders of his father, even the company that he left behind. “Nice isn’t it?” Jennifer asked.
Farkle nodded. The room was decorated with various posters of military aircraft and soldiers as well as motivational posters that said things like “Endurance,” “Strength,” “Courage,” etc. Farkle instantly missed the astronomy, science fiction, and Einstein posters that dotted his wall. There was a desk that was as neat as a pin with a PC and laptop. “I can use my own,” Farkle said pulling out his laptop.
“That won’t be necessary either, Seamus,” Jennifer replied grabbing the laptop from her son’s hands. “I won’t have anything of him in this house!” As if materializing out of thin air, James reappeared at his mistress’ side. “I want you to put this with the other things,” she told him.
Farkle looked around. That was what made the room so barren. “Where are the things that my friends gave me?” He asked.
Jennifer rolled her eyes. “Seamus, you don’t need reminders of people like that. You will make new friends at your new school. You have to start over with an entirely clean slate. So those things are going in the trash. Speaking of which.” She opened her son’s backpack and took out his cell phone. Without asking her son’s permission, she looked through his contact list and deleted all of his friends and his father’s numbers.
“Those are mine!” Farkle objected wanting to take the phone from his mother’s hands but she held back.
“Nothing in this house is yours, Seamus,” Jennifer ordered. She then deleted the wallpaper which featured a photograph of Riley, Lucas, Maya, and Farkle laughing at Coney Island. “Everything that is here belongs to me or your grandfather. So we can do whatever we want with it.”
“May I have it back now, please?” Farkle asked.
Jennifer held the cell phone to her chest then put it in her pocket. “I’ll get you a new one. This one has too many bugs in it.” She then turned to her son. “You and I will have dinner at the main house, your grandparents. There is a suit pressed for you in your closet. I want to see you in it. You will have your hair combed and your body cleaned. There will be no backtalk and you will speak only when you are spoken to. Do I make myself perfectly clear?”
Farkle lowered his head. “Yes Mother.”
Jennifer put her hands on her son’s hair. “I will have to send for someone to get your hair cut before supper. This will not do at Washington.” She was about to step out of the room when she returned. “Oh and I am having some people over Friday night, a gathering with a few friends. I want you to make yourself presentable to them, do you understand?”
Farkle nodded. “Yes mother.”
“Good,” Jennifer answered. “Supper will be at seven. I expect to see you then.” She then left the room.
As Jennifer closed the door, Farkle flopped down on his new bed. Something inside confirmed what he already knew: he was not going to be happy here.
Farkle looked at his reflection in the mirror. The pressed white shirt, black slacks, black tie, and navy blazer felt starch and unreal on him. He felt like he was looking at a stranger. His hair had been cut severely short almost like a buzz. He stood up straight feeling almost like a military cadet. He glanced at the military poster. Was that what his grandfather was turning him into?
“Semus,” he heard his mother’s voice. Farkle continued to look at his reflection. It took him a second before he realized that his mother was calling him! He once again looked at his uniform and body. He felt like he wore a Halloween costume. In a way that’s what it was: a Seamus Bassett
costume. This Seamus Bassett seemed almost alien to him like he possessed the body of Farkle Minkus. How long before Seamus Bassett took over entirely. “Seamus!” His mother commanded again. Once again Farkle felt like Farkle Minkus really had died and wondered if he would ever come back to life.

Farkle exited his bedroom and approached his mother. She examined him up and down. “You look fine and clean,” she said. She was dressed in a sky blue skirt and matching top. “Come we don’t want to be late,” his mother ordered.

Jennifer and Farkle appeared at the Bassett’s dining room. Not only were his grandparents present but his Uncles Teddy and Tommy as well as his Aunts Eugenia and Anastasia and his younger cousins, Teddy and Anastasia’s 10 year old son, Andrew and Tommy and Eugenia’s 8 year old twin daughters, Ginny and Laurie. Since Teddy and Tommy and their families lived in Philadelphia, they must have taken a special trip just to see Farkle.

A maid put food on Farkle’s plate. He felt nervous as the maid placed the salad on the plate. He counted the tines and put the fork on the plate. He was about to take a bite when Edward cleared his throat. “I know that father of yours has deprived you of your manners, Seamus, but here we thank the Lord before we eat.”

“Oh I’m sorry, Grandfather,” Farkle said. He put the fork down and followed as the others bowed their heads.

Edward Bassett led the prayer. “For what we are about to receive may we be truly grateful. Dominates Padre Dominates Excelsior. Amen.”

“Amen,” the other Bassetts agreed as they crossed themselves.

“Amen,” Farkle said a half-second later and followed them, but made the horizontal cross from right to left before making the vertical one from his genitalia up to his head. Ginny and Laurie laughed. “Ginny, Laurie,” Aunt Eugenia corrected the girls. “That’s enough. It’s not his fault that he doesn’t understand. Semus hasn’t had the advantages that you have had.” Farkle gaped at his aunt’s patronizing. She made it sound like Farkle was a kid from the sticks living under the charity of his rich relatives. Okay right now, his father had more financial difficulties than he used to (and whose fault was that? He didn’t want to throw stones) but he was hardly living in poverty. For goodness sake, he wasn’t Oliver Twist!

“Eugenia makes a good point,” Edward said. “Seamus, while attending your lessons at Washington, you will also take Catholic instruction.”

Farkle looked around at his family. “Do I have to?” He asked. “I’ve never been very religious. I mean my father and I have always respected other people’s but we were never—”

“I will not hear anymore about that man in my house,” Edward commanded. “Your father will face the Day of Judgment like everyone else and he will be found wanting if he does not repent.” You mean if he does not buy enough indulgences to earn his way out of Purgatory,, Farkle wanted to object but chose not to. He had a feeling that his grandfather was not the sort to welcome a religious debate.

Edward continued to face his grandson. “You will take the instructions and you will be baptized into the Church. There will be no further discussion.”

“Edward,” Eunice interrupted. “Don’t you think that Farkl- uh I mean Semus should wait some time until he is used to living here before he makes that decision and shouldn’t the decision be his own?”

“Eunice do not interrupt me,” Edward snapped. “I knew how to bring up my children and I know how to bring up my grandchildren. He has been brainwashed by that ungodly father of his and made to worship at the altar of Darwin, Nietzsche, and who knows who else. Perhaps Karl Marx.”

“Oh no, my father is definitely a capitalist,” Farkle said wondering how on earth that Edward could mistake his former son-in-law for a Communist seeing as how he was a millionaire. A former millionaire, Farkle thought with a shudder of regret. But he figured by now, Edward Bassett recognized every evil ever imaginable in Stuart Minkus.

Jennifer grabbed onto her son’s shoulder. “Do not interrupt your grandfather!” She then turned to her father as though Farkle weren’t in the room. “Mother, if nothing else it will curtail outside
influence on him.”
“He looks like a slob,” His cousin Andrew interrupted.
“Andrew,” Farkle’s Aunt Anastasia said. “He is just a throwback.”
“Well what do you expect, Jenny,” Uncle Teddy asked dryly. “Do you really think that the influence from your ex will be removed so quickly?”
Tommy chimed in. “After all he is his own image.”
“That is what we are taking care of,” Edward ordered his sons.
Farkle wondered when he stopped being a person and started being something that they just talked about. He had a suspicion that it was intentional that the Bassetts kept referring to Farkle as “him” or “he” and stopped talking to him directly. He had been deprived of everything his father, his friends, his home, his name, and soon he would be deprived of his opinions and thoughts. He would not be consulted on anything about his life anymore.
Farkle entered Washington Academy for Boys following similarly dressed boys in their uniforms with similar haircuts. They walked forward single file into the hallways as the headmaster, gray haired wizened man glanced up and down. Farkle opened his locker and put his books inside. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a photograph of Maya, Riley, Lucas, and himself and another one of his father. “Wish me luck, guys,” he whispered. He put the photo of his friends to his lips and kissed Maya’s image wishing he could kiss her for real. He was about to tape them to his locker when he felt a severe tap on his shoulder. He turned around to see an upperclassman and the headmaster facing him.
“I’ll take those,” the headmaster said as he took the photos from the teenager’s possession. He ripped them in two and handed the pieces to the upperclassmen. “Dispose of these, Hollister.”
“It would be my pleasure, Mr. Kiltcher,” the upperclassman said as he threw the photos in the trash.
“You are the new student Bassett,” Mr. Kiltcher said. Farkle nodded. “I presume you read the handbook before you entered our school grounds.”
Farkle smiled. “Well everyone keeps telling me to, but I thought that I would wait for the movie.”
Kiltcher gave a sarcastic smile. “Having personal possessions costs you one demerit. Disrespecting an authority figure costs you another. 5 demerits and you and I will have ourselves a little chat and you won’t like the outcome, son.”
“I’m sorry, sir,” Farkle said. He felt like those words should be tattooed on his forehead. It seemed ever since he moved in with his mother, he was sorry about everything. “It won’t happen again.”
“See that it doesn’t,” Mr. Kiltcher said. “Now what is your first period class?”
Farkle checked his schedule. “American History, Mr. Philson.”
Kiltcher smiled. “Good, Hollister, take him to his classroom.”
“Yes sir,” Hollister answered.
Hollister and Farkle walked down the hallway. Okay, Farkle failed to get the headmaster on his side. Maybe it wasn’t a complete loss, he may make a friend. Hollister after all appeared only a year or two older than Lucas. He even looked sort of like him except less like a cowboy and more like a preppy. “What was his deal?” Farkle asked pointing at Kiltcher’s direction.
“You follow the rules and you won’t wonder,” Hollister answered snidely.
“So Hollister,” Farkle asked holding out his hand. “You can call me Seamus or Farkle anyway. That’s what everyone calls me at hom uh I mean at my father’s. What’s your first name?”
“All students refer to each other by our last names, Bassett,” Hollister emphasized the last name. “It encourages respect for authority and uniform behavior for Washington faculty, staff, and all personnel.” He looked him up and down. “Though I must say you don’t look like Washington material. What are you, a scholarship student?”
Farkle felt his face flush with anger. Again a swipe at his father. “No, my grandfather, Edward Bassett wants me to come here.”
“My mistake,” Hollister returned sarcastically. “I am aware your father was…new money, less so now. I just assumed.”
“You know what assuming means,” Farkle said not wanting to continue.
Hollister grimaced thinly. “That’s 3 marks also for disrespecting an authority figure.” He pointed at the door and rapped smartly on it. The door opened to see a bespectacled man in white buzz cut. “Mr. Philson this is your new student, Seamus Bassett.”

Farkle walked into the classroom and sat down towards the front row. There was no introduction and no cross talk between students. All of the students were seated properly and quietly waiting for the lecture. Farkle sat down and faced the teacher. Mr. Philson wrote on the smart board, Custer’s Last Stand. “Now what do you recall about our previous conversation about General Custer?”

One of the students raised his hand. “That General Custer valiantly led his troops to fight the savage Indians.”

Farkle couldn’t believe what he was hearing. That wasn’t how Mr. Matthews taught the lesson. “Very good, Mr. Thomas,” Philson said. “He fought to protect the rights of the settlers who were being invaded.”

Farkle raised his hand. “But weren’t the settlers themselves the real invaders?” He asked. He stood up and approached the desk. He was half-tempted to flip over Mr. Philson’s name plate but had a feeling that “Farkle “was not on the other side. He remembered when he was in Cory’s class, that his teacher taught them about mythologizing the West and how it contributed to centuries of stereotypes on Native Americans and the settlers.

Farkle continued. “Custer broke treaties with the Sioux tribe and he and his officers invaded their land. It was the Sioux’s land by right.”

Philson rolled his eyes as if it were a speech that he heard many times. “Property that isn’t in writing and isn’t properly cultivated can never be someone’s land by right, Bassett! Custer was a hero who was tragically killed defending his people.”

“By declaring war on another people,” Farkle objected. “Sitting Bull fought for his people to live and be free from the white’s influence.”

“Whose people met their end at Wounded Knee after Sitting Bull resurrected that useless Ghost Dance,” Thomas added. The other students laughed. Some even “booed” imitating ghost sounds. “Precisely,” Philson said. “Now Bassett return to your seat and mark yourself another demerit. This time for questioning the curricula.” Farkle sat back down feeling flushed and embarrassed as Philson pointed at him. “You see class this is what results from a liberal public school education. I must admit, Bassett, from your inflated reputation that your previous institution has delivered, I would have expected more but unfortunately I am utterly disappointed.”

Farkle looked up at the teacher but said nothing. That makes two of us, he thought bitterly. In gym class, Farkle changed into his shorts and long sleeved shirt as some of the other boys talked around him. A few pointed at him and laughed. Farkle knew that he was the subject of their discussion. One even did a fake war whoop referring to him defending Sitting Bull in class. He overheard another one saying “His dad lost his shirt in the divorce.”

“He’ll never fit in here,” Hollister said quietly. Farkle looked at him as Hollister raised his voice. “I’m sorry I said HE’LL NEVER FIT IN HERE!!!”

A whistle broke through the tension as a coach appeared. The boys hurriedly get dressed and mouthed, “Sorry Coach Hozier.”

“Alright ladies this is not a tea party! Get suited up and get outside! Calisthenics the running, then football!” Hozier shouted, then looked at the newcomer, the only one who wasn’t moving. “You there Bassett!,” he shouted. “When I said everybody, I meant you! Get dressed!”

“I am dressed, Coach,” Farkle answered. In JQA, he received permission to wear a long sleeved shirt for gym class. He hoped that it would be the same here as well as long as he wore a Washington logo shirt.

“No I mean put on your short sleeves now,” Hozier said.

“But Coach,” Farkle objected. “This is a regulation shirt. It’s even the Washington logo and motto!”

“I don’t care,” Hozier said. “Everyone wears the uniform and so do you.” He faced the young boy but Farkle wouldn’t budge. The last thing that he wanted was these guys seeing the scars from his
suicide attempt. “Put the shirt on!”
“Please sir, I can’t,” Farkle said.
“If you don’t put it on, I will put it on for you,” Hozier said through clenched teeth.
Farkle looked at the other boys facing him and then shook his head. Hozier then whistled.
“Hollister, Dumont, take care of this young gentleman.”
Farkle stepped back in fear as the two older students grabbed him and forced him to the ground.
Farkle begged for them to get off of him, but Dumont pulled his shirt off. “What the hell?” he asked. Hollister then grabbed Farkle’s arms forcing them to be still so everyone could see. Around Farkle, he could hear the other boys talking at once. “What is that?” “Is he cutting?” “No stupid only girls cut!” “its suicide right?” “What a weakling!”
Farkle caught his breath and panted facing Coach Hozier. The coach looked at the student with no expression except to say, “Hollister put his short sleeved shirt on him. Bassett, that’s another demerit.”
Farkle waited as the headmaster called the young boy in. “Five demerits already, Bassett,” Mr. Kiltcher said gleefully. “This is your second day here. It must be a record.” He then opened his drawer. “Lean over that chair.”
Farkle obeyed as the headmaster took out a paddle. “Mr. Kiltcher, corporal punishment is no longer permitted in schools.”
Farkle jumped as Kiltcher paddled him five times. The paddling didn’t hurt as much as his pride. He was never a disciplinary problem until now. “Stand up,” Kiltcher commanded. “For now I will take care of this. If you come to my office again, I will have to report this to your mother.” Farkle felt faint. He knew how his mother would react. The paddling would be easy compared to what she would do. No doubt she would tell his grandfather too and the punishment would be twice as severe. Farkle knew to avoid any further problems, he was going to read the Washington Academy handbook cover to cover.
Farkle didn’t know what to wear for his mother’s gathering so he figured that he would just remain in his school clothing. He heard loud music coming from the main room. He entered to see a group of people gathered. They were drinking, talking, and laughing loudly. Many of the guests were dressed more casually than Farkle had anticipated, though wearing designer clothing. “Farkle hi,” called a very dizzy voice. Farkle turned to the direction partly in confusion and relief that someone called him by his original name. It had been so long he had been called “Farkle” he had began to forget what it felt like. He turned to see Dana who was stumbling towards the young boy. Libby upheld the other woman embarrassed by her behavior.
“It’s Seamus Dummy,” Libby hissed in the other girl’s direction.
“Oh sorry Seamus Dummy,” Dana giggled as though she said the funniest thing in the world.
Farkle helped Dana Pruitt-Livingstone stand. If possible, she was thinner than when Farkle saw her last. He knew from health class that a body couldn’t last long if it were anorexic. Her eating disorder was all too painfully obvious. He remembered her report from the trial. “Aunt Dana-“ He said hoping he could warm her up by using his familiar nickname for her. “I thought that you said that you were in rehab.”
“I was,” Dana said wincing. “But the only thing I learned there is that I’m an addict.”
“To what,” Farkle asked.
Dana began to cry. “To your mother.” She swayed back and forth as Libby held her up and led her to the couch. Farkle understood. He knew that his mother was a strong forceful personality that drew people to her. She could find and pick at their weaknesses until they were destroyed. Farkle was glad that his father got away from her when he did and wondered how much longer it would be before he ended up like Dana himself.
Mitzi Van Houten looked up from necking with her current boyfriend, a young film star that Farkle recognized from various action films. If he wasn’t so confused by the setting, Farkle would have asked for his autograph. “Jenny Benny, your little boy’s here!” Mitzi called.
Jennifer looked up from kissing a blond man next to her. Farkle didn’t know who he was, but he
looked enough like a male version of Maya that he wondered if he was her long-lost father. “Seamus,” Jennifer called. “Come and meet my friends!” She then lowered her nose onto a small mirror and snorted cocaine into it. Farkle took an involuntary step back. He knew his mother was an alcoholic, but a drug addict too? What was going on in this place? He shuddered, why was it so important to his mother that he should be here?

Jennifer stood up and introduced him to her friends. “Come on have a seat baby,” she said. “Don’t you want to meet Mommy’s friends?”

Not particularly, Farkle wanted to say but he was too terrified to answer her back.

“Check out the suit,” Mitzi teased. “Our Little Preppie!” She sat him down between a curly haired man that Farkle insanely thought could have been Mr. Matthews’ older brother and a woman with neck length dark hair.

“You never told us your boy’s handsome, Jennifer,” the woman said. She began to touch his crotch in a way that made Farkle uncomfortable.

“I can’t reveal all my secrets now can I, Sherry?” Jennifer teased.

“Now what’s your name again?” the man asked.

“Far-“ Farkle was about to say his real name but because of his mother’s fierce look, he changed his mind. “Seamus.”

“Would you like a drink, Far-Seamus?” he asked.

“Uh oh Stuart’s at it again,” Farkle heard someone say. He looked around. Had his father entered? But then he realized they were referring to the man seated next to him. It was odd that he would have the same name as his father. He saw the man’s sly smile and reptilian look at him. He instantly made Farkle feel uncomfortable. He may have the same name, but he was certainly nothing like his father.

“Next will be Sherry,” another party goer agreed. “Spending all that time with Mr. Big Mack must have taught her something.”

“Uh no, I don’t think so,” Farkle said answering Stuart’s question about a drink. “In fact I have some homework to do.” He was about to stand up when Stuart and Sherry held him down.

“Now come on, darling,” Sherry said. She offered him an alcoholic beverage. “When I was your age, I would have loved for somebody to give me a drink. It’s just a sociable drink among friends.”

“I will help loosen you up kid,” Stuart teased.

Farkle’s hands shook as he held the drink in his hands. He felt dry and parched. The burning smell of alcohol and drugs was all around making him feel sick to his stomach. He glanced over at his mother’s direction. Jennifer nodded and mouthed, “yes.”

“Come on you want your Mommy to love you don’t you?” Stuart asked.

Farkle put the cup to his lips and swallowed the drink whole. He felt violently ill feeling the alcohol already go through his insides. His stomach churned and he held onto his mouth. “Mother,” he gasped.

He rose from the couple’s grasp as some of Jennifer’s friends mocked him. “Mother,” a couple of people quoted in a whiny voice including Jennifer’s blond date. “I think I’m going to be sick,” Farkle said.

Jennifer rolled her eyes. “Fine go to bed,” she said. Farkle ran to the bathroom and vomited into the toilet bowl. He then sank into his bedroom and changed into his pajamas. He sank into bed not feeling very tired, but lay in bed.

An hour later, Farkle felt the room spin. He felt drained and sleepy like everything moved slowly. He couldn’t remember falling asleep, but wondered if maybe he was dreaming. Was he approaching REM sleep? He wanted to leave his bed but felt pulled into it.

His bedroom door opened. Farkle wondered if his visitor was his mother wanting a talk with him. He saw a woman enter, but was disappointed as she approached. She had dark hair. Instead she was his mother’s friend, Sherry.

Sherry then moved jerky towards Farkle. Something about her movements and the heightened tone of her voice indicated that she was high. She then sat down next to him in bed and began to fondle his crotch like she did at the party. She then kissed him on the mouth. “You feel soft,” she said.
“I’m your first aren’t I?” She scratched his back with her long nails.
Farkle wanted to open his mouth and say something but couldn’t. Was he dreaming? Like most
boys he dreamt of his first time, but this wasn’t what he envisioned. Especially not with one of his
mother’s friends, and not like this, it was uncomfortable almost revolting to him. “Please wake up
Farkle”, he whispered. He glanced towards the door.
“No one will hear you and if they do, they won’t care,” Sherry said as she continued to work. “You
will find me a very pleasing woman if you get to know me.” She opened Farkle’s shirt and lowered
his pants. She moved her head down his body. Farkle tensed! Oh no, was she doing what he
thought she was doing down there? Farkle’s moan answered the question.
His bedroom door opened once more as another figure appeared. “What’s going on here?” Farkle
recognized the voice of Stuart, Sherry’s Stuart not his father! Farkle tensed fearing a fight between
the couple that Sherry was getting her highs elsewhere and with an underage boy at that. He felt
very slow moving. “It’s not what it looks like,” Farkle managed his voice feeling almost like a far
away echo.
“I was just getting him started,” Sherry said sounding not at all frightened, angry, or even
apologetic.
Instead of continuing to look stern, Stuart smiled. “Good,” he said as he undid his belt and put
down his trousers. He locked Farkle’s bedroom door. Then, he entered Farkle’s bed and fondled
his back as Sherry took care of his front. Farkle wanted to scream and shout. He wanted to beg
them to stop, but he felt like his tongue was extremely heavy like he couldn’t get the words out.
“If you tell anyone we will kill you,” Sherry said her voice becoming sharp and fierce.
“It won’t do you any good anyway,” Stuart whispered. “Your Mom knows all about it.”
The two of them fondled the young boy as Sherry continued to give Farkle oral sex. “Did you learn
that move from Your Sainted Leader, Babe?” Stuart teased her.
“He’s not my Sainted Leader,” Sherry said sounding for a moment bitter. “I left him long ago. But
he did teach me a few things beyond hugging. What about you, did you learn that move screwing
college girls?” She taunted.
“Let’s say I taught as much as I learned,” Stuart taunted back as he pushed himself towards
Farkle’s buttocks, clearly erect. No Farkle would not profane his father’s name by giving it to this
man. His father was nothing like him. In Farkle’s mind, this man would always be Other Stuart or
O.S. He would never mix him with his father by even using the same name.
Farkle’s breath caught in his throat. He was unable to move, unable to speak, unable to cry. He was
so shocked that he could do nothing more than hang stiff as the two adults continued to molest
him. The only thing that he hoped for was that they weren’t right that his mother knew and that this
really was a dream. Wake up, Farkle, he mentally kept begging, Please wake up, Farkle.
Farkle awoke the next morning with a pounding headache. The light filled his room practically
blinding him. He looked around his room, the encounter with O.S. and Sherry hazy in his mind. Had it been a dream? He looked at his sheets.
There were several impressions on the bed but that wasn’t unusual. He moved around in his sleep.
He timidly changed from his pajamas and felt his shoulders. He glanced at them. Some long jagged
edges had sharpened into them like something with long fingernails. Sherry had long fingernails,
Farkle remembered. He shivered with fright as he changed his clothes.
He entered the living room and saw his mother asleep on the couch, a bottle only a few feet away
from her. Farkle looked around the room to see cigarette stubs inside the ash tray and some on the
table. Some had flicked on the floor. Several broken bottles lay on the ground and hung in plants.
He could see some drug paraphernalia on the table next to his mother. Jennifer was alone and a
mess with her hair askew and her makeup running on her sleeping face. She had a swollen eye and
Farkle wondered if she got in a fight during the night. Farkle sighed and began to clear away the
bottles and cigarette butts and threw them in the trash.
Jennifer moved and sighed a little in her sleep. Farkle approached his mother. “What time is it
baby?” Jennifer asked.
“It’s a little after 10,” Farkle answered looking at the grandfather clock in the hallway.
“Oh,” Jennifer said. “A few more hours then. Clean up around here.” She mumbled. “The regular girl is useless.” Her voice was muffled by the cushions.

Farkle then helped his mother to stand and led her through the hallway into her bedroom. Jennifer staggered wincing at the sunlight. Farkle understood how she felt right then. Farkle then led his mother to her bedroom and covered her up with the blankets and bedsheets.

Jennifer mumbled. “You are so good to me, Stuart. Will you always be good to me?”

Farkle was confused. He felt chilled as he recalled his encounter with the duo the night before and his inner resolve to never call the man anything but Other Stuart or O.S. He assumed hoped anyway that his mother was referring to her former husband.

He guessed since his mother was hung over and coming down from her high, she thought that Farkle was his father. He remembered that his father would often put his mother to bed after her drinking binges. Perhaps she recognized the responsibility in both men.

“I will be good to you,” Farkle said. “I promise.”

“Do you love me, Stuart,” Jennifer asked.

Farkle stepped away. “I love you.”

“Then say it,” Jennifer begged.

“I love you,” Farkle repeated.

“And?” Jennifer prompted.

Farkle didn’t know what else to say. He hesitated so Jennifer finished for him. “And you would be nothing without me.”

“And I would be nothing without you,” Farkle repeated. He then flipped off the light and returned to the living room to clean up the mess left by his mother and her guests.

Stuart Minkus drove up to the Bassetts driveway in the car that he rented from the airport. It had been a month and he heard barely any word from Farkle. He had received a few terse customary text messages early on saying that he was alright and having a good time at his mother’s. He even compared notes with the kids and they said the same thing that he hadn’t called or texted him except then. Stuart was disappointed that Farkle didn’t even call on his birthday the previous month, but he figured hoped anyway that maybe he was just getting used to his new surroundings. At the very least, he wanted to check to see how he was doing. He knocked on the door looking forward to this time with his son. If it had to be once a month, he was no different than most divorced fathers. He was determined to make it last and make it worthwhile.

“May we help you?” a tall gray haired man appeared at the door. Stuart guessed that he was a servant.

“I’m Stuart Minkus here to pick up my son, Farkle,” Minkus answered.

The man looked him up and down as though he were an intruder and then shut the door. Jennifer this time opened the door. “What do you want?” she asked.

“I’m here to pick up Farkle,” Minkus said. “It’s my weekend with him.”

Jennifer looked downward almost sorrowfully. “Oh I’m sorry, Stuart. He’s come down with the flu. He’s really not feeling well.”

“What?” Minkus asked suspiciously. He stepped inside the threshold. “If he’s sick at least let me be with him!”

“I told you that he is too sick to see you,” Jennifer said sternly pushing her ex-husband back. “Now leave.”

“Not until I see my son,” Minkus practically shouted. “At least let me explain it to him. Let me come next weekend!”

“Not until I see my son,” Minkus practically shouted. “At least let me explain it to him. Let me come next weekend!”

“We’ll see about that,” Jennifer hissed. “Now if you want my son to be healthy, I suggest you leave and not rouse him!”

Minkus struggled for a bit to get inside with Jennifer holding him back. His cell phone vibrated. Minkus cursed and took out the phone to read the text message. It was a short one from Farkle.

“Not feeling well. Will see you next week, promise.”

Minkus glared at Jennifer then at the cell phone. He wasn’t convinced that Farkle was sick, but he wasn’t sure if he could pursue this further. Was Jennifer keeping his son from him? Right now, he
wouldn’t put anything past her. He glared at her. “Next week and I had better see him,” Minkus said.
“We’ll see about that,” Jennifer replied. Minkus then turned around to head into the car and drove away.
Jennifer closed the door as James, her underbutler, handed her Farkle’s cell phone.
“Thank you,” she said. “Now to wake my little boy.”
Farkle felt his head throb. He rose languidly from his bed still feeling tired. Why should he still be tired? He had plenty of sleep the night before, almost too much of it. For the first time in a month, he managed to fake sick to get out of attending his mother’s gatherings.
He complained of a headache and strangely enough despite his mother’s insistence that he was just fine, Jennifer was sympathetic. She gave him two aspirin and a glass of water. No soon had he taken the pills, pills that he didn’t recognize as aspirin, that he felt languid and slept right away.
Right before he woke up, he thought he heard voices. One of them sounded like his father! Was he real or a dream? He sprang from the bed to face the window. The landscape was still the same. There wasn’t any new car in the driveway. Wasn’t this the weekend that he was allowed to be with his father? He was looking forward to it. It would be a time of normalcy from all of the anxieties and tensions that he had been feeling.
His mother’s parties were unfortunately a weekly thing and every Friday night, he was fearful not only of O.S. and Sherry’s visits to molest him, but also the sight of his mother getting drunk, high, and having full-on almost public sex with her male guests.
Farkle had guessed a long time ago that Sherry slipped him “roofies” AKA the “Date Rape drug” while she and O.S. took speed or cocaine to get high and molested him. He took them almost willingly not wanting to have the sharp recall and shame of what they were doing to him.
One night to avoid the party, he tried pretending that he was spending the night at a friend’s, (though at Washington he didn’t really have any. He was just going to spend the night somewhere else maybe a hotel or something), but his grandfather and mother asked enough questions about the so-called friend and his family that they were able to ask around and find out Farkle was lying.
After his mother’s party, he spent the next night standing outside the house for 8 hours.
The punishment after his mother’s party had become a typical one for Farkle. While his mother would yell, slap, and refer to her son in her usual derogatory terms, his grandfather often had more creative means of punishment. He called it “toughening his grandson up.”
Grandfather Bassett was relentless in drilling his grandson in his lessons, something Farkle would have normally aced at, but being in that house made him nervous and skittish. Once when he messed up the Apostolic Creed, Edward Bassett made his grandson sit at a far table with no food while he watched the rest of the family eat.
Since his grandfather didn’t believe in psychiatric care or medicine, he insisted that Jennifer throw out Farkle’s anti-depressant and anti-anxiety medication. As expected the demons of depression and anxiety returned full force. Farkle felt the panic attacks emerge almost constantly now, at school or at home. He became an expert at learning when they returned. When he felt his chest and throat constrict, he knew one was coming. Occasionally he made a sound that was a combination of clearing his throat and a dry heave. Whenever he did that in front of his mother or his grandfather, they would tell him to stop it and it was a sign of weakness. Once the anxiety passed, the depression continued. He would often feel pessimistic, worthless, and angry with himself and the whole world. He would sometimes remember the time when he attempted suicide and wonder why he didn’t just finish the job. He knew that he promised Maya that no matter what would happen, that he would live. Still that promise was getting harder to make.
It was interesting that Farkle thought of his mother as the one in control, but with his grandfather she always deferred to him. She never argued or disagreed with his commands. He suspected that when she was with her father, the power balance shifted and Edward was really the one in charge. That he controlled everything in the household including Jennifer’s son. Maybe because Jennifer was as under his thumb as everyone else or maybe she just really didn’t enjoy the tedious task of raising a child, she allowed her father to make all final decisions toward Farkle’s care.
Farkle had minimal contact with the outside world, especially his friends and his father. He only went to school where he was being monitored and had no friends and to church. He had been through the Catholic instruction and had been baptized, but it held no meaning for him. Just like the kneeling, the communion, and everything else that went on in the church. They felt hollow and meaningless. Even when Farkle went to confession (mostly talking about how he was bad and was being punished), he didn’t feel any release of guilt or comfort. In fact the priest often told him to say several Hail Mary’s before he apologized to his mother and grandfather for having an ungrateful heart.

He tried to contact his friends and his father but was unable to. His mother and grandfather always stood over him whenever he sent text messages to monitor what he wrote. He felt like a prisoner of the Gestapo desperately trying to spread news about his real condition but unable to because of the guards. All he could manage were short messages to say that he was fine. They also had ways of monitoring Farkle’s Internet and phone use so he didn’t send messages to anyone back home in Manhattan. Farkle compared this surveillance to when his father spied on him after the suicide attempt. Farkle understood it in a way, though he didn’t agree. Stuart Minkus was spying out of worry and panic over the realization that his son almost died once and could very well do it again. He also stopped when he and Farkle talked to each other and apologized. Jennifer and Edward Bassett spied on Farkle as a means of control, not wanting him to get any information out to anyone. If Farkle even hinted at the unhappiness that surrounded him, their house of cards would fall.

Farkle wanted to scream and wanted to shout. He wanted to say that this was all a mistake and that he wanted to go home, but he couldn’t. What good would it do? No one would hear him and he wondered if anyone would care.

His bedroom door opened and his mother appeared. “You left your cell phone in the living room last night,” she said. “Be glad I hid it so no one would make off with it.”

“You mean you don’t trust your friends with something?” Farkle asked. “That’s a first.”

His mother slapped him hard. “I have friends. You don’t and with that attitude you never will. How’s your headache?”

“Fine,” Farkle said. “I slept most of the time.”

“Good,” Jennifer said. He glanced at his mother wondering if she had drugged him. Maybe he was becoming paranoid but then again he slept very soundly the night before.


Jennifer shook her head. “No, he wasn’t. I was talking to James. The clumsy ox dropped some things and scratched the living room floor.”

“But aren’t I supposed to see him?” Farkle asked. “This is my weekend with him.”

“No, I just received a text message from him,” Jennifer answered. “He’s on a business trip probably visiting that Philadelphia Slut for all I know—“

“-She’s not a slut,” Farkle corrected. “Morgan’s really nice.”

“She went out with him,” Jennifer insisted. “She must be a slut desperate to get a tumble from anybody!”

Farkle didn’t want to strike back with a comment like it takes one to know one, but he certainly felt like it.

“-Anyway he forgot all about your weekend,” Jennifer said. “See?” She showed him her phone which had a text message: Off for conference. It was followed by Jennifer’s response: What about our son? Then followed by his response: Oh sorry. It will have to be next week then.

Farkle shook his head. “No, that’s not right. He would never forget!”

Jennifer glared at her son and grabbed him so hard that her nails dug his arm sharp. “Are you calling me a liar?”

Farkle shook his head. “No, I’m not. I just want to see him!”

“Well you’re certainly not going to,” Jennifer said. “And anyway you have work to do!”

Farkle sighed and put on the gray apron that he wore when he was doing housework. Since his mother had such an explosive temper, she never kept indoor servants in her house for very long.
Servants could stay as long as they wanted to at her parent’s house, but as far as her house was concerned, they were under her control. When she lost her temper, they were fired. When the house was devoid of servants like now, Farkle usually found himself doing the cooking, cleaning, and whatever work that his mother had in mind. He privately wondered if his mother preferred it that way that she had a son instead of a servant to work under her, that way he had to take whatever abuse she could give him and never have to be fired or quit. It wasn’t the typical situation where a kid got chores that he didn’t like but had to do them anyway. His mother stood over him as he worked, pointing out any flaws or mistakes that he made. This time, she watched him as he scrubbed the floor with a Swiffer mop. He continued to mop the kitchen floor as she stood over him. Farkle left one corner and was about to approach another corner, when his mother cleared her throat. “Uh, what are you doing?” she asked.

“I’m cleaning the other side,” Farkle said sighing heavily. Oh no, she was in one of her moods again.

“Does that look clean to you,” Jennifer asked pointing at the side he left.

Farkle looked down at the floor. “Y-yes,” he stammered.

Jennifer held onto her son by the shoulder, the Swiffer landed on the floor with a clang. Jennifer then forced her son on his knees and pushed him to face the corner that he just cleaned. The cleanser filled Farkle’s nose making him nauseous as close as he was to the smell. He screamed in pain as his mother continued to shove him. “Does it?” Jennifer practically screamed. Farkle shook his head. “No,” he said meekly though he couldn’t see anything wrong with it.

Jennifer let him go so sharply that Farkle nearly lost his balance and had to grab onto the countertop for support. “Then clean it again!” Jennifer commanded. Farkle nodded with tears in his eyes as he picked up the Swiffer and mopped the area again.

After at least three hours of mopping the kitchen floor, dusting the walls, and washing windows among other housework, Jennifer finally told Farkle that he was finished. Farkle removed the apron from his waist and practically collapsed on the chair.

After he caught his breath, Farkle asked his mother something he had been wanting to ask Jennifer for some time. “Can I give Father a birthday present or at least call him to wish him a happy late birthday?” He asked last month but was refused. Since he cleaned the house for her, maybe she would be more willing.

Jennifer shook her head. “No, you won’t need to celebrate anything with him anymore.”

“Why not?” Farkle asked already not liking this.

Jennifer smiled very reptilian. “Well I suppose it will come out sooner or later. You’re going to have a new father.”

Farkle was stunned. “What?” he asked.

“I’m getting remarried,” Jennifer answered. “Your last link to Stuart Minkus will be severed, Seamus.”

Farkle shook his head. “He’s still my father! You can’t just replace him!”

“And he certainly is taking his time replacing me isn’t he?” Jennifer said sarcastically.

“No he and Morgan don’t want to get married,” Farkle said. “They’re just long distance dating!”

Jennifer held up her hand. “I don’t want to hear another word about either of them, do you understand?”

All feeling seemed to leave Farkle’s body making him cold. He shivered. “Who are you getting married to. Is it O.S.?” His mother looked confused so Farkle translated. “Other Stuart, the man that comes to your parties.” Oh please don’t let it be Other Stuart Farkle thought. He knew with O.S. as his stepfather, a locked door wouldn’t keep him out for very long.

Jennifer laughed at the absurd notion. “Do you really think that I’d marry someone else named Stuart? Besides he and Sherry are in a loving committed relationship, you know that.”

“Yeah committed to other people,” Farkle shot back.

Jennifer rolled her eyes. “I am not going to have this discussion again with you. They did not do what you swore they did. Either you were dreaming or you misinterpreted their actions.”
“They walked into my bedroom, lay in my bed and kept touching me,” Farkle argued. “They’ve been doing that to me every week for the past month. How is that a misinterpretation? God, if I were your daughter and not your son, I’d probably be pregnant by now!”

“Seamus you are being ridiculous,” Jennifer said. “Stop making things up!” She said severely. “If you don’t, I will tell your grandfather. You know what he can do to little boys who lie!” She slapped her son hard across the cheek.

Farkle nodded with tears in his eyes. “You’re right Mother. I’m probably dreaming the whole thing! It never happened.”

“Anyway your new father isn’t Stuart,” Jennifer said. “You’ll meet him shortly. That’s why I needed the place to be spotless.” She heard the doorbell ring and smiled. “Oh good that will be him!” She told her son to get dressed and cleaned up. Farkle put on one of his good suits and stepped downstairs.

Jennifer took her fiancé by the hand and pulled him to her son’s side. “Shamus,” Jennifer said. “Of course you know Alvin Meese.”

“Just call me Dad,” Meese said sarcastically.

Farkle felt like he was falling through a crack in the floor. His head felt dizzy and faint as he looked up at his mother and Alvin Meese, his, gag, future stepfather. It was bad enough that this man stole his father’s company and became CEO in his stead leaving Minkus to start over. He had to steal his ex-wife and now his son too. Was this some kind of intentional revenge on both his part and the Bassetts? “I don’t understand,” Farkle said through gasps. “I thought you two didn’t even like each other—” He pointed at the two. “I didn’t even know you were dating let alone getting married. How—I mean are you in love?”

Meese and Jennifer looked at each other and laughed. “Such a sweet naïve boy,” Meese said patting him on the head. “I wonder where he gets it.”

“Certainly not from me,” Jennifer agreed with a smirk.

“You see, son,” Meese said sarcastically drawing out the “son.” “You’re old enough to understand that marriage is more like a compromise. I’m now your grandpa’s golden boy and I get to marry his golden girl. We play the happily married couple for your Pop Pop’s benefit and to the public and we go off into our own separate ways in private.”

Jennifer and Meese smiled and kissed. “You see what your birth father failed to realize is that I am entitled to my little bit of fun. Your new father not only gets that, but he has his own side projects to take care of.” The couples smiled and kissed for the benefit of the young teen.

Farkle understood the double entendre. Alvin and Jennifer were only married for Grandpa Bassett’s benefit, but they would both have an open marriage which allowed them to be with whomever they wanted. Farkle felt his throat and chest constrict. “I will tell him,” Farkle said through clenched teeth. “I will tell my Grandfather what you just told me.”

Alvin approached the teenager and pushed him towards the banister. “You’d better not, you little shit!,” he commanded. “I slapped you once and I can do it again just as easily.”

Jennifer held onto Meese’s shoulder. “Alvin, wait. He can tell all he wants.” She turned to Farkle. “Do you really think that your Grandfather will believe you?” Farkle couldn’t answer, but he knew that Jennifer was right. “He would accuse you of lying, bearing false witness, and you know how he feels about that. When Alvin and I get married, we will certainly leave you with him on our honeymoon. Think of how uncomfortable that will be.”

Farkle began to hyperventilate. “What is he doing?” Alvin asked as Jennifer rolled her eyes. “Oh he’s just trying to get attention,” Jennifer said. “Seamus, stop it!” But Farkle couldn’t. He continued with his panic attack. Almost from beyond, he could hear his father, Stuart Minkus, his real father’s voice, telling him to breathe deeply and to just listen to his breathing. Farkle mentally recited the 2 squared times tables until his breath was steadied.

“When are you getting married?” Farkle asked.

“In December,” Meese answered. “I want you to be present. After all, where would the groom be without the best man? Seamus Bassett-Meese, I like the sound of that!”

Farkle didn’t say anything. He knew that he wanted out of this house and had to do it fast before
his future stepfather was added to the mixture. He tried first to run away at school. In between periods, he took his time dallying in the hallway. He then stepped into the Men’s room and waited for a few minutes. When he could only hear silence in the halls, he poked his head outside. Thankfully, the halls were still with no student or teacher in sight. Farkle looked around and casually opened one of the double doors and stepped outside. He winced in the bright afternoon sunlight. It was an unseasonably hot September. But he didn’t care. He had an opportunity to escape. He would leave the school grounds right this minute and run away back to Manhattan.

He wasn’t sure what move he was going to make first. He figured that he would leave the grounds and keep walking through Rochester until he approached the highway. Then he would thumb a ride to the nearest gas station or rest area outside of Rochester. He checked his pockets. He had less than $10.00 not enough for a cab or bus. Perhaps he could call his father or Mr. Matthews and they could come and get him.

He continued to walk forward. He sighed with relief as he approached the edge of the school grounds. He was about to step off when he felt a hand grab him from behind. He looked up to see a groundskeeper looking down at him. “Come with me to Mr. Kiltcher’s office,” he said.

His mother and grandfather’s retribution was swift after Farkle had been suspended from Washington for three days. His mother yelled at him and called him an ungrateful little nothing and slapped him so hard that he fell against the banister. The next Saturday, his grandfather woke him up and took him outside at noon. He then handed him a warm wool black sweater. “Put this on and stand outside!” He commanded.

Farkle looked at the sweater. “But it’s 90-”

“I don’t care if it’s 80 degrees below zero,” Edward ordered. “You will stand outside and recite Our Father until I say that you can come in! Now!” Farkle put on the sweater and obeyed.

Farkle looked directly at his grandparents’ home. He wouldn’t look down or away. He would just look at the building. If he had to do it, he was going to. He would be defiant and never let his grandfather or his mother see him break! He noticed that his grandfather never looked at him once. His mother did through the window, but often had a smug grin. Usually, she would turn from her son to whomever she was talking to, a servant or Meese and would speak louder. As though she were purposely ignoring the sight of her little boy sweating under the heat of the sun and his sweater.

After one hour, Farkle felt dizzy and he could barely see the house over the spots in his eyes, but he continued to stand and to speak. “Our Father which art in Heaven hallowed be they name,” he recited turning the prayer into a drone of mindless repetition.

His throat was parched and his lips were chapped but still he continued to recite. Shivers fell through his body. He remembered that sometimes a body would have chills before it fell into heat exhaustion. He wondered if his Grandfather would just make him sit out there until he collapsed. Farkle’s breath kept getting heavier and heavier and his vision continued to dim. “Forgive us our-um trespassers,” he continued his concentration becoming slower. No he had to continue. They couldn’t break him! They wouldn’t break him. He wouldn’t let them!

After three hours of standing, he felt something plastic being forced into his mouth and heard a soft voice encourage him to drink. Cool refreshing water emerged from a straw down Farkle’s throat. He welcomed it like a nomad finding an oasis. He let the water dribble down his chin onto his neck. Farkle sighed and looked up to see his grandmother Eunice dressed in gardening clothes holding a pair of shears and a water bottle. “Drink up, Farkle” she said again. Farkle took another long drink pleased not only that his grandmother was offering him water but that she called him Farkle.

He was about to take another drink when he heard his grandfather’s voice, “Eunice,” he said. Eunice and Farkle looked up. “Let him alone. I am dealing with Shamus’ punishment!” Eunice turned away guilty.

Jennifer and Alvin walked outside hand in hand as Farkle continued to recite. “So what are you going to do with him?” Alvin asked.
“I’m not sure yet,” Jennifer replied. You could send me back to Dad, Farkle thought but knew that was one suggestion Jennifer would never take.

“I suppose boarding or military school would be a good option,” Jennifer mused aloud. “At least he’ll be disciplined.”

“He certainly needs it,” Meese agreed. He led his fiancée by the hand as the two entered his car and drove off.

Farkle glared but continued to recite. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever Amen!” He sighed and continued. “Our father which art in Heaven….”

After two more hours, a total of five hours standing outside in 90+ degrees that finally cooled down to 80 by evening, Edward finally consented for Farkle to return to his home. Farkle entered his bedroom, removed his clothes and collapsed on the bed. His mother and future stepfather had yet to return, so he could rest and relax in comfort. He hadn’t put on any other clothes but Farkle didn’t care. He just lay on the bed undressed in everything except his underwear. His body continued to feel hot and sweltering.

A timid knock filled his bedroom. “Farkle, it’s your grandmother,” Eunice said. Farkle invited his grandmother to come in. Eunice then entered carrying the water bottle and an icepack.

“You are overheated,” Eunice said as she wetted his forehead and rubbed the icepack down his shoulders and back. “You’re lucky that you didn’t die.”

Farkle breathed in and out. “Thank you,” he said quietly and hoarsely.

“I should have done more,” Eunice said. “I should put a stop to this! I am so sorry for the way that your mother and grandfather have been treating you! It’s not right at all! You should be with your father, the one who really loves you!”

“I want to go home to him,” Farkle said sadly. “I miss him!”

“I know you do,” Eunice said. “I want to help you, but you can’t run away. That will only make more trouble for yourself and your father.”

“What am I supposed to do,” Farkle asked.

“Wait something will come up,” Eunice said. She let Farkle continue to drink and continued to wet down his body. She then stood up and Farkle lay back down. He thought of what Eunice said but knew that he couldn’t wait. He would try again to make a run for freedom.

At 2:00 AM, the next Saturday morning, Farkle awoke and quickly changed into a black long sleeved shirt and jeans. He wouldn’t take anything more than his wallet and some cash. After all, he was going to his father’s home. Clothes, food, and other essentials would be waiting for him. He opened the window to his bedroom and carefully inched onto the drainpipe. His practice of climbing fire escapes between his and Riley’s apartments and the rope at gym paid off. He managed to dangle on the drainpipe and ever so slowly inch his way down. His mother’s party for once came in handy. Jennifer and her friends would be so drunk and coked up they wouldn’t even bother to look outside. When O.S. and Sherry entered Farkle’s bedroom this time, he lay stiff and bit his lip thinking of his escape. The escape and return to his friends and his father in his Manhattan home kept him from screaming out.

Farkle reached the end of the drainpipe and quietly leaped down. His ankle turned inward and he gave an involuntary clumsy “oof.” He shut his mouth with his hand hoping no one heard him.

After a few minutes, he relaxed when there was not a stir in the house.

When Farkle was on the grounds of the Bassett Compound, he broke for a run. While he hated Washington Academy, he felt the lessons were too restrictive, the other students continued to taunt and harass him, and Mr. Kiltcher and the teachers belittled him. Unlike his rocky first few days however and his aborted escape attempt, Farkle managed to keep a low profile. He studied the handbook and was just determined to make himself invisible, something he admitted he wasn’t good at in school but it was better than getting into more trouble with his mother and grandfather. He did find one thing that he began to enjoy at Washington: running. At first Farkle trailed behind the other students in the course, but as soon as he gained more momentum, he began to catch up to
even surpass some of them. He suspected because he wanted so badly to run from the Bassett home and his new life, he was able to if nothing else in his own head. Now the running paid off as he ran to the end of the compound in record time. He did a “yes” cheer as he touched the white picket fence at the far end and put his foot on it.

Suddenly, Farkle was blinded by a floodlight and a screeching sound pierced his ears. “Fuck,” he said out loud. He should have figured that the Bassetts would have infrared security. Maybe if he was lucky, he could climb over the fence in the confusion. He didn’t get very far when he felt a large hand grab him from behind and pull him to the ground. “Mr. Bassett will want to speak with you son,” the rough voice of Harold, Farkle’s grandfather’s security guard spoke from behind him. Minkus’ phone blared into his thoughts. He checked his watch, 2:30 AM. What could be the problem? He had been up all night working on the appeal. Rosemary Welles so far told him that it may not come to any good like the previous ones, but he had to do something. He couldn’t just sit there and wait to visit his son. The phone rang again for a second time. He checked the I.D. it said “Bassett.” His heart clenched hoping that Farkle wasn’t hurt.

“Hello?” he asked. Minkus heard some deep breathing, but rather than an obscene caller, the voice sounded young. “Hello?” He asked. “Farkle? Is that you?”

The voice only managed to let out a “Dad,” and a mumbled hysterical phrase that sounded to Minkus like “please help me,” before he heard a gasp and the phone hung up.

“Farkle? Farkle!” Minkus yelled to the dial tone. “Damnit,” he cursed. He then tried to call Jennifer’s number, but there was no answer. He tried to call Edward’s number, but there was no answer.

Minkus booked a red-eye and headed for La Guardia knowing that he was going to fly to Rochester whether Jennifer wanted him there or not.

Minkus approached Jennifer’s driveway and rapped on the door impatiently. James opened the door. Without waiting to be announced, Minkus pushed him aside and entered the door.

“Where is he?” Minkus demanded. “Where is my son?”

Jennifer walked down the stairs dressed in her teddy and silk robe. There was a time when Stuart would have been turned on by the sight of this beautiful woman barely dressed coming to meet him. Now he only felt loathing and disgust.

“What have you done with him?” Stuart commanded.

“What have I done with who?” Jennifer asked.

Stuart grabbed his wife’s arm and pushed her forward. “Don’t fuck with me now! You have given me several excuses every time. He’s sick. He’s away! He’s at a friend’s! He can’t be busy every time that it’s my turn to see him! What have you done with Farkle?”

“Farkle is asleep,” Jennifer answered.

“Then why did he call me?,” Minkus asked. He was in such a rage that he was trembling. “He was upset! He wanted me to help him!”

Jennifer shrugged. “I have no idea. But I do know that you are trespassing! Please leave!”

“Not until I see Farkle,” Minkus yelled. He ran past his former wife and cupped his mouth with his hands and yelled. “Farkle! Farkle!”

The noise brought the attention of other people into the foyer. A man with curly dark hair and a woman with neck length dark hair looked at each other amused by Minkus’ hysteria. Two women that Minkus recognized to be his ex-wife’s friends, Libby and Dana also stared. Dana wavered a little appearing somewhat fearful about the fight, but Libby just rolled her eyes and pushed Dana back inside the parlor from which they came. The man and woman followed them shortly after.

“Are you having a party?” Minkus accused. “Good I have witnesses that you are holding my son! Where is he?”

“Witnesses who see a mad man going through my house,” Jennifer yelled. Behind her ex-husband, Jennifer pushed her security code on her cell phone. “Harold, my ex-husband is here! I think he’s wants to take my son. He’s very irate and he’s already threatened me….I don’t know.” She turned to Stuart. “Are you armed?”

“What?” Stuart asked confused. “No, I’m not armed.”
“No he’s not armed,” Jennifer said turning to Harold. The security guard then promised that he would be there. Jennifer hung up as Stuart climbed the stairs and knocked on the bedroom doors. “Is one of these his room?” he asked as he knocked on each one. “Farkle? Farkle?” “I told you that he’s not here,” Jennifer insisted. “You told me that he was asleep,” Minkus corrected her severely. Jennifer winced. She was still high from the party, so that lie slipped through without her noticing. “As I said, he’s at someone’s house asleep,” she corrected hastily. “Expect me to believe that,” Stuart swore as Harold and two other security guards entered. Jennifer pointed upstairs as the guards swarmed around Minkus. Two grabbed him by the arms and forcibly dragged him down the stairs. “He’s obviously mentally unstable, Ms. Bassett,” Harold said. “Of course, just get him out of here,” Jennifer said.

The security guards pushed Minkus out of the Bassett compound as he screamed his son’s name. Farkle looked up from the cramped attic, not even an attic more of a crawl space with a small porthole window attached to it. He tried to catch his breath but he could feel his claustrophobia and a panic attack coming on. This was his punishment for trying to sneak out of the house. When Harold pushed him into his Grandfather’s home, Farkle took those few seconds before his grandfather arrived to use the house phone to try to call his father. He knew he wouldn’t be able to say much in the time that they gave him, so he could only manage “Dad” and “please help!” He hoped it would be enough. Harold then pushed him off the phone and violently threw him into his grandfather’s study.

Edward Bassett then told his grandson that he had been disloyal to his family and ungrateful to the people who took him in. His punishment was to remain locked inside the Bassett attic for a day and night. Already Farkle felt cramped in. Because it was still dark and there was no light switch in the attic, it was hard to have any ideas of what was in there with him. His foot and knee banged against some cardboard boxes. He tried kicking, but found that a wooden crate barring his leg from getting too far. He heard a voice, a familiar voice. This time he knew it was his father’s voice! He heard his father call his name. Farkle could crouch up to see through the porthole. He could see a man being dragged out of his mother’s house. It may have been one of the partygoers, but Farkle’s instincts told him that he was his father. He tapped at the porthole first gingerly, then hard but he couldn’t make his father hear. As the car revved, Farkle banged harder on the porthole. He continued banging on it until the car pulled off the road and disappeared into the horizon.

Rosemary paced back and forth incredulously at her client. “Congratulations Stuart,” she said sarcastically. “If you wanted to go about the worst possible means to gain access to your son, you have seemed to achieve it!” “My son called me in the middle of the night and he was in trouble,” Minkus reminded her testily. “How else was I supposed to act?” “Not like a lunatic,” Rosemary half-shouted. “You went right to your ex-wife’s home, barged onto her property, threatened her-” “-I didn’t threaten her,” Minkus objected. “-Do you think she’ll say that,” Rosemary reminded him. “Acted like a mad man in full view of several witnesses!” “All Jennifer’s friends and servants,” Minkus said. “Hardly non-biased.” “They have eyes,” Rosemary said. “Stuart we have just been through a trial and you spent countless hours and money trying to paint yourself as the ideal parent. In less than an hour, you may have destroyed that image. You keep doing things like this and you can kiss that appeal good-bye!” “Jennifer abused him and I know she’s keeping me from him,” Minkus argued. “I can’t just sit here and do nothing! I know she’s hurting him now!” “She abusED him, abused, past tense,” Rosemary pointed out. “No judge is going to care about what she did to Farkle in the past. That is over, done, finito! We need proof that she abuses him
now! That is the only way you will ever see your son again that isn’t on the other side of a prison cell for violating a restraining order!”

Minkus wanted to argue that Rosemary was wrong. But he couldn’t. He came to Jennifer’s house acting on emotion, the mental anguish and worry that his son was hurt. Any loving parent would do the same and any loving parent in that situation would probably lose custody of their child because of those actions, the basic innate actions that a parent has in protecting their child. In doing the most basic nurturing instinct that Minkus possessed for his son, he would end up losing him. It was not time to think with his heart, it was time to think with his head. After all who was he? Stuart Minkus, Genius and if anyone can find a way to obtain custody of their child, it was him. He had to find proof and he had to find a way to hide the evidence from prying eyes. Maybe he could recruit a spy in their midst and who better than his own son?

He looked at Rosemary. “You give me an iron clad court order in writing that guarantees me at least a few hours with my son, and I will get all the proof that you need.”

Minkus knocked on the Bassett’s door with the court order in hand. James opened the door and Jennifer stood behind him her arms crossed as if challenging him. Minkus held up the court order as though it were a magic talisman. “This says that I have him for four hours today,” he said. He knew four hours would never be enough for him, but he had to at least give it a try. He hoped that the plan would work.

Jennifer craned her neck and said, “Seamus, he’s here.”

“Seamus?” Minkus questioned. He didn’t have much time to question as Farkle entered the hallway. He was dressed in a blazer, slacks, a tie, and a white stiff shirt looking clean and polished, but Minkus could see something lost in his son. He was thin and pale. He stood up straight with his back erect but looked downward as if not wanting to meet his father’s gaze. He didn’t smile instead looked serious and devoid of energy, enthusiasm anything that made him Farkle. His eyes wavered and seemed lost. Minkus could not see any bruises or injuries on his son, but he could see there was something not right about Farkle, something that was damaged. Like someone had picked him up, shattered him, and put him back together in the right places. But looking closer, one could still see the flaws and chipping.

“Farkle,” Minkus said wanting to reach over to his son to give him a hug. “It’s Seamus, Father,” Farkle said holding out his hand for a shake. Minkus shook his son’s hand warmly. “I don’t understand, Far-” Upon Farkle’s desperate pleading look that seemed to say Please do what she says, Minkus changed his mind. “-Seamus. How have you been?”

“Everything is good here,” Farkle said. “Mother and my grandparents have been very kind to me.” Was it just Minkus’ paranoiac imagination or did Farkle’s words sound forced? They certainly sounded devoid of emotion. “My school is challenging, but I am doing quite well academically.” “That’s great, son,” Minkus said. “I am proud of you.” He held out his hand and Farkle walked next to his father. During his time at his mother’s, he seemed to have grown a few inches and was almost up to Minkus’ shoulders. Minkus wondered how many milestones that he had missed in his son’s life while he was here. “I’ll bring him back about six,” Minkus informed his ex-wife as he led his son to the car.

Since he only had four hours with Farkle, Minkus unfortunately didn’t see any point in driving his son to Manhattan and letting Farkle visit his friends. But they chipped in and got him a present and signed their names to a card. Farkle accepted the tokens with a sad smile and somewhat reluctance. Minkus handed his son the present and card as they sat on a park bench.

“Tell them thank you,” Farkle said in that strange absent way of speaking that he had acquired. “It’s good to hear from them again.”

“They’re worried about you,” Minkus said not wanting to add and so am I, but he had a feeling that his son knew. “They said that you haven’t been communicating with them.” Farkle looked around nervously. Behind the pair, they could see a couple of men that had been following them since they left the compound. They probably worked for Jennifer’s family, Minkus guessed.
“They’re good to me here,” Farkle said with a wide clearly forced smile for the guards’ benefit. “I’ve just been so busy that it’s hard to keep up with them.”

Minkus considered. He knew that his son was lying. He just had to hear his son speak the truth somehow. They knew many languages. Could he speak to his son in Spanish? Too obvious, the guards may know it. How about Portuguese? It was worth a try.

He tried a sample phrase to test how much the guards knew. “That man behind you is sure ugly,” he said to his son.

Farkle looked at his father confused. There was no reaction from the guard, so Minkus continued. “In fact I would like to knock his teeth in, he’s so hideous,” Farkle shook his head clearly wondering if his father had an unspoken death wish or something.

“The other guard doesn’t look any better. He looks like a walking scarecrow.”

The guards looked confused at the sudden change in language, otherwise gave no indication that they understood. “How would Quasimodo and His Skinny Playmate feel if I stood up and punched you?” Farkle looked terrified at his father’s threat and shifted uncomfortably. “While I’m at it, why don’t he watch me punch your mother?”

“Dad, are you alright?” Farkle asked his father in Portuguese.

“I was just testing,” Minkus asked in the same language. “They don’t understand us do they?” He indicated the guards.

“No, I don’t think so,” Farkle said.

The father and son continued their conversation in Portuguese. “Now tell me the truth. How are they treating you? Tell me, but whatever you do, don’t react. I know it will be hard, but we don’t want them to know what we are talking about, okay?”

Farkle nodded. Don’t react, don’t react he thought making it a mantra before he spoke. “I don’t like it here! My mother is worse than she was before! She still drinks and now takes drugs and she keeps me from calling you and others! She still hurts me! Grandfather is worse! He keeps punishing me by putting me in the attic or outside when it’s hot or raining! I deserve it, I’m so bad!”

“No you’re not son,” Minkus said.

“The school is terrible! They keep monitoring their students and they still practice corporal punishment! I’ve been in front of the headmaster three times already and I’ve been suspended! There are the parties that Mother throws! They drink and take drugs and do things with each other….sometimes with me!,” Farkle said all at once.

Minkus blanched at his son’s recitation. Despite the boy’s bland voice he could tell that his son was upset. Minkus wanted so badly to comfort him, but knew that they had to stick to the “not reacting” rule. He compromised by brushing against his son’s hand giving it a tight squeeze and then withdrawing his hand.

“I’m getting you out of here,” Minkus said. “I won’t let you stay with her any longer than you have to.”

“I may not have very long,” Farkle said. “I don’t know if you know or not, but she’s getting remarried to Alvin Meese.” Minkus rolled his eyes. As far as he was concerned, they deserved each other. “I overheard them talking about sending me to a boarding school. Can’t I sneak inside your car and come with you?”

“As much as I would love for that, it wouldn’t fix all of our problems,” Minkus said. “We have to make sure that your mother loses custody of you. Otherwise it will happen all over again.” He once again reached for Farkle’s hand and slipped something inside it. Farkle looked down and saw a key and a small flash drive.

Minkus held his son closer and whispered in his ear and continued to speak in Portuguese. “I have set up a safe deposit box for you this morning at the First National Bank here in Rochester. It’s across the street from your school. Get all the evidence that you can of everything that you just told me. Photos, drugs, alcohol anything and put it inside the box. It is box #413 and will be under the name, M. Ginsburg.”

Farkle allowed a thin smile at the name. “Great-Grandpa of course.”
Minkus nodded and squeezed his son’s shoulder. “You will need this key and a password to open it. The password will be easy to remember: Urseus.”

Farkle nodded remembering the father and son’s private story when they first went star gazing. They were Urseus Major and Urseus Minor. Farkle realized that once again Urseus Major was looking out for Urseus Minor.

Minkus continued. “I will fly up every week and collect the evidence and show it to Rosemary and the judge. Don’t worry you will be safe.”

He squeezed his son’s shoulder again as the security guard cleared his throat. Minkus pulled away from his son. “Conspiring are we?” the guard asked.

“Oh no,” Minkus said in English. “I was just telling Seamus about how glad I am that he is being treated so well by his mother.” He gave a wide toothy smile to the guard who gave a thin smile back. He turned away and Minkus sighed hoping that the guard wasn’t on to them. He once again promised to Farkle in Portuguese, “I will get you out.”

The next Monday, Farkle didn’t feel quite so confident about his father’s plan. It was a good idea and he knew that they could never win in court without evidence, but what would Farkle do in the meantime? Still he gathered the evidence as well as he could. At his mother’s party, he had picked up a small line of cocaine. When Sherry offered him his drink, he “accidentally” spilled most of it and kept the cup. He even cut a small swath from his bed sheet hoping there were still traces of fluids, blood, or semen from O.S. and Sherry. When he cleaned up after his mother’s party, he picked up any broken bottles and drug paraphernalia. Once when he complained of a headache, his mother slipped him the same pills that she did before. Farkle pretended to take them, but hid them under his bed. He then collected them with the rest of the evidence. He put the items in small bags so as not to leave fingerprints.

At one point, his mother was drunk and began yelling at the top of her lungs at her son calling him various names. Through his blazer, Farkle managed to record the conversation and save it to his flash drive. While he was aware that recorded conversations were not admissible in a court of law, it had to help, he hoped. He also made quick pictures of any bruises or injuries that his mother, his grandfather, or Meese inflicted upon him.

He also claimed to his grandfather that he was taking pictures of a historic study of the Bassett family for an extra credit project. When he entered the attic, he took a quick snapshot of the cramped attic before he studied the antiques and memorabilia inside. Each time after he took the pictures, he saved them on his flash drive and deleted them from the phone so they would be gone when Jennifer or Edward checked and they often did. Farkle placed the flash drive with the other items inside the safe deposit box which he visited after school.

As his father said, the box was under the name “M. Ginsburg” and the key and password “Urseus,” got it open. Farkle felt a pleasing rush knowing that in a way that not only his father but his great-grandfather were watching out for him. When he left the bank, he looked around. Luckily, he wasn’t being followed.

Farkle had returned from the bank to drop off the evidence and hoped that it would reach his father. But he knew that the long frustrating wait for the courts to pay attention would kill him, possibly literally. He couldn’t just wait for things to happen. He had to come up with a faster solution. He had to escape, but he knew that he couldn’t do it on his own! He tried twice already and was caught. He would need someone’s help, someone bold, someone daring, and someone who was given to hatching crazy schemes.

A thought entered his mind. It was a crazy daring thought, but it might be one that would pay off! He almost used his cell phone, but then considered. With his grandfather and mother monitoring his electronics usage, they would know instantly what he was trying to do. They would never suspect, Farkle Minkus, never Shamus Bassett or Shamus Meese, the technological genius would stoop so low as to write an important message via snail mail! He entered a nearby post office. Then he took out a piece of paper and wrote a brief but important message to the people that he knew would help him. He had to make sure that no one would guess what was in its contacts, so he had to write the message in code. But how to alert the readers of this possibility? Suddenly, he
remembered a lesson about America’s involvement in WWI and wrote in the first line after the salutation: “Remember Zimmerman G8?”

When Farkle was finished, he purchased an envelope and stamp and addressed the letter to “Ms. Riley Matthews.” When he was finished, he paid for the letter to be sent urgent delivery and gave it to the postal clerk. He thought to himself that like Sitting Bull, he was challenging authority for his rights to live and be free. The only question that remained would be whether this would be his Little Big Horn or his Wounded Knee.
Riley and the gang take on "Operation Rescue...Farkle" Minkus gears up for the final confrontation against the Bassett family.

Author’s Note: The song, “Little Man” by Teddy Edwards is sung during this chapter.
I highly recommend the haunting version by Tom Waits, it’s such a beautiful moving song.
Riley sat on the stairs of the hallway in her new high school. Her best friend, Maya leaned against her locker with a lost look on her face. Riley knew what her friend was feeling and she hoped that what she had in her pocket would help ease Maya’s loneliness.

Craig Donovan, a handsome popular sophomore approached Maya, “Hey Maya I was wondering if you’re free-“
“- I’m busy that night,” Maya said angrily.
“But I didn’t say what night,” Craig said confused.
“I’m busy every night,” Maya snapped. Craig held up his hands and walked off muttering something about “more of an ice princess than Elsa.”
Riley walked off and held her friend by the shoulder. “You turned down one of the most popular sophomores,” she said.
“So?” Maya asked.
“Come on, Maya,” Riley urged. “Craig Donovan isn’t the first guy you turned down. You still love Farkle.”
“No I don’t,” Maya insisted.
She was interrupted by the appearance of a happy Lucas. “You can all relax. I, Lucas Friar, Rider of Tombstone am now one step closer to being a licensed driver!”
Riley ran up to her boyfriend delighted. “You got it,” she said as she gave him a hug and a kiss on the lips.
“Yep, I have my learner’s permit,” Lucas said. “I’ve actually been practicing for the road test using Mama’s truck. She says I drive as well as anyone with a license.” He glanced over at Maya’s direction. The boyfriend and girlfriend exchanged quick unspoken looks. Lucas’ said is she alright? Riley’s came with a shrug and said who knows? Lucas walked up to his friend and said. “I said I’ve been learning to drive using Mama’s truck?” There was silence so Lucas continued. “You know truck? The type of vehicle that a Ranger Rick or a Bucky McBoing Boing would drive, some guy that goes, “Hurr?” When there was still silence, Lucas rolled his eyes. “Well if I’m going to make this too easy for you, it’s just not fun!”
“Yeah hurr,” Maya said unenthusiastically. “Look Lucas I have enough on my mind without resorting to my version of your derogatory stereotypes” She thought for a minute. “Oh no, I’m starting to talk like him. I need help.” She moaned leaning against Riley and Lucas took her hand in sympathy.

While Riley and Lucas had their ups and downs in 8th grade by the time 9th grade began, they were officially a couple. Maya was happy for them. She knew that her earlier theory about Riley and Lucas being more like a brother and sister was wrong and that they were good together. But Maya couldn’t help feeling like a third wheel in their lives, since they were together and she was alone. Well she was only alone because the boy that she realized that she loved was now living with his mother living the high life for all she knew

“You still worried about Farkle aren’t you?” Lucas asked.

Maya rolled her eyes. “Yeah Farkle, the geek who hasn’t contacted us since he moved in with his mom! The dork who thinks he’s too good for us!”

“He doesn’t think that he’s too good for us,” Riley objected. “I’m sure he has his reasons to not contacting us before now?”

“Like what he’s having a great time with his rich preppy friends and possibly rich snobby new girlfriend?” Maya snapped. “Why do I even bother? He has made an embargo on his old friends!”

Since they learned about the Cuban-U.S. relations the former week, they had been using the word “embargo” a lot.

“Well the embargo may have been lifted,” Riley said about to pull the letter from her pocket. She held it to her best friend and boyfriend. “It’s a letter from Farkle.”

“What’s he say?” Lucas said just as happily.

“I hadn’t opened it yet,” Riley said. “I figured that I would wait until we were all together.”

The tardy bell rang and Cory appeared in the hallway. “Hey guys, I have something to tell you,” he said as though he were putting them in on a secret. Riley, Lucas, and Maya leaned closer ready to confide. “You see,” he pulled them closer. “When the bell rings, it means get to class!” Riley, Lucas, and Maya followed their history teacher into the classroom.

To the surprise of…..no one Cory Matthews was once again their history teacher even though the kids had graduated to Abigail Adams High School. They sat in their usual spots as Zay Babineaux and Isadora Smackle also greeted them.

Cory wrote the words, “Civil Disobedience,” on the smartboard (He was grateful at least that the high school had a slightly bigger budget and allowed more updated equipment). “How many of you know what that means?” Cory held up his hand to his ear as if cuing Maya to come back with a smart remark. Riley shook her head and said. “In absence of Maya I would like to say, ‘disobedience that is civil?’”

“Close enough,” Maya said knowing her best friend wasn’t well practiced in the art of wisecracks and smart remarks.

“Well that’s a given,” Cory said. “‘Civil Disobedience’ is the rights of a citizen to challenge society’s standards and laws. There are many ways that people can do that. They can write, they can organize protests, or speak out. It sometimes means that they have to get arrested to do it, but they make people listen. Can any of you think of any famous incidents?”

Isadora raised her hand. “In the play Antigone by Sophocles when she went against her uncle’s edict to bury her deceased brother.”

Lucas raised his hand. “Rosa Parks when she refused to give up her seat on the front of the bus and then later Martin Luther King and the other civil rights activists when they organized the boycotts in protest.”

Zay raised his hand. “In Ferguson, Missouri a couple of years ago when people were in the streets protesting Michael Brown’s shooting.”

Many of the other students mentioned other incidents such as Malala Yousafazi’s challenges against the Taliban’s anti-education of women, the Sons of Liberty when they dumped tea in the Boston Harbor, Mahatma Gandhi’s leadership of peaceful protests against the British government in India, Susan B. Anthony’s casting a vote when it was forbidden for women to do so, among
“Exactly,” Cory said. “These protests were considered illegal but they got people talking and allowed changes to be made. Even ones that are still going on like in Ferguson. There are great strides in the discussions of police brutality and racial profiling. Sometimes it doesn’t take the courts or laws to change people’s minds. It takes the actions of one person to right what they see as a wrong.”

“So is it worth going to jail for something that you know is right?” Riley asked.

“If it inspires great change and is for the betterment of others then these people would surely have thought so,” Cory said. “The phrase ‘civil disobedience’ was first coined by Henry David Thoreau in his essay of the same name. He wrote, ‘All men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable’ Can any of you think of the most courageous act that you can do?” Cory asked. “Has there ever been something that you wanted to make great change? Something that you feel in this day and age is wrong that you want to see righted? Write it down in an essay and send it in by next week.”

The class moaned except Isadora who offered a slow, “yayy.” They looked at her as she said sheepishly. “I cannot do it as well can I?”

“Wouldn’t the most courageous thing be not to write this essay?” Maya asked. Cory blinked back in surprise. “Welcome back, Maya.”

“I had to let one out before we go,” Maya said with a shrug.

“Well it would be courageous but it would also get you an ‘F’,” Cory said. “If I were, I wouldn’t be that courageous.”

Morgan waited inside the police station as the suspects were lined up. The officer, Lt. Ramirez, the same female officer that helped her when she was raped told the men to turn to the left, then face the front. “Do you recognize any of these men, Ms. Matthews?” She asked.

Morgan looked closely at them. She had been called to identify her possible rapists in a line-up. She looked closely but didn’t have to look for long. She pointed at the man with long blond hair and the beard. “Number 5, that’s the one called Frog!” She said.

“As certain as I’m talking to you,” Morgan replied. “That’s him alright.”

“Okay,” Ramirez called through the intercom. “You can all go except Number Five.” The other convicts walked off smiling and clasping hands. Number Five did not look happy at all.

Morgan waited outside the interrogation room as Sgt. Malloy reappeared. “His name is Kermit Clutterbucket.”

“Makes sense why they called him ‘Frog’,” Morgan said. Ramirez nodded also getting the reference. Morgan thought she had heard that name previously and she remembered. In Katy Hart’s testimony she said, “My former husband, Kermit Clutterbucket, molested my daughter!”

“Is something wrong, Ms. Matthews?” Ramirez asked.

“I think he might be my nieces’ friends’ father,” Morgan said.

“Not surprising,” Ramirez said. “He has a rap sheet a mile long including unpaid child support as well as assault on various women.”

“That’s the last of them,” Morgan sighed with relief. Hector Suarez, J.J. Stone, and now Kermit Clutterbucket were all caught.

“Apparently they were working for somebody,” Malloy said.

“I knew it,” Morgan said.

“Do you recognize the name Jennifer Bassett?” Malloy inquired. Morgan sighed and nodded. “I knew that too.”

At Topanga’s Lucas, Zay, and Maya waited while Riley looked at the envelope. “Well I think it’s from Farkle,” she said. “It says ‘Seamus Bassett,’ but he’s the only one I know who would write from Rochester.”

“But why write?” Maya asked. “That’s not like Farkle. He would email or text.” She sniffed annoyed. “Not like I care or anything.”
“No of course not,” Lucas said patronizing his friend.

Riley opened the letter and began reading:

Dear Friends,

Remember Zimmerman G8?-“

“Zimmerman G8,” Maya asked. “What is that some genius term we’re supposed to know?” The others shrugged.

“Isn’t there a jeweler with that name?” Zay asked.

“Go on, Riley,” Lucas said. Riley continued.

“Hello Pals, Merrily I’ve Been Hurrying To Belles-“

“-Belles,” Maya said sarcastically. “So he’s hanging out with a Disney Princess! That’s always good to know.”

“He’s never mentioned someone named Belle before,” Riley said.

“He’s barely written before now,” Maya reminded her friend.

“But you know what he was like with us,” Riley pointed out. “He kept going on about us. Don’t you think if Farkle had a girlfriend, he would have texted us about her?”


Your Rich Friend,

Farther Knowledge Leaves Just Minimal Kept Useful.

Seamus Bassett.

“Well that made perfect sense,” Maya said sarcastically as Riley finished the letter. “It was worth waiting four months to hear that!”

Lucas fingered the letter. “What do you think he was saying?”

Maya rolled her eyes. “Come on, Farkle oh sorry Shamus is clearly saying that he’s having a great time and wishes we weren’t there! Grandly Famous, the rich? Status’ your nicest knowledge? Our gestures towards his education? He thinks he’s too good for us!”

Riley shook her head. “I don’t think that’s what he’s saying at all, Maya.” She read the letter again in silence. “I don’t know it just seems to me like he’s in trouble.”

“It sounds like he’s bragging to me,” Maya scoffed.

“I agree with Riley,” Lucas said. He pointed at the letter. “Look at the way he capitalized every word.”

“So?” Maya said.

“Not like he’s capitalizing the important words,” Lucas said. “Like he’s capitalizing every word even the little ones like “and” and “the.” Like he’s saying every word is important. And look, ‘you move the right and grandly famous?’ He misspelled mistook?

Since when have you ever known Farkle to be careless with grammar or spelling?”

“Like he’s trying to tell us something more than what he’s writing,” Riley suggested.

Zay shrugged. “I’m still wrapping myself around the ‘Zimmerman G8’ thing.”

“The only Zimmerman I can think of offhand is the telegram,” Lucas offered.

“What telegram?” Riley asked.

“Don’t you remember last year your dad’s lesson about the Zimmerman Telegram?” Lucas asked. Upon Riley’s blank stare, Lucas sighed. “Do you ever remember your dad’s lessons?”

“Well he says them so often, after a while they just start to run together,” Riley said sheepishly. Lucas explained. “Well the Zimmerman Telegram was a telegram intercepted by U.S. Intelligence from Germany to Mexico. It said that if the Mexican government would aid the Germans in fighting WWI, then the Germans would help the Mexicans get back Texas and all of their former lands. It’s what got the U.S. involved in WWI.”

“So you think Farkle’s in Germany or Mexico?” Maya placated.

“No,” Lucas said. “I think Farkle’s telling us something about it. G8, could mean Grade 8!”

“Why use a historic reference?” Riley asked.
“Yeah why not just say ‘remember that telegram lesson we studied and wasted a good week trying to think of codes to say what we really felt about each other?’ “Maya dryly asked.

Suddenly, the same thought hit all four kids at the same time. “Codes!” Lucas and Maya said at once.

Riley reasoned. ‘That’s what Farkle meant! He wants us to know that this letter is written in code!”

The gang looked at the letter and read it again. “So anyone figured it out yet?” Zay asked.

“Damn, I must had left my super-secret code book at home!” Maya said.

“It will take a genius to figure that out,” Lucas said. “Unfortunately he’s in Rochester.”

“We know another genius,” Riley suggested.

Zay, Lucas, Maya, and Riley stood in Isadora Smackle’s bedroom as she deciphered Farkle’s letter.

“Well it’s definitely in code,” she said. “Actually a relatively easy one. I’m surprised you didn’t crack it right away.”

“Please continue talking down to us Smackle,” Maya said getting irritated. She was about ready to crack the genius’ skull if she didn’t translate the letter.

“Well for the most part it’s easy,” Smackle said. “It’s similar to an acrostic in which the pattern is achieved by sequence of words or group of words’ separation.”

“The who is achived by the the what and which?” Zay asked.

Smackle rolled her eyes. “It means that to pay attention to Farkle’s real message, all we have to do is read the first letter or letters in each word. However, there is a difficulty with this pattern because it breaks apart at one point.”

“What does most of it say?” Lucas said.

“Well you are right in your hypothesis,” Smackle said. “Farkle is in trouble. I’ll read:

Dear Friends,

Remember Zimmerman G8. Help me! I’ve been hurt by mother and grandfather. I want to go home! Trust you nice—“She looked up pausing in her reading. “This is the part that confuses me. Up until this point and even afterward. The code is constant. He even used misspellings and poor grammar specifically to achieve the effect. However, this phrase ‘You nice’ doesn’t mean anything.”

“Could they mean something else?” Riley asked.

Smackle shook her head. “I’ve tried variations to implement the code, but none make sense! The next line makes even less sense, ‘She knows!’ Who is she?”

Maya was reading the words together. “You nice? Younice? You-nice!” “She then pronounced “nice” like “niss.” “Eunice! Farkle’s grandma is named Eunice! I remember Farkle said that she visited his dad before the trial telling him that she was on their side!”

Riley nodded. “Farkle wants us to contact his grandmother because she can help us help him!”

Smackle was stunned that Maya and Riley figured out something that she didn’t but nevertheless she continued to read the letter. “‘I miss you! Get me out!

Your Friend,

Farkle J. Minkus Seamus Bassett” Smackle looked at her friends. “So what do you think?”

Riley and Maya looked at each other as the same thought occurred to them. “It looks like we can use our ‘hatching crazy scheme’ power,” Riley said triumphantly.

“You mean—“Lucas began.

“I think it’s time we practiced civil disobedience,” Riley said.

The girls nodded. “We are going to get Farkle out of Rochester and send him home to his dad and us,” Maya translated.

“Sounds like fun,” Zay said. “I’m in.”

“I’m in too,” Lucas said warily. “I want to help Farkle just as much as anybody, but how are we going to get there? Should we contact one of our parents or Mr. Minkus?”

“No,” Maya shook her head. “No adults, especially Minkus! If this goes bad, he’ll be arrested for kidnapping!”

“We want to get Farkle home and reunite him with his father,” Riley added. “It won’t do him any good if his father ends up in trouble.”
“Which leads us back to how are we going to get there,” Lucas said considering. Maya and Riley smiled sly grins as they walked around their friend. Zay shook his head realizing what they were planning, “Oh no, if I were you Lucas, I’d run.”

“What we need is a good driver,” Riley suggested.

“Someone who will do anything for a friend,” Maya added.

“Someone who is brave, confident, and handsome,” Riley said.

“Someone who owns a truck, you know a truck, a McBoing-Boing Mobile?” Maya said. She did a “yes” cheer and said, “I’m back!”

Lucas realized what they were referring to and shook his head frantically. “Oh no, no no!” He said.

“Come on, Lucas,” Riley said. “You told us that your Mom said you were as good as any licensed driver.”

“AS GOOD AS,” Lucas reminded her. “As good as any licensed driver! I don’t actually have a driver’s license! Do you realize that if I get caught it will be about a year before I can get my license?”

“Who says that you will get caught?” Maya said. “All we need to do is get you a fake I.D.”

“Oh that’s all,” Lucas mocked. “Where are we going to get one?”

“Somebody will make you one,” Maya suggested.

“Sure somebody for a price,” Lucas turned to Riley, Maya, and Zay. “Come on, this is crazy. It can’t be done!” He turned to Smackle. “Tell them Smackle it can’t be done!”

“IT can’t be done,” Smackle began.

“See thank you,” Lucas said. “At least someone in our group is reasonable.”

“-It can’t be done if I don’t make the I.D. and I shall,” Smackle said.

The other three smiled smugly as Lucas realized that he was outnumbered. “This is crazy. I am not going to do this, period! Forget it!”

“Do you want to help Farkle?” Riley insisted.

Lucas winced realizing that his best friend’s life was at stake. “Alright, I’m in for Farkle.” He put his hand out.

“For Farkle,” Riley added as she put her hand on top of Lucas’.

“For Farkle,” Maya said as she put her hand on top of Riley’s.

“For Farkle,” Zay agreed as he placed his hand on top of Maya’s.

“For Farkle,” Smackle repeated. She hesitated for a minute, but then shyly placed her hand on top of Zay’s. The five friends broke hands.

“Alright we know how we’re going to get to Rochester but how are we going to get out of the Bassett’s house?” Lucas asked. “Farkle’s mama knows most of us. We were at the intervention remember? It’s not like we can go up and ring the doorbell.”

“Can’t we sneak him out do you think?” Riley asked.

“If it were easy to sneak out don’t you think Farkle would have achieved it by now?” Smackle said. Maya held up the letter. “I think we ought to ‘trust you nice!’ “She quoted from the letter.

Zay held up his hand and said proudly. “Leave it to me! No one in that family knows me and I can certainly think of something!”

“Finally his Big Mouth powers work for us as well,” Maya said dryly. Lucas, Smackle, and Riley nodded.

“I’ll get you the number,” Smackle said as she pressed information on her laptop. She repeated the number to Zay as he dialed on his smart phone. Zay heard a pompous sounding sophisticated voice saying “Bassett residence.”

Zay said making his voice a bit deeper and giving more of a Creole accent. “I’m trying to reach Mrs. Eunice Bassett.”

“I am sorry but Mrs. Bassett is eating with her family,” the voice said. “Who may I ask is calling?”

Zay smiled. “My name is Isaiah Babineaux and I am with the LRMSZ Rescue Foundation!” He winked at his friends who tried to stifle their grins and laughter.

“I’ve never heard of this organization,” the voice said suspiciously.

“We’re a fairly new charity,” Zay said. “We help displaced children and refugees find their way
“Well I will speak with Mrs. Bassett,” the voice said. “However she is on the board of many charities and foundations, I don’t know if she will agree to sponsor yours.”

“Oh she will enjoy this offer believe me,” Zay said. There was a long silence as Zay could tell that the voice went off to get Mrs. Bassett. Smackle then quickly sent a text message to Mrs. Bassett.

“Oh I have my charities, you know that Edward,” Eunice said as she walked into the study. Eunice spoke on the phone and carefully listened for any indication that someone was eavesdropping, for a cracked signal or extra breathing as she listened to Mr. Babineaux, really Farkle’s friend Zay, speak about “a rummage sale” and hoped that Mrs. Bassett would deliver some very important merchandise if she was so willing.

“I would love to participate, Mr. Babineaux,” Eunice agreed speaking very loudly in case anyone was listening. “I have something very valuable that would be very dear to someone else.”

Zay nodded to his friends. “She’s on board.” He then returned to the phone. “Mrs. Bassett, my colleagues would like to meet you so you can drop off the merchandise. When would be a good time?”

“Oh I think that Saturday at 7:30 would be an excellent time to do so, wouldn’t you agree?” Eunice said. “Perhaps at the corner of Mulberry and Elmswood near Highway 87. There’s a Citgo station and a Trader Joe’s in between.”

Zay gave the information to their friends as they nodded. “That will be just fine, Mrs. B. We’ll be there and we can’t thank you enough for helping us one kid at a time.”

Eunice nodded understanding what the young man meant. “Anything to help a displaced child find his proper home,” she said as she hung up the phone. She returned to her seat in the dining room as if nothing had happened.

Zay hung up and turned to his friends. “So got any plans Saturday night at 7:30?” He asked. Riley nodded. “Yeah, looks like we’re going to Rochester to help a friend!”

Smackle held up a finger. “You will need assistance,” she said. “My parents have been working on an improvement over the GPS locater.”

“You mean it will give us directions?” Maya asked.

“More than that,” Smackle said. “It will alert you to any potential dangers or roadblocks like traffic jam, accidents, police officers—” She hinted.

“That’s not a half bad idea,” Lucas said. “We’ll take it.”

Smackle nodded. “The only drawback is since it’s in the planning stages, I will have to be here to see you through manually and inform you of any difficulties. I do not mind remaining here, but the
conundrum is that I will need someone to feedback information to you. I will need to concentrate on the layout of the environment as well as difficulties. In other words, someone should remain here with me to give you the information via smart phone.”

Zay raised his hand. “I’ll do that,” he offered.

“So it’s the three of us going,” Riley said. Maya and Lucas nodded. “And Smackle and Zay wait here.” Smackle and Zay nodded.

Zay put his arm around Smackle’s shoulder. “It’s you and me, Izzy Baby!” He teased.

Isadora rolled her eyes clearly annoyed at the thought.

The plan almost didn’t go through. Farkle sat as quietly as he tried to be during family dinner. His grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins were present to celebrate Jennifer’s engagement to Alvin Meese. Farkle felt like he was in the secret headquarters of a villain’s organization. He picked at his food as people talked around him. He heard his mother and future stepfather share their wedding plans.

“Well you will be quite an improvement over Jennifer’s previous mistake, Alvin,” Edward said generously.

“I hope that I am, Edward,” Meese said with a snide laugh. “But then again I always was better than Stuart Minkus in many ways, a better businessman, lover of women—” He took Jennifer’s hand as she smiled. “And of course I am very in tune to God’s influence on this world.” He made the sign of a cross.

Farkle shook his head in irritation. Alvin Meese was no more religious than Farkle was! He was just citing commitment to the Bassett family’s Catholic faith to win their favor and set himself apart from Minkus.

Meese continued to brag. “Of course it doesn’t take much to be a better businessman than a failure like Stuart Minkus!” The family laughed at his comment.

Farkle stood up. “He’s not a failure!” The family was silent. “He loves what he does! He loves creating technologies for other people! Learning and discovering things is what makes him happy!”

“Well he’s not a millionaire anymore,” Edward said weakly.

“Because he’s not with you,” Farkle shot back. “He’s the wisest best man that I know!”

“Clearly you’re being delusional, Seamus,” Jennifer said. “Sit down!”

“We have told you before, Seamus to never mention him again,” Edward ordered. “You are no longer in his life and he is no longer in yours!”

“Don’t insult him then and don’t expect me not to answer when you do,” Farkle said. Jennifer grabbed her son’s arm so hard that Farkle felt like she was going to break it. “I think you’ve said enough,” she hissed. “One more word and you will be punished.”

Farkle’s cousin, Andrew scoffed. “I don’t know why he’s defending him anyway. His birth father’s nothing but a dirty kike!”

That did it! Farkle approached his cousin and rather than let him get another word in, Farkle pushed him off his chair and to the floor. Four months of abuse, neglect, and bottled anger finally erupted as Farkle fought his younger cousin. He hit and clawed at Andrew like a wildcat gone mad. The adults all started yelling at once. Teddy Bassett pushed Farkle off of his son and roughly forced him to the wall while Aunt Anastasia picked up her son and smoothed his tears.

“Seamus, go to the attic,” Edward thundered.

“No,” Farkle held back. “You heard what he called my father!”

“He was just speaking the truth,” Edward said. “You however behaved inappropriately!”

“I’ll take him,” Alvin grabbed Farkle by the arm but he resisted.

“You’re not taking me anywhere,” Farkle shouted.

“You will obey me at once,” Alvin commanded slapping Farkle so hard that he drew back towards the wall.

Farkle was stunned, but his buried anger had yet to be quenched. He was tired of being used and abused by this family, tired of being beaten, punished, overworked, molested, and unloved, and certainly tired of them slamming his father’s name through the mud. “You’re not my father!” He
shouted
“He will be soon you little shit,” Jennifer reminded him pushing him upwards by the arm.
“Stuart Minkus is my father,” Farkle hissed even through the pain. “He will never be him just like
you are not my mother and the rest of you are not my family!”
Jennifer was stunned for a moment, but then she screamed as she pushed her son upwards and hit
him towards the bannister.
“Jennifer take your son upstairs,” Edward commanded.
“Yes Daddy,” Jennifer said sweetly.
Jennifer shoved Farkle into the attic. He winced in pain as he fell across the window. “You’d better
enjoy your time here, Seamus,” Jennifer said icily. “Your father and I have been talking and after
this display you are certainly heading for reform school!”
“I’m not going,” Farkle said defiantly.
“Yes you are,” Jennifer said. “When you return you won’t be the weak little nothing that I see now!
You leave tomorrow and start on Monday.” Jennifer slammed the door leaving Farkle drained of
all his hatred and anger.
Eunice waited for her daughter. “I am so sorry, dear,” she said.
“He’s uncontrollable Mother,” Jennifer said. “He’s too much like him! I have to get rid of that
influence somehow. He starts reform school on Monday.”
Eunice leaned closer to her daughter as she buried her head on Eunice’s shoulder. “If you think that
is best, Dear Heart.”
“I just don’t know what else to do, Mother,” Jennifer sighed wearily.
Eunice gently held her daughter by the shoulder then moved downward into her pocket. “Of course
dear,” Eunice continued to say soothing words to her daughter until she was calmed.
Jennifer finally relaxed long enough to edge free from her mother’s grasp and smiled. “Well
Mother, Alvin and I are going out. We don’t want to be late.” She nodded at Meese. “Coming
Alvin?”
“You know I wouldn’t miss it,” Alvin said as he took his fiancée’s hand and led her to the door.
Eunice waited until her sons and their families had left the Bassett home before she continued with
her plan. She glanced at her watch 7:00 it was almost time to meet Farkle’s friends.
“Eunice,” Edward said. Eunice jumped in surprise. “I’ll be in my study for the remainder of the
evening. Tell Robert to give me my brandy in there.”
“Yes of course Edward darling,” Eunice said. “I will be gone for at least an hour this evening. I have to
drop off those items to the Alarms Foundation Rummage Sale.”
“Of course Edward darling,” Eunice said. “I will be gone for at least an hour this evening. I have to
drop off those items to the Alarms Foundation Rummage Sale.”
“Of course,” Edward said in a tone that indicated he didn’t have any interest in the subject. For
once Eunice’s husband’s indifference worked for her. Eunice waited patiently as Edward closed
the study door. She then reached into her pocket for the skeleton key that she lifted from Jennifer’s
pocket.
Farkle’s breath clenched as he heard the door unlock. He tensed as the door slowly opened. If it
were his grandfather, mother, or future stepfather he was ready to give them all new insults. Of
course they probably had different ideas of punishment. Perhaps standing outside during the night
naked or Jennifer would send for Sherry and O.S. to make a special Saturday trip just for the
occasion.
He was about to say something when Eunice motioned her hand forward and beckoned her
grandson to follow.
Eunice motioned Farkle forward as the two sneaked out of the house. She held her finger to her
mouth to silence him as she sneaked out the door with her grandson following. She opened the door
and led him outside. Then she closed the front door quietly. “Now, get in the backseat of the car.
There’s a blanket. Wrap yourself underneath it until we are on the road.”
“Okay,” Farkle said.
“Good evening Mrs. Bassett,” the voice of Harold the security guard made both Eunice and Farkle
jump. Out of the corner of her eye, Eunice could see Farkle sneak into the side of the garage. She
gave an inward sigh of relief. “Were you off anywhere in particular?”
“Oh I was just off to drop off some old junk for a charity rummage sale,” Eunice said. “It’s always good to help others you know.”
“Sounds like a good cause,” Harold observed. Eunice could just barely see Farkle sneaking around the wall, inching towards her sedan.
“Oh indeed it is,” Eunice said. “If you don’t mind, I must be on my- Oh no!” Eunice released her purse strap as her items spilled out. “Oh darn and it was a Kate Spade original! Would you be so kind as to help me?” She knelt down to pick up her items.
“Oh of course Mrs. Bassett,” Harold said as he knelt down by his female employer’s side. Eunice gave a quick nod to Farkle as he nodded back. As Eunice picked up her automatic lock, she absently pressed the button. Farkle opened the back door and leapt into the sedan wrapping himself inside the blanket like Eunice told him. “There it is,” Eunice said motioning for her car lock as she put it in the purse.
Harold looked up at the sound of the car door slamming. “What was that?”
“I didn’t hear anything,” Eunice said as she continued to put away the items back in her purse.
“I thought I heard the car door shut,” Harold said.
“No it must be your imagination,” Eunice said. “Perhaps it was the wind banging against the screen door. I’ve been trying to get our groundskeeper to fix it but it will be next autumn by the time he does.” She sighed with relief that it was a windy night so it added credence to her story. She motioned to the screen door which just her luck was banging. “See over there,” she nodded.
“Oh of course,” Harold said. “I think we have everything.”
“I think you’re right,” Eunice said. “Thank you, Harold.” She accepted all of the items inside her purse and then entered her car and pushed the ignition.
“Not yet,” Eunice said to her passenger. She drove up to the driveway and punched her security code. The gate opened and Eunice pulled out onto the road. When she was far from line of sight in the Bassett compound, she glanced through her rearview mirror at the still body in the backseat.
“You can come out now, Farkle.”
Farkle sat up from underneath the blanket. “That’s a relief,” he sighed.
“It’s not over yet,” Eunice said. “We have to meet our co-conspirators.”
Eunice pulled over to the Citgo station where three teenagers waited as they stood outside a white pickup truck. Farkle jumped out delighted as he hugged Riley and Lucas. “I thought I’d never see you guys again,” he said happily.
“Well we’re here and we’re getting you out,” Riley said. Farkle walked up to his girlfriend. She frowned for a minute and held her arms to her chest.
“Thanks for writing Farkle,” Maya said sarcastically.
“I’m sorry, Maya,” Farkle said. “I tried but they wouldn’t let me! I wanted to. I-”Maya grabbed him by the shoulders and moved him closer. Before Farkle could say another word, she kissed him on the lips.
“We’d better get going,” Lucas said. “Or this will be the shortest rescue mission ever!”
Maya and Farkle pulled away and nodded. “Farkle, you’ll have to get in the back,” Maya pointed. “But it’s illegal for someone to ride in the back of a moving truck,” Farkle reminded her.
“Yeah well it’s also illegal for you to run away from your legal guardians and be kidnapped by some crazy people, even if they are friends. Not to mention it’s illegal for someone to drive with only a learner’s permit-”She motioned to Lucas. “So where we going with this?”
Farkle considered. “Better to beg forgiveness than ask permission.” He realized.
“Take this,” Eunice said holding onto the blanket.
“I’ll bring it back,” Farkle said as he accepted it.
“No keep it,” Eunice said. “You be careful and I will pray for you to return home safely.”
Farkle ran up to his grandmother. “If all Catholics were like you, I’d want to be a priest,” he smiled. “Thanks… Grandma. You are the only one of them who’s my family.”
Farkle hugged his grandmother as Eunice kissed the top of his forehead. “You’re welcome, Farkle. Take care.” Farkle nodded and then jumped into the backseat covering himself with the blanket.
“I’ll get Zay,” Lucas said as he dialed Zay’s number. No sooner did Zay answer when Lucas said.
“Breaker-Breaker 1-9, We got the package. Repeat the package has been delivered. Right now we’re at the Gogo Juice Stop and we’re heading on down the Big Slab soon. You copy, good neighbor?” Riley and Maya looked mystified at their friend.

Zay spoke into his phone as Smackle followed their process on the computer. “10-4 Roger, that, catch you on the flip-flop and watch out for them bears! Smokey will be on your tail before too long.”

“Copy sending the Four-Wheel Phone over to Princess Sunshine—”Riley smiled at her trucker CB handle and Maya still looked confused. “—and Badass Blondie.”

Maya nodded. “I like that!”

“Alright, Tombstone Tamer, the Black Rider and Genius Girl will be at your backdoor,” Zay said. “Just get Prince Genius over to the King and say bye to Granny Goodheart for me.”

“10-4 Roger, Over and Out,” Lucas said as he turned off the smart phone and handed it to Riley. Riley, Maya, and Lucas thanked Eunice and then entered the truck as Lucas started it. The girls continued to look confused. “What? Zay and I always wanted to do that.”

Zay turned his smart phone to off as Smackle looked at him confused. “You’ve never seen Smoky and the Bandit? Only the greatest movie ever!”

Smackle rolled her eyes. “Clearly how could it ever compete with the garbage that is Citizen Kane?”

“Exactly you get me,” Zay said missing Smackle’s obvious sarcasm.

The truck continued to roll down the highway getting further from Rochester. They rolled along the interstate mostly avoiding traffic. “Is he okay out there?” Lucas asked indicating Farkle in the back.

Maya tapped on the window and received a similar tap in return. “Yeah, he’s fine,” Maya said. “Oh no,” Smackle said. She nodded at the screen. “Zay, get the others.” Zay dialed the number. When he heard Riley’s voice, he said “There’s a traffic pileup ahead.”

“Uh oh,” Smackle pointed even further as her and Zay’s eyes widened in fear and sympathy for their friends. Zay held onto the phone. “Uh oh, there’s something else up ahead.”

“Uh oh,” Riley repeated.

“What is it Riles?” Maya asked noticing how pale her friend looked.

“There’s traffic,” Riley said.

“Well that’s not unusual, we can manage,” Lucas said.

“And a police blockade,” Riley added.

“Shit,” Maya cursed.

“Are they after us, can they tell?” Lucas asked.

“Can you tell if they’re after them?” Zay asked.

Smackle then moved the satellite hookup further to the scene of the police blockade. “I can’t tell,” she said. “It looks like,” She surveyed the scene for any evidence of an accident or an arrest, anything else that would obstruct traffic. “I can’t see anything else,” she said. “Tell them to proceed with extreme caution.”

“Be very careful out there,” Zay said.

“That’s what I said,” Smackle added.

“They don’t know,” Riley said. “Just be careful.”

“Let’s just make a U-ee and get out of here,” Maya said.

“Until we get out of this traffic, I won’t be able to do anything,” Lucas said. “Hell of a road test!”

“If we survive this, there’s no reason you shouldn’t get an A,” Maya joked weakly.

The cars inched forward. From the back Farkle could see the stalled traffic and he could see the familiar red and blue police lights up ahead. “Shit,” he cursed. If the police were looking for him, his friends would be in big trouble. He mentally tabulated the physics whether a body could jump from the flatbed of a truck and survive running into the nearby field. He knew that he wanted to go home, but he also knew that he didn’t want his friends to get into trouble for it. If he weren’t in the truck, then his friends could always play dumb and say they were just going for a drive. He waited until the traffic was at an absolute standstill and squatted down towards the door.
“Is there any way we can get out of this?” Maya asked annoyed as they approached the police blockade.

“We might be able to take the back roads,” Lucas said.

“I’ll ask,” Riley suggested as she asked Zay and Smackle.

Smackle looked for alternate routes. “There are some,” she explained. “If they drive through to the Thruway into Syracuse.” She explained the alternate route as Zay called it back.

Zay repeated everything that Smackle told him.

“Got it,” Lucas said as Riley explained the information back to him. He was about to take their suggestion when they heard a loud horn blast from the car behind them. “What was that?” Riley asked.

“I don’t know,” Lucas said. “I’m not speeding.”

“Maybe you’re driving too slowly,” Maya gibed.

“Maya remember I’m doing this for the first time,” Lucas said testily.

“Maybe they’re just as impatient as we are,” Maya said bored.

“I’d better see if Farkle’s okay,” Riley said. She banged on the rear window waiting for Farkle’s return knock. She didn’t get an answer. Riley knocked again, but still no answer. Curiously, Riley glanced at the flatbed. Even though it was dark, Riley knew that she should at least be able to see a large shape underneath the blanket, but the blanket lay as flat as the rest of the truck. Riley turned on the light amidst Lucas and Maya’s groans and then just as quickly flipped it back off when the light confirmed what she already guessed in the dark.

“Great Riley, I don’t mind driving without a license, but I ain’t driving blind,” Lucas said sarcastically.

“Sorry,” Riley said mechanically. “I have a question. How many people are supposed to be in this truck?”

“Four counting Farkle why?” Lucas asked.

“Good,” Riley said. “Why are there only three of us?” Maya and Lucas’ eyes widened as the meaning of Riley’s words rang clear. Maya looked in the back where Riley pointed.

“He’s gone,” Maya said. Lucas jammed on the brake in surprise.

Farkle limped through the woods that he landed in as he jumped out of the truck. He had injured his ankle on the way out of the truck. His arm also hurt from his mother grabbing him earlier. Unfortunately physics couldn’t prevent every injury. He knew that he had to get some distance between himself and his friends. That horn blast from the car behind them would surely get some attention. He ran as fast as he could. He hoped with his dark clothes, that he wouldn’t be easily spotted but he wouldn’t take that chance. He wasn’t sure what he would do next. Maybe Lucas, Riley, and Maya would drive back to Manhattan. They may not notice that he wasn’t in the back seat until they returned. Farkle didn’t know what he would do in the meantime. He couldn’t go home if police were looking for him and he sure as hell wasn’t going to stay at the Bassetts. He leaned against an oak tree. He had to think this through logically. Of course if he were thinking logically he wouldn’t have jumped out of the truck in the first place. Would this be another failed escape attempt?

Farkle felt his throat and chest clench in fear. “Oh no, not now,” he whispered as he could feel the panic attack fast approaching. He felt dizzy and tried to get moving to make enough distance between himself and the roads but he could still see the headlights of the cars. His head felt tight like it was going to pop, but he continued to move forward. Farkle clenched his chest hoping that he wasn’t having heart palpitations at fourteen.

Great I’m lost in the woods, I’m having a panic attack, and I don’t know what to do next, Farkle thought. What else could go wrong? Just then he saw a flashlight and heard voices. He was half tempted to call out hoping that it was Riley, Maya, and Lucas but the deep older sounding voices made him stop.

“Are you sure they saw the kid go through there?” one voice asked. “And that he’s the Bassett kid?”

Farkle’s eyes widened in surprise and fear as he continued to walk through the woods away from
the highway. So far he wasn’t in their light so he wasn’t yet seen.
“That driver behind them saw the kid run out of the truck,” another voice said. “Who else would it
be?”
“Did they get the license on the truck?” the other voice said.
“No,” the second voice said. “The truck took off down the road.”
“Are you sure they even saw a kid?” the first voice asked dryly.
“Let’s just look for him,” the second voice said. “I don’t want to have to explain to Old Man
Bassett that I lost his grandson!”
Farkle continued to limp forward feeling the panic attack continue. He had to continue. He couldn’t
wait for them to get him and take him back. He moved behind a pile of rocks and crouched down.
“Oh no,” he said loudly as his breath continued to catch. He hoped that the two men hadn’t heard
him. He could see the flashlights coming closer as the men’s voice got louder. Farkle looked
skyward at the stars over him. He would have thought normally that it was a nice night to be
stargazing, but now it looked overpowering. He felt like he was going to be sick. He panicked so
much that he was beginning to feel dizzy. He hoped that somehow he could possess the ability to
make himself invisible.
A hand grabbed onto Farkle and an arm wrapped around his shoulder. Farkle was about to cry out
when he saw a man crouched down next to him. Farkle was about to say something when the man
put his finger to his lips to shush him. The mysterious man looked to be in his early twenties and
was dressed in a black turtleneck, pants, and a beret. Farkle could see a goatee under the man’s
chin. He looked familiar but Farkle couldn’t quite place him. The man motioned Farkle to lean
closer to him. The teen could smell the faint odor of marijuana and felt slightly ill, but didn’t say
anything.
The two men with the flashlights motioned downwards aiming their lights right on Farkle’s face.
Farkle winced and tried to think of some clever excuse about what he was doing there, but he
stayed still and silent, locked in the other man’s grasp.
“I don’t see anyone here,” the first man with the flashlight said. “Let’s get out of here.” He spoke
into an intercom and motioned for his partner to follow him.
Farkle and the man waited for the footsteps to die down and the flashlights to dim before they let
go of each other. Farkle sat up and looked at him. “Thank you,” he said trying to catch his breath.
“Just trying to do my part to right something that’s been wrong,” the man said.
Farkle was about to say more when the panic attack continued. “They won’t stop until I’m back
with them!” He said. “I won’t go back! I can’t!”
“I know, son, I know,” the man said comforting him by the shoulder. “You want to go forward.”
“I want to go home,” Farkle said.
“To your Father,” the man said calmly.
“How do you know?” Farkle asked. “Who are you?”
“Just a traveler down the road trying to help a lost soul find his way back home,” the man said.
“But you can’t get there alone.”
“My friends were with me,” Farkle said. “But they probably drove off.”
“Now what real friends would do that,” the man corrected. “They’re probably out looking for you.”
“I hope not,” Farkle said. “I should never have let them do this. They’ll get in trouble because of
me!”
“Because they’re true friends who look out for each other,” the man said. “It was their choice and
they would lay their lives down for you as you would for them.”
Farkle nodded as the man held onto the boy. He soothed him. “Now keep breathing, just keep
breathing, Farkle.”
“How did you know my name?” Farkle asked.
“Well you look like a Farkle,” the man answered. “You have fire and you sparkle.”
“My father said that to me once,” Farkle said breathing out each word.
“Well he’s right,” the man agreed.
Farkle thought for a minute that the man seemed familiar and trusting. Even though Farkle had met
many strange people at his mother’s, this man didn’t seem at all like them. He seemed comforting. Farkle timidly leaned closer as the man gave him a quick embrace. Farkle knew that he couldn’t stay in the wood forever. He thought of his friends. Where they really looking for him?

“They’ll never find me,” Farkle said.

“Sure they will,” the older man reassured him. “Now sit back and just be.” He then soothed the young teen by singing a song. “Little Man as you climb upon my knee/Little Man the future lies in thee..”

Riley, Maya, and Lucas walked through the woods seeing if they could find their friend. “Farkle,” they called aiming their flashlights but couldn’t see anything. Lucas had managed to turn his truck out onto a back road like Smackle suggested and parked.

As soon as he stopped the car, he and the girls climbed out and began looking for their friend. “Farkle,” Riley called again.

“Great we try to rescue him and he runs out on us,” Maya said sarcastically.

“Well better we found out now than finding out in Manhattan,” Riley suggested trying to be optimistic.

“Yeah there’s the silver lining,” Maya scoffed.

“Come on girls, let’s just keep looking for him,” Lucas said.

Riley’s ears perked up. “Listen do you hear that?” she asked.

“I heard someone say, ‘listen do you hear that?’” Maya said dryly.

“No I mean do you hear anyone singing?” Riley asked.

“No,” Maya said. But now that Riley mentioned it, she could hear a faint song in the distance.

“I think I hear something,” Lucas said. “But it might be my imagination.”

“No, I hear it too now,” Maya said. She pointed her flashlight forward. “It’s coming from over there.” The three teenagers walked towards the location of the sound. They could make out the words, “Don’t look back/There are things that might distract…”

As they walked forward, there was a deep silence. “That’s weird it’s gone,” Maya said.

Out of the corner of his eye, Lucas saw a person standing in front of them. He moved his flashlight to the figure’s direction. He saw a man in black clothes standing in front of rocks. “Hey,” he said.

The girls looked at the man as well. Just as they were about to head towards him, he disappeared.

“You saw him too right?” Lucas asked.

Riley and Maya nodded. Before they could say anything more, they heard a familiar voice call, “Lucas! Riley! Maya!”

“That’s Farkle,” Riley called delighted. The three friends ran to the direction of their friend’s voice. They looked underneath the pile of rocks and saw Farkle crouched down underneath.

“We’re sure glad to see you,” Lucas said with delight as they ran down to meet him.

“Are you okay?” Riley asked.

“Yeah, you could make this rescue mission a little easier on us,” Maya said.

“I’m sorry,” Farkle apologized. “I saw the police cars and I was afraid they were after me. I didn’t want them to come after you.”

“Well we got away from them anyway,” Lucas said. “We’re taking the backroads for now.”

“Come on,” Maya invited taking Farkle’s hand and pulling him to his feet.

Farkle looked around. “Oh I should thank—” He looked around. “Hey, he’s gone!”

“Who’s gone, Farkle?” Lucas said.

“The man,” Farkle said. “The man that was helping me. If it wasn’t for him I would have been caught.”

“Well we’d better get going or we’ll all be caught,” Maya said as the four teens ran through the woods and approached Lucas’ mother’s truck.

“You did?” Zay asked jovially. “Alright!” He hung up the phone and smiled. “Smackle, they found Farkle and they’re on the road!”

“I’m so relieved,” Smackle said. Zay and Smackle stood up in delight and high fived their friends. The two then stood in an awkward silence their hands still touching in the high five. The two teenagers withdrew their hands rather quickly.
“Sorry,” Zay hurriedly said at the same time Smackle said, “Sorry.” They then sat back down at Smackle’s computer and monitored their friends. Lucas continued to drive down the backroads feeling a bit more at home than he ever had in Manhattan. “It looks like home except with more trees,” he observed. “Yes I’m sure all these small towns look alike to you Hopalong,” Maya said sarcastically. “Where are we?” Maya asked.

“I think we’re near Oneida,” Riley said. “That’s what Zay said the last time we talked.” Maya was about to make another comeback about being out of civilization when the car began to slow down and then stop. “Are you kidding me?” Lucas asked.

“What is it?” Riley asked. “Are we out of gas?” “No, I filled it up before we left,” Lucas said. He jumped outside the car and opened the hood. He examined the engine and didn’t have to look far. “It’s the battery,” he said. “We’ll need a jump.” He said to the girls who came out to join them.

“What’s going on?” Farkle asked looking up from the back. “We’ll need a jump,” Maya explained wearily.

“Maybe a car will pull up and offer us one do you think?” Riley said.

“That may have worked on the Interstate,” Maya said. “But we’re now in BFE, that’s Bum Fu-“ “I know what it means,” Lucas countered.

“Who knows when a car will pull up?” Maya continued. She leaned back and gibed at her boyfriend. “No offense, Farkle, but you’re kind of a jinx.” “Sorry,” Farkle said sheepishly and with a shrug before he lay back down.

“I’ll call Zay and Smackle,” Riley suggested. She tried to reach them but saw the sign on her phone: No signal. “Damn!” She cursed. Of all the places to get lost in, it had to be one of the less than 10% that didn’t have cell phone reception.

A pair of headlights approached the teenagers as a 1960’s era VW pulled up to the side of the road. Two men were in the driver’s seat but only one got out. “Looks like you kids are in a world of hurt,” the man said.

“Yeah,” Lucas said. “Our car stalled. We need to get a jump.”

“We got some cables for you,” the man said. “We’ll get you where you need to go in no time at all.”

“Thank you,” Riley said warmly shaking the strange man’s hand. “You’re welcome,” the man said kindly. “I’d do anything to help the Mystery Man, the Observer, the Singer, and the Farkle.” Riley, Maya, and Lucas looked warily at each other. Riley tried to play innocent. “What’s a Farkle?” She asked realizing that most people would assume that a term like Farkle would be an object rather than a person.

“A Farkle is who’s inside the back of your truck,” the man said pointing at the rear of the truck. Farkle poked his head out and cautiously stepped down. “Don’t worry, I won’t tell.” Farkle looked closely. The voice was familiar and now he knew why. “You’re that man that helped me in the woods.” He recognized the dark clothing, the goatee, the spacy rhythmic way of speaking, and even the marijuana smell. Farkle couldn’t shake the feeling that he knew him before though.

“I might be,” the man said.

“Thank you,” he said. “You’re welcome,” the man said. “Now to get your truck started and you to be on your way.” He connected the jumper cables from his battery to Lucas’ truck and flashed an O.K. sign. He nodded at the man in the driver’s seat of his car who still hadn’t emerged from the vehicle. “Okay, Mike, let ’er rip!”

“Sure thing, Mal.” the man in the driver’s seat said as he started the car. It took a few minutes, but Lucas managed to get the car started.

“That should be good enough,” he said. “Thank you guys.” Riley and Maya both said thank you as well. Riley even gave the man a big hug. “Always like a
hug or two, best payment I could ever get!” He said with a laugh. The girls jumped into the car as Farkle hesitated. “Thank you again,” he said. “It’s funny, I don’t know your name but I feel like I’ve known you my whole life.”

“You’ll find the answer soon,” the man said. “Now go on and give my love to my Little Man! It will be a farkle when you come back to him!”

Farkle wasn’t sure to whom the man was referring, but he stepped inside the front of the truck when Riley reminded him that they were far enough away, he might as well get warm inside the front.

Zay and Smackle waited patiently for any other word. They found out that the quartet had left the backroads and finally got back on the Interstate. Now they were waiting word that they had approached Manhattan. Zay’s smartphone vibrated as he heard Riley’s jubilant voice. “Zay, we’re back! We did it!”

“Yes,” Zay said in delight. He put down the phone and said with delight. “They’re back and they’ve got him!”

Smackle sighed with relief and gave a happier cheer than Zay had ever heard. Zay handed her the phone. Smackle held it with a sly smile. “Go ahead,” Zay invited her.

Smackle grinned. “10-4, Princess Sunshine, we copy.” She said her voice bland but her smile said it all. Zay laughed and gave her the thumbs up as she hung up the phone.

She and Zay faced each other as the African-American teenager pulled closer towards his friend and hugged her with delight. Zay pulled away embarrassed. “I’m sorry,” he said. “It was a heat of the moment.”

“Do it again,” Smackle said. “I’d like you to do it again.”

“Alright I’ll comply to your bashful, but affectionate request to a return towards an emotional embrace.” Zay said. Upon her confusion, he said. “Hey you spoke my lingo. I can speak yours.”

Smackle rolled her eyes as Zay gave her a larger hug than the previous one. The two looked into each other’s eyes and were about to move closer to each other with their lips locked when Smackle’s bedroom door opened.

“Isadora,” the voice of Smackle’s mother, Ingrid, came through. Smackle told her mother that she was working on a project with her friends, but not much else. “Your father and I wonder how you are doing—” She stood in surprise as the two teens pulled away from each other in guilt.

Riley’s voice came over the cell phone. “Are you two alright? What’s going on over there?”

Zay sheepishly held the smartphone. “Hold please.”

Lucas pulled the truck into the parking garage of Farkle’s apartment building. Zay had hung up the phone and didn’t say much, except that Smackle’s mother had entered the bedroom. The four teenagers entered the building and knocked on Minkus’ apartment door. Farkle hid behind Lucas as his father looked at the hallway in surprise. “Riley, Lucas, Maya, what are you kids doing here?”

He said in confusion. “It’s after 2:00 in the morning.”

“Well we have a surprise for you and we didn’t want to wait,” Riley said mysteriously. She and Maya stepped away and Lucas pushed Farkle forward.

Minkus’ mouth dropped open in surprise, “Farkle?” he said wondering if this was somehow a dream.

“Dad,” Farkle said as surprised but happy tears filled his father’s eyes. He walked closer to his father as Minkus first put his hands on Farkle’s face then moved down his shoulders. He then pulled his son towards him in a loving embrace.

“I don’t understand,” Minkus said. “How did this happen?”

“Well it’s sort of a long story,” Riley said.

“You’ll have plenty of time to tell it,” a familiar and unwelcome (at least to Riley) voice said from inside the Minkus apartment. Minkus stepped back so Riley could see her father, Cory Matthews seated on the sofa.

“A very long time,” another voice said. Riley winced as her mother, Topanga Matthews swiveled around Minkus’ desk chair and glanced at her daughter.

It was a busy morning for Stuart Minkus. He had flown out early to get a very special package from
Rochester, then he received a phone call from T.J. Murphy. “You sure about this,” Minkus said in delight.


“That makes the hearing very interesting,” Minkus said. “Thank you, T.J. I can see why Eric Matthews keeps you around.”

“Well I do my job,” T.J. said. “Good luck, Minkus.”

Minkus then answered a text message from Morgan. He was stunned but not really surprised. All of this information combined could finally work in his and Farkle’s favor he hoped. In fact he was so busy that he was almost late in arriving to Topanga’s Bakery.

As Maya would later call it, “The Gathering of Old Men and Women” had already begun by the time Minkus arrived. Five sets of parents were reading the riot act to their teenage children about their behavior the previous night.

Like her son, Eudora Babineaux was a woman of many words which she liberally used towards her son. She paced back and forth talking at times even shouting about what Zay did the night before. She continued to go on about how Zay could do such a thing, why did he have to be so irresponsible, what was he thinking getting involved in a whole mess of trouble, and hadn’t he learned anything since they left Texas. “You are in for a world of hurt, young man, a complete world of hurt, Right Isaiah?” Eudora asked stopping for a minute to catch her breath.

Unlike his son, Isaiah Babineaux Sr. was a man of few words. He only stood in silence as his wife continued with her rant. After she cued him, Isaiah Sr. approached his son and said slowly but with meaning, “Son, you’re grounded ‘til you’re 35 years old!”

“What I don’t understand is how they got the exact coordinates of where to meet Farkle,” Ingrid Iverson-Smackle said aloud.

“Well that was my doing,” Isadora told her mother. “I used the GPS locater that you and Father were working on.”

“You did?” Elliot Smackle asked delighted. “Did it work?”

“Elliot,” Ingrid corrected her husband angrily.

Elliot cleared his throat. “Uh I mean bad Isadora, bad! You should never have done that!” He leaned closer to his daughter and asked. “Well did it?” Isadora nodded.

Rachel Friar sat next to her son as Lucas explained. She slowly spoke. “You drove all the way to Rochester and back in my truck without a driver’s license?”

“I wasn’t pulled over,” Lucas said. “I kept my hands at 10 and 2, I drove within the speed limit and obeyed all the rules!”

“Well that will be useful for you to freshen up and study until you’re allowed to get your license again in a year and a half,” Rachel said.

“But Mama I won’t be able to drive for another year,” Lucas said. “It says so in the manual.”

“I added six months,” Rachel hissed. Lucas groaned about how close he was to getting his license and how far away it seemed now.

“Maya you have done some terrible things, but this has got to be the worst,” Katy said.

“What were you kids thinking?” Topanga asked.

“We were thinking of civil disobedience,” Riley said.

“Civil disobedience, who told you about-” Topanga began then she gave her death glare to her husband.

Cory jumped back in fear. “AAHH! I didn’t think they’d listen,” he said sheepishly.

“We wanted to help Farkle and his dad,” Riley said.

“This was the best way that we could come up with,” Maya agreed.

“But you broke several laws in the process,” Topanga said. “Technically, this could be considered kidnapping, contacting the Bassett home under false pretenses-“

“Driving without a license,” Rachel added witheringly to her son.

“If you were caught you could have gone to jail,” Katy added.

“But we weren’t,” Maya insisted.
“You got lucky,” Katy countered. “You are in serious trouble for this, young lady!” She glared at Maya.

“I don’t know,” Shawn said. Katy and Topanga looked confused at Shawn.

“Shawn, Maya’s my daughter—” Katy began.

“I know,” Shawn said. “But I think that what she did was right.” He looked towards Cory and Topanga. “Come on would they be any different than what we would have done?”

Cory shrugged. He couldn’t argue but Topanga hesitated. “But in doing it, you kids may have gotten yourselves arrested.”

“But not doing it, wouldn’t that be a worse crime?” Riley asked. “Wouldn’t it be worse to keep Farkle from the parent who really loves him and the friends who care about him?”

“But you can’t keep making your own laws,” Topanga said. “The custody agreement was awful, but there was nothing anyone could do.”

“Maybe we felt otherwise,” Maya said. “It was awful, but… That’s what everyone said. Why couldn’t we say it was awful and something could be done about it?”

“Intellectually what you did was illegal and it should be considered wrong,” Minkus said as he squeezed his son’s hand. “But emotionally, you gave my son back to me and I can’t thank you enough for it.”

The door to Topanga’s Bakery burst open as Edward and Jennifer Bassett and two police officers entered. “I told you he was in here,” Jennifer declared. “Arrest him, officers!” When Edward left the study that night, he was stunned that his grandson was not in the attic. He informed Jennifer and they put the police on their trail right away. After the county police said that they lost track of who they thought was the boy on the Interstate, Jennifer had guessed that he had returned to Manhattan.

She pointed at Minkus. The lead officer, Lt. Foley approached him. “Stuart Minkus?” He said as he held up a warrant. “We have a warrant for your arrest for kidnapping!”

“No,” Farkle shouted. He pushed himself in front of the officer as he tried to cuff his father.

“Stay back, Farkle,” Minkus ordered. “I’ll be alright!”

“No, I won’t let them take you,” Farkle said. “And I won’t go back there!”

“You are coming back with us, Seamus!” Jennifer said as she was about to drag her son out of the bakery. Farkle ground his heels and refused to move.

“I am not Seamus Bassett,” Farkle said. “I am Farkle Minkus and I am staying with my father!”

“This is ridiculous,” Edward said. “Your mother has made it clear that you belong with us!”

“Mr. Bassett, Jennifer,” Topanga began. “Perhaps we can discuss this in a reasonable manner.”

“There is nothing to discuss,” Jennifer said. She pointed at her former husband. “We had a custody arrangement and he went and violated it. He took my son from our home and brought him here!”

“Is this true?” Lt. Foley asked.

Minkus looked at the others and sighed. “Yes it’s true. I took my son from his mother and I will go with you!”

“No,” Farkle said as they were about to take his father away. “No, if you take my father then you have to take me too!”

“Farkle,” Minkus warned.

“Seamus,” Jennifer corrected.

“Farkle,” Farkle insisted. “No one took me! I ran away! My father did not have anything to do with this! I acted on my own. I left the compound on my own, got a ride on my own, and came to Manhattan on my own. It was not a kidnapping, it was a returning.” He stood next to his father. “I go with my father.”

“No, this is ridiculous,” Minkus said. “I am not going to let my son get in trouble for something I did. I will go quietly and I will go cooperatively, but I am not going to let my son stay with Jennifer Bassett.”

“He is in my sole custody, Stuart,” Jennifer insisted.

“Why aren’t you doing your job, arrest him!” Edward commanded to the police.

“Ms. Matthews,” Stuart motioned to Topanga. “Could you please hand me the manila folder that is
on the counter? I think these officers would be very interested in its contents.” Topanga handed the police officers the envelope as they opened it. They thumbed through the contents in silence looking at the photos, broken bottles, and drug paraphernalia. “You see I will be glad to go with you, because I took my son. But I will not allow him to stay with his mother, even if it means staying with neither of us.”

“These are all lies,” Edward said as he looked at the information. “They were clearly planted to malign my family! What are you doing? Arrest him!”

Sgt. Reese was about to move when Farkle stood forward. “I told you, you take my father then you take me as well!”

“Wait, this is stupid,” Riley said. She and Maya approached them together. “Farkle could not have done this by himself. It was our idea to get him away from his mother and send him home. All he wanted to do was go home and he needed our help.”

“Why did he need your help?” the other officer, Sgt. Reese asked.

“Because we hatch crazy schemes,” Riley said. “I hatch.”

“I scheme,” Maya added. “Look this is a package deal. It always has been with us. You get one of us, you get all of us.”

“And you get their driver,” Lucas said.

“Lucas,” Riley began.

“I was there, I was part of it too,” Lucas said. “I drove the getaway vehicle and I helped hide Farkle on the way home. You get me with them.”

Zay and Smackle were the next to stand with them. “And what was your role in all of this?” Lt. Foley asked. “Were you the gang leaders?”

“We were the Qs,” Zay said proudly.

“We provided the technological expertise and contacted with them via smartphone,” Smackle explained. “So Zay and I are just as to blame as the rest.”

Cory then approached the mob of children and Minkus. “You’ll have to take me too.”

Foley sighed. “And why is that?”

“Because it’s the right of every citizen to challenge what they see is wrong,” Cory said. “You are separating a loving father and son and as my daughter pointed out that’s a worse crime than sending him to his mother. You will have to get through me to get to Stuart Minkus and his son.”

“And me,” Topanga agreed. “As a lawyer, I know when there is injustice and I know that this is the very definition of it. What is in that folder should be enough evidence that Farkle Minkus would never have to return to his mother, but if it isn’t, I won’t stand to see it happen.”

“And me,” Shawn said. “These kids learn from the best.” He nodded at Cory and Topanga. “They learn from us.”

“And me,” Katy said as she approached her boyfriend. “My baby girl has friends that she would go through that much for. What else could I do but support her and one of my friends who has suffered enough through the courts?” She smiled and nodded at Stuart who nodded back.

“And me,” Rachel said standing by her son. “I’m proud of my son and I’m proud of his friends for taking a stand.”

“And me,” Ingrid and Elliot said at the same time as the stood behind their daughter. “Our daughter cares for these friends, we know they’re something special,” Elliot said. Ingrid nodded. “Plus we support Stuart Minkus. He’s our friend and we know how much he loves Farkle.”

“And us,” Eudora and Isaiah Babineaux Sr. said at the same time. “We don’t know these folks, but we do know our son.” Eudora said. “He wouldn’t do this much for someone if they ain’t had a reason.” Isaiah nodded wordlessly but squeezed his son’s shoulder and wrapped his arm around his wife.

“And me,” another voice approached the bakery. Eunice Bassett then appeared and took her place in front of the small group.

Edward widened his eyes in shock. “Eunice how dare you-?”

“Maybe the question is how dare you, Edward,” Eunice said. “How else do you think Farkle got
off the compound? If you need an eyewitness to the abuse that Farkle endured, I would be glad to give it to you.”

“Is any of this true?” Lt. Foley who had long been silence throughout the show of support asked.

“Yes it is, officer,” Eunice said.

“This man is conspiring against us,” Edward declared pointing at Minkus. “He has violated the law several times!”

“What about the laws that Jennifer violated?” Farkle shot back. “What about the beatings? The punishments, the ‘toughening up?’ How long do you think I was going to last out there in the heat, Edward? What about the parties?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Jennifer began.

“You know what Sherry and Other Stuart did to me,” Farkle insisted. “You just won’t admit it! What Sherry learned from her Sainted Leader, what was his name Mr. Big Mack and what Stuart taught by screwing around college girls?” Topanga and Shawn both mouthed the names “Sherry” and “Stuart” and glanced at each other in surprise. They both paled as he mentioned those details. Farkle continued. “You know that Sherry and Other Stuart fondled me during the night and you let them drug me so I wouldn’t say anything! How about the times that you slipped me sleeping pills so I wouldn’t know whether Dad visited me? Are you really going to pretend that you don’t know anything about it?”

“I still have sole custody of you,” Jennifer hissed. “If I were you, I would stop making up these fantasies!”

She turned to the police officers. “He’s doing all this just to get attention.”

“But he’s not,” Eunice added. “I can testify to most of it.”

“We have a court order,” Edward said.

“From a judge who has been bribed and assisted in his campaign by you, Edward,” Minkus said wryly. “I have information that a certain company that was subsidized by Bassett Investment is financing Gilbert Boyer’s campaign for the State Supreme Court. Now isn’t that fascinating?” Minkus turned to his friends as he showed Topanga the message from T.J. Murphy.

“Very fascinating,” Topanga agreed. “In fact I would say it violates several judicial processes and quite possibly makes any decisions invalid. Certainly deserves a new hearing with a different judge.”

“Fine,” Edward said. “This isn’t over. We will get a new trial with a new judge.”

“You can all you want,” Farkle said. “But I won’t let you.” He turned to Jennifer. “Here’s how it is, Mother. I will not go back to that house with you. I will never let you hurt me again. In fact if you do somehow get custody of me, I will be dead the second that I walk through that door.”

“Farkle,” Maya approached her boyfriend.

“I know what I promised, Maya,” Farkle said. “But to go back to that house is like a living death and I can’t live like that anymore. I am warning you, I will either be dead by your mistreatment or by my own hand. It’s up to you now, Jennifer, I can either live here in Manhattan with my father and be happy and alive or live in Rochester with you and be miserable and eventually dead! So what do you say, Mother?”

“Don’t say anything Jennifer,” Edward said. “We’ll get my lawyer-“

“-No,” Jennifer said slowly.

“No?” Edward questioned his daughter.

“No Daddy,” Jennifer said. “It’s over. He’s not my son. He’s his.” She nodded at Stuart. “He always was his son. He’s not worth it anymore!”

Lt. Foley shrugged as he undid Stuart’s handcuffs. The kids and adults cheered in delight and celebration.

Lt. Foley stood between Edward and Jennifer. “Mr. and Ms. Bassett, we are going to have a long talk about these-“He held up the manila envelope with the information. “-And about what good parenthood should be.” He and Sgt. Reese led them out the door.

Eunice walked up to her husband. “Oh Edward, I want a divorce.” Edward lowered his head and muttered in anger.
Stuart approached his ex-wife, “Oh and Jennifer one more thing Kermit Clutterbucket was arrested in Philadelphia earlier this week,” he said. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Katy and Maya blanch at the name Kermit Clutterbucket. “He talked. Morgan can finally sleep well again, but you may have to take another trip back home.” He waved as his wife was led out of the building.

“Kermit?” Katy said as the gang gathered celebratory drinks for the occasion. She and Maya listened as Stuart explained that Kermit was paid by Jennifer to rape Morgan. “I just can’t believe it,” Katy said. “I mean I’m not surprised, but that he would stoop that low-!”

“According to what the police told Morgan, she promised Kermit money for drugs and other…if he and his buddies would hurt her,” Stuart said matter of factly.

“What a jackass,” Maya cursed. “I mean he’s my father but so what?”

“It’s like you said,” Farkle said. “We’re half mixed up and half good, we make one whole good.” He held Maya’s hand and the two leaned on each other’s shoulders.

“I’m glad you’re back, Farkle,” Maya said.

“I’m glad to be back, Maya,” Farkle agreed.

Topanga and Shawn approached Farkle. “Farkle, we have to ask about that man Stuart, the one who molested you. Did he have dark curly hair and look a bit like Mr. Matthews?”

“And did Sherry have dark hair and kind of a spacy way of talking?” Shawn asked. Farkle nodded. “Yes that was them. Did you know them?” They asked.

They nodded. “Stuart was a professor that tried to seduce me in college,” Topanga said.

“And Sherry was a member of a cult that I almost joined,” Shawn said.

Farkle and Minkus looked at each other confused. “I’m sorry that happened to you,” Farkle answered. Minkus squeezed his son’s hand amazed that even in recalling a terrible event, Farkle was still more concerned about someone else’s traumas than his own.

“We’re sorry that it happened to you,” Topanga said.

“I ought to punch Stuart again,” Cory said clenching his hand into a fist.

Minkus looked up in confusion his expression clearly saying What did I do?

Not you,” Cory said.

“I can’t believe that she would get them of all people to help her out,” Shawn said.

“Do you think she knew about our history with them?” Topanga asked.

Shawn shrugged. “I never told her about Mr. Mack’s cult, but that didn’t mean that she couldn’t have heard it from someone else.”

“It could be that she did,” Stuart said. “But Jennifer always liked control. She loves to prey on people’s weaknesses no matter what they are. Perhaps she was just gathering up all of the weak people that she knew to hover around her. Whether you knew them or not was probably not as important to her as what she could get out of them.”

“I’m glad I got away,” Farkle said.

Stuart squeezed his son’s hand. “I’m glad you did too.”

The final appeal was practically a non-event. The new Judge, Helen Golden was certainly not a crony of Edward Bassett’s being unimpeachable, a woman, and African-American. She looked at the information that Stuart and Farkle Minkus had gathered and listened to the testimony presented.

“This hearing is practically redundant since the evidence speaks for itself. Sole custody of the minor, Farkle J. Minkus shall be rewarded entirely to his father, Stuart Minkus! Farkle you are certainly very lucky to have a father that loves you that much.”

“I think I’m the lucky one, your honor,” Minkus said holding his son by the shoulder.

Judge Golden smiled and banged on the gavel, “Case dismissed.”

“Fines and probation,” Topanga spat as she entered the Minkus home. Minkus and Farkle were talking to their friends.

“What?” Minkus asked.

“All Edward Bassett got was a lousy fine,” Topanga said. “Something about not being accountable for his daughter’s abuse. Jennifer got probation and is required to attend court appointed rehabilitation! They aren’t even going to charge her for the rape! I guess it’s too much trouble to indict her in Philadelphia! The only good thing about it is that Sherry and Stuart were arrested.
Apparently they were caught trying to seduce another teenager, a girl this time! Sure enough, they were the same Sherry and Stuart that we know and despise.”

“What a shocker,” Shawn said deadpan.

“Figures,” Cory muttered bitterly.

Stuart and Farkle groaned. “So it could start over again!” Farkle said wearily putting his hands through his hair. “She could still come after us and play the ‘I’ve changed’ card again!”

Topanga shook her head. “Maybe not, when our associate delivered the papers to Jennifer’s address, apparently there was a For Sale sign on her house.”

“Are you serious?” Minkus asked. He dialed Jennifer’s number on his smart phone.

“Hello Bassett residence,” the voice of one of the female servants said.

“Hi is Jennifer Bassett there?” Minkus asked.

“No I’m sorry Ms. Bassett no longer lives here,” the servant said. “She has moved to Europe.”

“Europe?” Minkus said in surprise.

“Yes apparently, she intends to stay there a long time,” the maid replied. “She took much of her valuables and left no forwarding address. I will no longer be working for the Bassett family, so I don’t mind telling you apparently she and Mr. Bassett got into a huge fight and she took her things with her.”

“Thank you,” Minkus answered before he hung up the phone. He turned to his son. “She’s in Europe, I don’t think she’ll be back for some time possibly never!”

Farkle smiled wide. “So it’s finally over!” He said.

“Yes it’s over,” Minkus said. “You’re home to stay.”

Farkle ran into his father’s arms and fell into his embrace. “I am so relieved,” he said feeling a yawn come over him. “I was so worried about it- that I-He yawned again. “I couldn’t sleep well.”

Minkus held his son tightly. All of the stress of living with his mother, the escape, and the court hearings not to mention getting back on his medication were draining him. “You should probably get some sleep,” Minkus suggested.

“No, I’ll be fine,” Farkle said then yawned again. “Maybe a little nap.” He walked towards his bedroom and sat on the bed.

Maya and Stuart followed him as he lay down. Maya leaned next to her boyfriend and smoothed back his hair. “Let him sleep okay,” Minkus said to his son’s girlfriend. He ruffled Farkle’s hair. Maya nodded and leaned down. She blew a kiss inside Farkle’s ear before she rose and Minkus led her by the shoulders out of his son’s bedroom.

It was several days before Farkle remembered the strange man who helped him and his friends as they were leaving Rochester. He had walked home after spending time with his best friends, Riley and Lucas (who were as committed as ever), Zay and Smackle (who slowly began dating in a strange attraction of opposites), and of course his girlfriend, Maya. He waved at the employees of Minkus Technologies as they were closing up for the weekend. “Hi guys,” Farkle called.

“Hi Farkle.” “Hey Junior!” “Staying out of trouble, kid?” “Have a clean aura!” They called among other things. Farkle smiled glad that his father had some great people to work with and that they were finally getting steady regular business.

Farkle entered the apartment as Minkus was listening to music. The music wasn’t familiar but the lyrics certainly were, “Little Man as you climb upon my knee/Little Man….”

“Hi Dad,” Farkle said greeting his father who was working on his laptop.

“Oh Hi son,” Minkus said. “I talked to Morgan and she may be coming up in a couple of weeks.”

“That’s great Dad,” Farkle said. “You two make a good couple.”

“So do you and Maya,” Minkus agreed.

“What are you listening to?” Farkle asked.

“Oh nothing it’s just a song that always reminded me of your Great-Grandpa Ginsburg,” Minkus said. “He used to call me ‘Little Man’ so it makes me think of him.”

A thought hit Farkle. He turned on his laptop and searched for the URL for the Malachi Ginsburg Café Hey Digital Library. He flipped on the page that featured Ginsburg’s portrait. “I knew he was familiar,” Farkle said. “Dad you will never believe who helped us that night when we left
Rochester.”
Farkle explained the story of meeting the strange man both when he leaped from the truck and when Lucas needed a jump. “He looked just like Great-Grandpa Ginsburg and he talked the way that you always said he did!”
Minkus shook his head. “Farkle I’m sure it was a coincidence. He just might have been dressed similar, maybe a modern day beatnik.”
“But he knew my name and he said things that only he would know,” Farkle said. “He said that I had fire and I sparkled! He knew my name was a combination of those words. He even told me to give his love to his ‘Little Man!’ I think he was talking about you!”
“Farkle we are men of science,” Minkus objected. “Science dictates that when people die they don’t go off to some other world.”
“He even sang that song,” Farkle insisted. “He knew that ‘farkle’ meant a joyous occasion or a happy surprise! Now Dad, I know what we believe and I know that science provides many answers. I’m not asking us to abandon our whole beliefs, but isn’t there enough wiggle room to consider other alternatives? Isn’t that what science does for us, allows us to test different possibilities before we come up with the solution?”
Minkus looked downward. “You know, Farkle, your great grandfather was also an agnostic like us. He was logical and prided himself on questioning various beliefs. But he was also very open minded. He believe that because the Universe was so vast, that we could never possibly know all the answers, so the Universe took care of us and looked out for us.”
“So do you believe me?” Farkle asked.
“Well I believe in you,” Minkus answered. “I also believe that if anyone was ever going to find you in the woods or on an abandoned road and help get you safely home to me, it would have been your Great-Grandpa.”
Farkle smiled as he and his father embraced. As the song continued to play, Minkus wasn’t sure but he swore he could feel someone else embracing them. He also wasn’t sure but he could catch the faint whiff of marijuana. He didn’t tell Farkle that. Instead the two just listened as the song continued:
“Little Man, love is always in the air /its there for those who care/Little Man/Little Man.”
Minkus Ville I: Breaking Point (Stuart Minkus Age 37; Farkle Minkus Age 15)

Chapter Summary

PTSD, his father's illness, and work and home pressures drive Stuart Minkus to the edge of a complete breakdown

The Lives of Genius
A Boy/Girl Meets World Fanfic
By Auburn Red

Chapter Twenty-Four: Minkus Ville I: Breaking Point (Stuart Minkus Age 37; Farkle Minkus Age 15)

Author’s Note: These chapters were based on a request from one of the readers who wanted Minkus to reconcile/gain closure with his parents. I hope this meets your expectations, Anonymous Guest! D

And thank every deity imagined for Girl Meets World to have another Minkus/Farkle themed episode (and as of right now my favorite. I just love their father/son interaction and the hug that they shared melted me. AWWW!! :D) Otherwise this fic might have sat on the shelves a little longer. :D The only major change to “Girl Meets Money” is that the events happen in 9th grade rather than 8th but it flows so well with my story without any major changes to the canon, I thought that I would include it here. :D

As before, Rusty Venture and the rest of the cast from Venture Bros. and they belong to Cartoon Network and Doc Hammer and Jackson Publick. (This idea of Venture Industries being the company that Minkus invested in was suggested by my sister, Starfire and I when we talked about how similar Rusty Venture and Stuart Minkus not to mention Dean Venture and Farkle Minkus were).

Minkus could hear voices. Farkle called to him. He could just hear his voice through the door. But as he kept running towards the voice, the door kept getting further and further away. Using his logic, he determined that the corridor was out of perspective. It got longer the more he ran, reaching to an infinite length. No matter how far he ran, it would never shrink. It would never get smaller.

After what seemed like forever, Stuart reached the door as his son’s screams got louder. He could hear voices getting louder and louder and could distinctly hear Jennifer’s threatening. “If you scream, I will kill you Seamus,” she said.

“Dad, where are you?” Farkle’s voice called through his sobbing.

“I’m just outside Farkle, I’m coming,” Minkus called through the door as he tried to open it. The door had no knob, no lock, no way of getting inside. Minkus pounded on the door calling to his son, “Farkle! Farkle!”

The voices mixed. He pounded on the door until his fingers were bleeding. “Farkle, I’m trying to save you!” Minkus shouted through the door. “Just hold on!”

Farkle continued to yell his father’s name, his voice becoming less and less frightened and desperate as though it were finally silenced. “No,” Minkus begged. “No please no! Somebody help me, please!”

Minkus instantly felt eyes watching and boring into him. He looked upwards to see his grandfather behind a wall of glass. Minkus ran towards him, but the old man just glared at him giving him an intense silent stare. He didn’t say anything just sat in a chair with a lost forgotten expression as
though he couldn’t remember the young man. “Grandpa,” Minkus begged running towards him. “Help me, please!”

Ginsburg looked towards his grandson confused through the wall, “But I don’t know who you are.”

Minkus shook his head and stepped back. “No,” Minkus said. “Grandpa, no please.”

Minkus looked up to see another glass wall with Morgan this time standing. Minkus ran towards his girlfriend hitting the sides to let her go. “Morgan help me!”

Morgan glared at Stuart in revulsion. Her clothes were torn and her hair was tangled. Her bleeding lips shook. “I told you to stay away and look, look what happened to me!”

“No Morgan I didn’t,” Minkus said.

“He raped me because of you,” Morgan said. She nodded at Ginsburg’s direction who still sat in the chair looking almost mummified. “He has no memory now because of you! What makes you think that you can save Farkle, when you couldn’t save us?”

Minkus ran from his girlfriend’s accusation and tried to once again banged his hands and head ignoring the pain, ignoring the blood, ignoring his son’s weaker cries. The only thing that he could do was call the name of the person that he loved most in the world and could never save.

Stuart Minkus sprang from his bed as he looked out at the darkness. It took him a minute to get his bearings and realize that he wasn’t inside the infinite corridor or standing in front of a doorway with his son on the other side. Instead he was inside his master bedroom. He staggered off the bed and entered the bathroom. His breath caught in his throat and his hand shook as he turned on the faucet and poured himself a glass of water. Since he nearly lost all of his money in that investment, the nightmares intensified. What was wrong with him? Farkle was safe at home. Jennifer was never going to bother them again. While Grandpa Ginsburg had been dead for 16 years thanks to Farkle’s information, Minkus can believe he was watching out for them. On the romance side, he and Morgan had finally made love and were in a loving committed relationship.

While yes he did lose money in that technological investment, the bid worked and they didn’t lose all of it and Minkus was still trying to figure out how to make Minkus Technologies match the advanced technologies that Venture Industries was producing under their new name, Ven Tech. It would be a matter of upgrading all of Minkus Technologies services, but it could be done. Minkus and other company’s CEO, Rusty Venture were still playing hardball about that. What was wrong with him?

Why were the nightmares troubling him now? Minkus gulped down the water. He tried to shut the faucets off, but his hands shook so badly that he almost couldn’t. Minkus held one hand on top of the other as if to will them to stop shaking. When they settled, he finally shut the faucets.

Farkle’s scream broke through the silence. “Dad where are you?” He yelled.

In panic, Minkus’ hand brushed against the glass and it tumbled to the floor. He turned towards his son’s room wincing as a piece of broken glass cut his foot. Minkus was about to inspect the cut as Farkle screamed again, “Daddy! Daddy,” he yelled through sobs.

Frightened because Farkle hadn’t called him ‘Daddy’ since he was six years old, Minkus ran faster towards his son’s bedroom. Breathing a quick sigh of relief that the hallway was the same length as ever and that the doorknob opened, Minkus ran inside the room and flipped on the light. He turned towards his son’s room wincing as a piece of broken glass cut his foot. Minkus was about to inspect the cut as Farkle screamed again, “Daddy! Daddy,” he yelled through sobs.

Frightened because Farkle hadn’t called him ‘Daddy’ since he was six years old, Minkus ran faster towards his son’s bedroom. Breathing a quick sigh of relief that the hallway was the same length as ever and that the doorknob opened, Minkus ran inside the room and flipped on the light. Farkle sobbed and gulped down tears as Minkus picked up his son and cradled him in his arms. “It’s alright, son,” he said. “Shh, shh it’s okay. Daddy’s here.” Farkle practically collapsed in his father’s arms, a bundle of tears and shivering. For the millionth time, Minkus silently cursed Jennifer, Edward, Meese and everyone else who reduced his son to this shaking emotional wreck that lay before him.

Minkus kissed the top of Farkle’s head and rocked him back and forth as Farkle’s sobbing lessened. “What happened in this dream?” Minkus asked.

Farkle caught his breath as he spoke between gasps. “Meese held me down by the arms and Jennifer-she-took the razor and cut me. Then Meese held open my mouth and she pushed the pills down my throat. When they finished, they pulled me out of the tub and O.S. and Sherry came in. Even though I was dying they—” He gulped not wanting to continue illustrating what his mother’s
friends did “-And she laughed about it! The whole thing. Her son was dying and all Jennifer did was laugh.”

Farkle continued to sob in his father’s arms. “Shh, Farkle, they won’t hurt you. They’re not here anymore to hurt you and even if they were, I wouldn’t let them.”

But you weren’t there and they did, Minkus’ thoughts objected. Even though he held onto his son tightly, Minkus could still see his hands shake and feel his breath getting caught in his throat. He ignored both of these things as he calmed his son down.

Minkus managed to get Farkle calmed down enough to fill a water bottle and hand it to him. Farkle took more deep breaths and tears still stained his face, but he managed to steady his emotions.

“Good and steady?” Minkus asked. Farkle nodded. “Do you think we need to talk to Dr. Friar about increasing your dosage?”

Farkle shrugged. “I don’t know. I guess so.”

“You have that appointment with Jordan Miller next Thursday,” Minkus reminded his son of the meeting with Farkle’s therapist. “Do you want to make it earlier?”

“No, that’s okay,” Farkle said. “I’ll tell him about it.”

“You want to talk some more about your dream?” Minkus asked.

“Isn’t it late?” Farkle asked nodding at the still dark sky and the clock indicating that it was 3:00 in the morning.

“It’s Sunday,” Minkus reminded his son. “I don’t have to be anywhere today and neither do you.”

Farkle nodded and gulped the water down. “It seemed so real.”

“Well you know how to make them lucid, Farkle” Minkus reminded his son. “Pick apart the things that seem odd, the tell-tale signs that you are dreaming and you can control the dream.”

“Like they weren’t there, when I cut myself,” Farkle said nodding at the scars on his arms now fading but still an ever-present reminder of his suicide attempt.

“Right,” Minkus said. “Remember Jennifer and Meese barely knew each other then. Anything, even the minor details, if the bathroom looked different or I don’t know Fluffy sprouted wings and started flying.” Or like hallways come to a definite end and there always is a way to open a door, Minkus taunted in his mind remembering his own recent dream.

Farkle laughed knowing that his father was trying to lighten the mood. “And above all you know that you can always talk to me, or your friends, or Mr. Matthews, or Dr. Friar, or Jordan about what’s bothering you. Okay?”

Farkle nodded as he began to feel sleepy and wrapped himself in the covers. “Dad, do you have nightmares like these?”

Minkus looked downward. “No, I don’t, Farkle.” He said hoping that his son believed him. It was obvious from his look that he didn’t. “Sometimes,” Minkus said.

“Is that how you deal with them?” Farkle asked.

“No,” Minkus said. “Sometimes I just compartmentalize them and put them away inside a little box throughout the day.”

“Does it work?” Farkle asked.

“Sometimes,” Minkus answered truthfully. “I just don’t think about them.”

“Well what do you do when it comes up,” Farkle asked. “Do you ever talk to anyone?”

“Well I’m talking to you now,” Minkus suggested. “What are you trying to say Farkle?”

“It’s just that you mentioned a whole list of people that you said I can talk to about what’s bothering me. Who do you talk to?”

“Well I have friends too, Morgan.” Minkus mentioned.

“Well you said something to me once,” Farkle suggested. “You said I articulate what you’re feeling every day and you can’t bring out.”

“Because I choose not to,” Minkus said. He laughed. “Farkle what happened? I was supposed to be talking to you about your problem and here you are talking about mine? Not that I have any.”

“Dad, the last three times that I woke up with a nightmare before tonight, I ran to you and you were already awake. Sometimes in the living room and sometimes in your own room, but I knew you were up before me.”
“So you think that I need to seek professional help too?” Minkus suggested.
“It couldn’t hurt,” Farkle suggested.
Minkus shook his head. “It’s like a religion isn’t it. Those who are in therapy become evangelical towards those who aren’t.” He teased.
“I don’t know,” Farkle said. “Maybe if you talked to someone while I talked to Jordan.”
“You really want me to?” Minkus asked.
Farkle shrugged but nodded.
“And you aren’t going to leave me alone about it until I do,” Minkus asked. He put his hands on top of each other as if to keep them from shaking before they did.
Farkle gave a much wider shrug and nodded his head.
“Well we’ll see about it okay,” Minkus suggested. “Right now the most important thing for me is to take care of you and make sure you’re okay.”
Minkus engaged in a friendly conversation with Morgan over the phone. The accusing Morgan from the nightmare flashed into his memory and Stuart for a minute there was lost in their conversation.
“Stuart, did you hear me?” Morgan asked.
“Umm sure,” Minkus said. “I understand, whatever it is you just said.”
The blond woman laughed as they recalled their last date. “All I’m saying is that I want to choose the restaurant next time.”
“What?” Minkus teased as he made figures on his laptop while talking to his girlfriend through headphones. “What was wrong with my choice? It had perfect ambience, the staff was friendly, and the food was delicious.”
“But it was a little pricey,” Morgan reminded him.
“Morgan, it is my favorite Italian restaurant,” Minkus inquired.
“When you said that you knew a little out-of-the-way Italian place I thought you meant that it was in Little Italy or at least New York! I didn’t think you meant that it was in Rome!” Morgan corrected.
“You’re complaining, you had a perfect view of the Spanish Steps and you’re complaining,” Stuart fake pouted.
“It was wonderful but it was overwhelming,” Morgan said. “I tell you that I want to get something for my Mom for her birthday and you whisk me away to Paris to pick out something from the upcoming Spring catalog.”
“You don’t think Dior was her type?” Minkus asked.
Morgan laughed. “Stuart, you’re driving me nuts! I thought you were cutting back on your expenses anyway.”
“I was, if I were the old Stuart I would have offered to buy San Marino for your Mom,” Minkus said. “Besides I still have Frequent Flter Miles from when I was Minkus International. It’s the perfect time to use them.”
Morgan growled in exasperation that her boyfriend wasn’t getting it. “Stuart, ever since we first made love, you have been trying to top yourself. You don’t have to keep trying to impress me. You already did a long time ago. Remember, our first date we had hot dogs from a vendor and walked around Greenwich Village? Remember, January when all that snow hit and you, me, and Farkle were holed up in your apartment? We drank hot chocolate and watched old movies. Those are the dates that I remember the most. You don’t have to spend a lot of money on me, Stuart. I’m not Jennifer!”
Morgan winced. Stuart’s silence gave her the answer that she had approached a touchy subject.
“When will I learn to keep my mouth shut? Stuart, I’m sorry I shouldn’t have said that.”
Minkus’ voice had dropped his teasing and he turned serious. “I know you’re not. I’m sorry, Morgan, you’re right. I’ve been going overboard. I’ve gotten so used to being that way that it’s hard for me to step back. It’s so easy for me to lose it all in one second and I don’t want to lose what we have.”
The dream came again and Minkus felt his hands shake. The expanding hallway and the door with
no opening puzzled him. How could he find a way through?
“"I know, Stuart," Morgan said. "But you have your money back and you have Farkle and you have me. We’re not going anywhere. You don’t have to spend half a million to make sure of it."
“"You’re right," Minkus said. "You’re right." He then smiled. "Okay boring old Manhattan food it is, your choice." Morgan and Minkus laughed. "You sure you don’t want anything more exotic?"
Morgan teased. "Promise me one thing, if we go Chinese I want to at least pay for half the flight."
The boyfriend and girlfriend laughed, Minkus knowing that Morgan wasn’t being serious.
“"How’s Farkle?" Morgan inquired.
“"Oh the usual," Minkus said. "Hanging out with his friends, going out with Maya, making the early plans for overthrowing the government and starting his own republic."
""Ah the usual earmarks of young adulthood," Morgan said sarcastically. "He isn’t troubled by nightmares or flashbacks or anything of when he lived with his Mom or anything else he’s been through?"
“"Sometimes," Minkus said honestly. "They come and go, but you know, Morgan, I think he’s finally coming through. The nightmares are becoming more infrequent."
“"He’s a survivor, Stuart," Morgan reminded her boyfriend. "He does you a good credit."
“"Yes, I know," Minkus said. The memory of his dream and the bloody angry Morgan once again occurred. "Morgan, do you still think about what happened to you with your rape?"
Morgan’s breath drew inward. "Well I don’t know why that came up."
“"If you don’t want to talk about it, I understand," Minkus said.
“"No, it’s okay," Morgan said. "Yeah sometimes I still do. I think about them. I walk down the street and wonder if one of them isn’t going to come out and jump me. I still don’t like to go into that alley by myself. Last time I saw Maya here with Riley, through no fault of her own, I tensed when I remembered that her father was one of my rapists."
“"How do you control it?" Minkus asked.
Morgan smiled, "Well at night in my dreams, I try to change the dream around, so I come out the victor. Like Wonder Woman or Buffy knowing they are going to come and kick the shit out of them before they do it."
“"So what do you do during the day?" Minkus asked. "I’m asking for Farkle’s sake naturally."
Morgan had a feeling that he wasn’t just asking on behalf of Farkle, but knew that to get Stuart to own up would take an act of Congress. "Well that’s the hard part. We all live with trauma, Stuart. It’s a part of us that we can’t ignore or push aside. But sometimes I think about the good that it brought."
“"How could something good have come out of that?" Minkus said doubtfully.
“"Well I got closer to a certain handsome, slightly geeky, but always sweet and charming CEO for one thing."
""Yeah Mark Zuckerberg is one lucky guy," Minkus teased. "I just hope Priscilla Chan doesn’t mind too much."
""Stop you," Morgan rolled her eyes. "Anyway, it also helped me with working with other women like when I do Take Back the Night. I understand more of what they have been going through and it allows me to sympathize with their pain. I talk to them about it and they talk to me. It helps to know that we’re not alone, no one is."
“"That’s really admirable," Minkus said.
“I also don’t expect it to go away anytime soon," Morgan said. "Especially if a pain like that lasted for years. There shouldn’t be a time table for it. You don’t get over it right away and you don’t expect to. It’s part of your DNA and your memory. It’s there but after a while it just gets pushed to the side. It becomes, I don’t know, less important to think about."
Minkus cleared his throat. "You’re right. Those are good things. I will…tell him"
Minkus checked his schedule. "So the weekend of the 18th that’s when you’re coming right?"
“"Yeah, wait uh no," Morgan remembered. "It’s going to have to be 25th. I have to get the books to your Mom. We’re going over the store’s budget that week."
“"Oh," Stuart said abruptly.
“Is there anything that you’d like me to tell her?” Morgan. “Like a message from her darling Sonny Boy or her adorable grandson?”

“Why?” Minkus asked. “Am I supposed to?”

Morgan bristled. “I assume you’re looking for a different answer other than she’s your mother.”

“Morgan no,” Minkus said. “We don’t get along you know that. I know that in Matthews’ Land, you guys talk and share feelings. If your phone goes dead, you parents call 911 thinking that some kind of cataclysmic emergency is the reason you haven’t called yet. But in Minkus Ville, it’s not like that. We don’t talk period.”

“Well I thought with your father,” Morgan began.

“By the time I found out about his surgery, he had already been released and was on the road to recovery,” Minkus said. “The three of us have cut each other from our lives. I learned to live without them and they learned to live without me. It’s just going to have to continue that way.”

“If you feel uncomfortable with me working with your mother, I will get another bookkeeper,” Morgan offered.

“I didn’t say that,” Minkus said. “It’s your life. You want to work with her that’s fine, but don’t expect me to send any messages to her.”

Morgan tapped on the screen door. She waited for Nancy Minkus to bid her inside before she entered. “Hi Nancy,” Morgan called brightly. “I brought the books.” She said to the freelance bookkeeper/accountant.

Nancy stared at the window as though she were unaware of the younger woman’s presence. She jumped as if startled that she wasn’t alone. “Oh thanks, Morgan, put them on the table.”

“Sure,” Morgan said as she laid the Matthews’ Wilderness books down on the table. She looked around Nancy’s house. It was as neat as it could be from a couple who was having difficulties. Morgan winced as she saw the pictures on the wall and table. They were all of Tom and Nancy in their youth and adulthood. Two featured older couples on their wedding day. One Morgan took to be Tom’s parents and the other she knew were Nancy’s mother and stepfather. Morgan remembered when she first became aware that there were no photos or memorabilia of Stuart. It was as though in their drive to forget their son, Tom and Nancy Minkus had removed him entirely from their lives. One would look at their home and assume that they were the token childless couple. Morgan wondered how many photos of his parents, Minkus had laying around but had a feeling the answer would be none.

Nancy had out her laptop and had put her reading glasses on, but she only plucked at her keyboard. “If you like, I can come back tomorrow.” Morgan suggested.

“No,” Nancy said. “We agreed to meet. Let’s just finish this” She smiled. “The right way, of course. Would you like some chamomile with honey?”

“You know the way I like it,” Morgan said. “Here I’ll make it,” She rose before Nancy could object and made two cups of chamomile tea for herself and her boyfriend’s mother.

The two women drank and made small talk before Nancy got that lost faraway look in her eye. The one that Morgan didn’t want to admit she recognized but certainly saw in Stuart when he had something on his mind and didn’t want to talk about it. “Nancy, what’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing it’s,” Nancy waved her hand disdainfully but then sighed. “Tom has to go in again this week.”

Morgan’s face fell. “Oh no, this is the third time isn’t it?” She asked. Nancy nodded. “How terrible, I am so sorry.”

Nancy looked down at the mug and the kitchen table. “I know it doesn’t make sense does it? He was a football and track star in high school and college. He could have gone pro, but he decided to go into business and open the store instead. He jogs every morning, or he used to until the last time. He doesn’t drink alcohol except some champagne on New Year’s. Never smoked a day in his life. He’s one of the most active men I know. He’s too young. He’s only 57 years old. I mean if he were someone who had health problems or was a chain smoker, I would understand. We would be ready for it, but for Tom to go into his third heart surgery, it’s not right and it’s not fair. I mean, the only sign we ever had of anything was that his father died of a heart attack when he was 40,” Nancy
sighed. “On Tom’s 40th birthday, we actually had a celebration because we thought he made it and now—Nancy began to be overcome. Morgan didn’t say anything just held her friend by the shoulder in a silent reassurance that she didn’t have to deal with this alone.

Nancy drank some more of the tea in silence and then grinned slightly. “You know we met at a football game.”

Morgan smiled. “No I didn’t. What happened?”

Nancy nodded. “He was a running back in our high school team and I was a cheerleading cocaptain.”

“Ah the football star and the cheerleader,” Morgan reasoned. “I can see where this is going.”

“Well our meeting was a little less typical than that. We went to a big high school plus he was a sophomore and I was a senior at the time. And of course that’s very important.” Nancy said sarcastically remembering those old age differences that no longer were. “So we probably only exchanged a couple of words at a game, at most. But this particular game he got the ball and he showed off a little on the field doing a bit of a dance, which he often did when he got close to us cheerleaders. Unfortunately, the rival player got the ball and tackled him to the ground. They got a bit too close to our pyramid which of course guess who was on top of—She raised her hand indicating herself. “The pyramid tumbled over and I fell right on top of the other cheerleaders and two football players, barely missing Tom’s head by an inch.”

“Well I was also Senior Class Treasurer and Vice President of FBLA,” Nancy added.

“Tom always joked that we had a perfect marriage because we had a perfect business partnership and vice versa. He was the people person. He always liked to talk to the customers, sell them whatever they wanted, and getting to know customers and the employees. Someone would walk into the store for a screwdriver and within a half hour, Tom would know every DIY project that the customer was planning for the next five years and provide them with the tools for those projects. He liked the sales aspects of running a business. But he never liked the daily aspects. He didn’t like balancing books, keeping everything on a budget, and contacting merchandisers when our supplies ran low. We always joked that’s what I was there for. I took care of that stuff so he didn’t have to. I think he actually didn’t mind when the store closed down and he got the job at Lowe’s, because then he could focus on the aspects of business that he liked and leave alone the aspects he didn’t.”

Morgan nodded silently listening to Nancy talk about her marriage. The younger woman didn’t want to say anything, but she felt that their son had inherited both of his parents’ qualities towards business. Stuart Minkus had the people skills and ideals to see a project to fruition and sell it to the public and he also had the logical inclination to the details to make sure things were put together in the right way before it came to light. Tom and Nancy Minkus’ better qualities had combined into one person, even though none of them would ever be able to see it that way.

Nancy sighed. “That’s what scares me the most about this, Morgan. Tom is so stubborn, so full of life and energy. But he’s not like that anymore. He even said that if it doesn’t work this time, he doesn’t want to try again. He hasn’t been doing too well with his pacemaker and he said that he doesn’t want to be tied to machines. I’m afraid that he wants to give up and I don’t know what to do about that.”

Morgan bit her lip before she spoke. “Why don’t you talk to Stuart?”

Nancy’s face darkened. “No, why should I?”

Morgan shrugged. “He has access to money and hospitals. Maybe he knows someone who knows something experimental or new that they could try to help Tom.”

“No, Nancy said ending the conversation. “Neither Tom nor I want him to be used as a guinea pig.”
“Well at the very least shouldn’t he know that his father is sick?” Morgan asked.

Upon Nancy’s expression, Morgan knew that she had taken a step too far in asking. “Morgan,” Nancy said sourly. “I know that you’re dating him. That’s all I need to know about him. I don’t interfere in your relationship with him. Please don’t interfere with mine.”

Morgan nodded. “I see,” she said. “I’m sorry.” Inwardly, she rolled her eyes about the genetic obstinacy between a mother and son. In her mind, the Minkus Family Crest should have been a mule!

“It doesn’t matter,” Nancy said. “Now let’s go over these accounts shall we?” Nancy asked opening up Morgan’s account books. Morgan nodded as the two discussed business the rest of the day.

Jessie nodded at the call button. “Batten down the hatches, a storm is coming Captain!”

Minkus rolled his eyes and sighed in disgust. Of course Rusty Venture would call in the middle of a staff meeting. “Put him through,” he said annoyed.

Jessie pressed a button for the teleconference. The screen showed a thin bald man standing inside a laboratory. Rusty smirked at Stuart who smirked back. Rusty had his full staff behind him, though privately Minkus thought they looked more like rejects from a cosplay or circus rather than the staff of a technological-scientific conglomerate.

A pale albino man sat next to a small hydrocephalic man with a metal arm. A bearded man dressed in gray robes sat between a tall African-American man in black with two sharp looking swords and a smaller man in a red robe. A large man with a “V” tattooed on his face stood close to a large blond muscular man who looked like he could tear Minkus to ribbons at a moment’s thought. The only ones who looked sort of half-way normal amongst the Venture Industries staff were Rusty’s teenage sons, Hank and Dean. But at that moment they appeared to be engaged in some sort of hand-to-hand combat with a robot.

“Rusty,” Stuart tried to greet the super scientist politely.

“Minkus,” Rusty said just as evenly. “Sorry to be so late in calling, I had to get rid of some Monarch butterflies who were being a problem.”

“How can Monarch butterflies be a problem?” Ali asked the other staff members.

“You don’t want to know Barbie,” Rusty said then he turned back to Minkus “Speaking of annoying pains in the ass, how’s the Mrs.?”

Minkus gave a bitter laugh. Rusty Venture knew that Minkus had been divorced. He as usual tried to get under Stuart’s skin.

“Just fine last I heard,” Stuart said. Actually he had no idea since he heard Jennifer moved to Europe, but figured no news was good news. “And available if you’re interested.”

“No thanks, I’d prefer not to make out with a loon like that. I already had enough loons like that. Besides what I heard was she made off with the rest of your money, house, car, testicles?” Rusty quipped.

That wasn’t exactly the way the divorce went but Minkus didn’t feel like going into the details with someone like Rusty. Since their vitriolic first meeting in Hawaii, Stuart Minkus and Rusty Venture had some interactions with each other. Far from their fiery first meeting, their subsequent matches more of involved a non-stop insult match. Despite their personal dislike of each other, they both recognize the genius in one another and when Rusty Venture inherited his brother’s money and inventions, Stuart leapt at the chance to invest in them.

Minkus knew that half the time Rusty Venture didn’t mean what he said, so he tried not to take the jest as seriously as he would have from anyone else. Time to volley back.

“True it’s difficult to lose half my things but I at least had things to lose,” Minkus quipped back.

“Why are you calling Rusty?”

“Well I’m just catching up,” Rusty said. “And I’m not at all bitter that you started that Family Foundation with Cuban instead of me.”

Minkus bristled. “Rusty what do you know about charity?”

Rusty looked shocked. “I will have you know that I am very charitable,” He said. “Just last winter I dropped a dollar into a Salvation Army Kettle!”
“I’m sure you made a noble sacrifice,” Minkus mocked.
“Dad, you told the bell ringer to give you your money back because it fell in,” Hank said.
“And then when he wouldn’t, you called him a bum and told him to get a job,” Dean said.
“I was being charitable,” Rusty insisted. “I was leading him to a new career!”
“Of course you were,” Minkus said condescendingly.
“Never mind that. How’s what remains of your family,” Rusty added snidely. “How is your son
what’s his name, Finkle?-“
“-Farkle,” Stuart corrected.
“Yeah that’s so much better,” Rusty said sarcastically. “Finkle, Farkle? Wha2t kind of a name is
that? It sounds like the lesser known Furbee!”
“My son may have a unique name that makes him stand out, but I at least trust my son to run my
company someday,” Minkus countered. “I wouldn’t trust your sons with a flashlight!”
“Now that is not true! “Rusty said. “These boys are quite mature and intelligent for their age!”
“Daaaad,” Dean whined in the background. “Hank dared me to play Rock ‘Em Sock’Em Robots
with H.E.L.P.E.R and now he’s making H.E.L.P.E.R. hold down my arm!”
“He won’t let go until you say that I’m Mad Max and you’re Furiosa!” Hank said.
“I don’t want to shave my head and look like Dad,” Dean whined.
Rusty rubbed the bridge of his nose. “Just do what I’ve done for the past 18 years, ignore them.
Anyway, Minkus you and I are like a pair of scales. I’m up you’re down.”
Minkus smirked knowing that Rusty used those particular words to echo Minkus’ earlier comments
in Hawaii. “You’re only up now because your younger, richer, successful, and more competent
brother was insane enough to leave you his fortune and technologies,” Minkus reminded him.
“For the benefit of you playing at home,” Pete White dryly observed to the Minkus Technologies
employees. “Now back to our story.”
“You mean the technology that you invested in and you can’t upgrade yet?” Rusty asked dryly.
“Oh we can get it upgraded,” Stuart said. “We’re working on it.”
“Preferably this millennium if at all possible,” Rusty countered.
“This investment will shine like the top of your head Rusty,” Minkus quipped.
“I don’t have time to wait for Stuart Minkus’ Fifth Comeback,” Rusty teased. “You came back
from that divorce so fast. You’re like Jason or Jigsaw. No matter how many times something kills
you, you return from the dead.” Rusty paused as though he were paying Minkus a compliment. “No
matter how hard we try to kill you. You’re annoying that way.”
Minkus smiled. “Oh Rusty, you of all people would know that the sequel is never as good as the
original.”
“Is he insulting him or us?” Lonny asked his colleagues. Rusty’s dirty look gave him the answer.
Christine leaned over to her colleagues. “This is amazing. It’s like watching a nature special with
two gorillas battling each other for dominance.”
Eddie turned to his colleagues and spoke in a soft measured voice sounding like the announcer of a
nature TV program. “And as noon strikes the encampment, the older gorilla beats his chest to
challenge the younger one’s authority. The younger leader responds in kind to signal his
acceptance of the older gorilla’s challenge for leadership of the band.”
“The slinging of filth will begin at any minute,” Lonny teased amidst the others’ laughter.
“No one told me this meeting would be in surround sound,” Mike joked.
“That’s the problem,” Jessie said. “Rusty and Stuart don’t get along because they’re too much
alike. They both have to be the smartest guy in the room.”
“You think they’re thinking the same thing about us?” Ali asked nodding at the Venture Industries
staff,
“Nah they’re probably just intimidated by us,” Lonny said. He gave them a game face look and
said “What you looking at?”
From the Venture Apartment, Dean pointed at Lonny. “Did the black guy over there just blow us a
kiss?”
Pete White nodded at Rusty Venture and Stuart Minkus. “The way I see it, pallies, it works. We
ever lose Russ, we got ourselves a spare!” He referred to Minkus.
But he has more hair than our Dad does,” Hank pointed out.
“No problem,” Brock Samson said. “We hold Minkus down, shave his head and no one would be the wiser.”
“Look Minkus,” Rusty said. “You invested in our company and nearly lost it all trying to get the thing updated and you can’t do it. Why don’t we just terminate this contract, sever our ties, and we’ll call it squarsies? I’m sure your old buddy, what was his name Meese is it would have no problems getting it upgraded!”
Minkus glowered at the name of the competition. “No we can do it,” Minkus said. “I have never backed away from a challenge. It’s just a matter of figuring the data.” Minkus could feel his hands shake and his body tighten. He mentally willed himself to stop shaking. He didn’t want Rusty or his employees to see any sort of weakness. “Figuring out the data.”
“I heard you and I heard you,” Rusty said repeating himself sarcastically. “I told you that the technologies may be too sophisticated but oh no you insisted that you can do it. You could see the success margin. Look why don’t we just speed ahead to the end of Devil’s Advocate and I get to play Al Pacino to your Keanu Reeves?” He then took on a gullible naïve expression and spoke in a large exaggerated Southern drawl. “‘You know what scares me, Rusty. I lose this investment and she—oh right you’re divorced I forgot. You got a kid, right.” He continued speaking in a fake North Carolina accent. ‘‘He gets better and I hate him for it!’ “
“I don’t sound like that,” Minkus objected.
“Actually, Stuart you kinda do,” Eddie quipped.
“I’ll have you know that I have a skilled adept staff that will work round the clock to upgrade your technologies,” Minkus pointed at his staff members who nodded in appreciation of his comment. Though Lonny and Ali couldn’t resist making goofy faces.
“I have a…..staff,” Rusty nodded indicating his colleagues who were all doing other things. Hank and Dean were engaged in wrestling match with H.E.L.P.E.R. The Triad and Ven Tech staff were arguing about the scientific vs. the magical way to cut through cans with a jinsu knife and who knew what Brock and Sgt. Vatred were doing. Probably engaging in a staring contest for all Rusty knew. “I have a necromancer!” Rusty blurted out pointing at Dr. Byron Orpheus who nodded in gratitude.
Minkus turned to his employees pretending to be stunned. “Necromancer, why didn’t we get one? Every technology company needs one!”
“I’ll be looking forward to your upgrade,” Rusty said. “Oh check that, my grandkids will look forward to your upgrade.”
“You’ll get it,” Minkus said. “I haven’t given up on it.”
“Whatever Minkus,” Rusty said. “I remain cautiously pessimistic.”
“You mean cautiously optimistic,” Stuart said.
“Clearly you don’t know me at all,” Rusty said. “Venture out.” He waited a minute but the screen didn’t change. Rusty glanced over at Sgt. Hatred, his assistant bodyguard. “Hatred, that means out! Push the button!”
“Oh sorry Doc,” the bodyguard said as he flipped the button off.
“I don’t believe that man,” Jessie said shaking her head.
“Come on Stuart,” Eddie said. “He’s just trying to get to you.”
“I know and we’re getting this worked out,” Minkus said. He turned to his laptop and started making some corrections in his earlier data. He began tabulating some code languages as he spoke. “It’s all a matter of finding a way to upgrade the services to make people be able to use it.” He continued to add numbers and codes almost as if he was in a trance. He had to get this right. Everything had to be perfect. As head of Minkus Technologies, he oversaw everything. He looked at the computer, not looking at his colleagues.
“Stuart why are you wasting your time with this guy?” Eddie asked. “You said so yourself ‘Rusty Venture is like a cartoon character!’ “
“I know but this cartoon character’s family left behind some of the most sophisticated equipment.
When he puts it on the market, the company that invests in it could make a fortune. It could be enough to make us be well known again. We wouldn’t have to live and die with one account after another. We just have to find a way to access it. Access is the key. Access, we have to find access. Every door has a key. There has to be away inside, there just has to be.” He continued to type codes and figures onto his laptop.

“Is he speaking in business metaphor? Because really I don’t know what I’m supposed to be saying here” Christine asked.

“I don’t know,” Jessie said. “Stuart are you okay?”

“How do you get inside a door that has no way of opening? How do you get to the end of a corridor that never ends?” Minkus asked as he computed the data.

“It just goes on and on my friend?” Ali asked innocently remembering the old Shari Lewis song. Her colleagues all groaned, “Oh shut up!” Jessie and Christine even playfully bopped her on the head.

Eddie gently tapped Stuart on the shoulder feeling like he was waking a sleepwalker.

Minkus looked up startled from a trance. “We’ll figure it out man, okay? Just relax.”

“Of course,” Minkus said. “Every question has an answer. There’s always an answer and we’ll find it.” He cleared his throat turning to his colleagues becoming more business-like. “Now we have a busy day ahead, so let’s get back to work shall we?”

Morgan sat between her parents and explained the situation between Stuart Minkus and his parents.

“They both made it clear that they don’t want to have anything to do with each other and they don’t want me to get involved,” Morgan said. “But how can I not say anything about it?”

“It’s not fair for them to put you in that situation either, Morgan,” Amy reminded her daughter. “I know you care a great deal about Stuart and Nancy.”

“I know Stuart’s my boyfriend but I consider Nancy one of my friends,” Morgan said. “I don’t want to hurt her by telling Stuart behind her back, but I don’t want to hurt him either by not telling him.”

“What’s going to hurt more is if he finds out that his father died when he reads his obituary,” Alan suggested.

“They don’t know that he’s going to die yet Dad,” Morgan said.

“Maybe maybe not Morgan,” Alan said. “Remember that I told you that I wasn’t there when your grandfather died.” Morgan nodded. “Before I left, we said a lot of things and not all of them were good. I never got to take back the things I said to him. I don’t always remember what we said, but I always remember what I didn’t say to him and never got the chance.”

Morgan nodded. “You’re right I should tell Stuart. I was probably going to anyway. I don’t even know why I bothered asking.”

“Because that’s what we’re here for to talk to when you need it,” Amy encouraged.

Morgan gave a thin smile. “That’s what life is like in Matthews’ Land.”

Amy and Alan looked confused. “What does that mean?” Amy asked.

Morgan shook her head. “Oh nothing, just something Stuart said.”

Morgan’s cell phone vibrated she picked it up and read the text message. “It’s from Nancy! I’d better go!” She said frantically as she reached for her jacket and ran out the door.

Nancy Minkus sat inside the emergency room staring at her husband. He was still breathing, but he was clearly devoid of life. His once fit frame had practically withered and his robust color was now ashen and pale. Nancy was terrified wanting to run from the sight of this man who resembled her husband, but seemed not to be. Instead she inched forward and lay her hand on top of his. She could just tell that this surgery’s results were just as unsuccessful as the other’s.

“Nance,” he said slowly and whispered.

Nancy’s eyes filled. She stubbornly refused to let them fall now. “No don’t give up, Tom. We’ll go through another one. No matter how many times it takes, how many doctors. You’ll get better!”

“No Nancy,” Tom said to his wife. “It’ll be over soon.”

Nancy nodded reluctantly holding her husband’s hand. Morgan ran to the open door and watched the couple, her eyes filled with tears of sympathy.
Minkus practically flew through the hospital corridor. He arrived almost as soon as Morgan called him. Privately, he thought that this could not have come at a more inconvenient time because he was working on the upgrades, but he felt disloyal and guilty about that and pushed those feelings aside. He sprinted straight for the emergency room that the nurse said that his father was inside. Tom Minkus was alone, tied to wiring that monitored his heart rate. He looked older, grayer, more withered than Stuart had ever seen him. He remembered when he was younger and his father seemed about 10 feet tall, now he was an old man aging before his son’s eyes.

“I didn’t think you’d show up,” Tom said his voice clearly exhausted and worn.

“I wasn’t sure that I would either,” Stuart said honestly. He timidly walked inside the hospital room and sat down upon his father’s invitation. “I understand that this was your third surgery.” Tom nodded. “And last,” he lowered his head.

Minkus shook his head. “It doesn’t have to be that way….Dad,” Both Tom and Stuart both started at the word coming out of Stuart’s mouth. He couldn’t even remember the last time he called his father anything but “Father” or “Tom.” Probably when he was younger than Farkle. He took out a business card. “This is Oliver Lee. He is one of the best cardiologists in the country. He will be able to help you. He has done miracles with heart surgeries.”

Tom looked at the card. “Son, even with my health insurance I couldn’t afford a fancy doctor like that.”

“No, you won’t have to pay for it,” Minkus said. “Dr. Lee would do anything for me. My former company helped implement 3D equipment to project images of the human heart for his clinic. I already spoke to him and he said that he would consider it a favor.”

“Stuart,” Tom said. He threw the card away as if to say it’s final. “Sometimes you have to know when it’s time. It’s time to go.”

Minkus shook his head. “No you were always the one who told me to man up and fight them back! Why aren’t you doing it now?”

“Because it’s better to know when the fight is over, son,” Tom said. “Even if I went to this Dr. Lee, what would I gain? Another month another year? I’ve made peace with the fact that it’s over. Now, the only thing that I want to do is set things right and make sure that your mother is looked after.”

Minkus winced. He knew that his father was accepting his death and that there was nothing that he can do about it. “If that’s your decision, then. I guess I have to abide by it.”

Tom nodded. The two sat in an awkward silence. Tom broke the ice. “How’s work?”

“Good,” Minkus said. “How’s yours?”

“Good,” Tom answered. “How’s Farkle?”

“He’s fine,” Minkus replied.

“Good talk son,” Tom said dryly after another long silence.

“Yeah I’m glad we shared this,” Minkus added.

“It’s funny, you’re my son and I can’t think of anything to say,” Tom said.

“I know,” Minkus said. His hands shook and he began to feel anxiety gnawing inside of him. “I feel in some ways that I don’t know you at all.”

Tom shrugged. “39 years ago, I married your mother. Then two years later, I helped produce you,” he began. “What more do you need to know?”

Minkus looked around. “I don’t know. How do you feel about all of this?”

“Truth?” Tom asked. “I’m scared to death, figuratively speaking of course. But I’m getting ready for it. I feel like I’m standing on a railroad track. I can see a light coming and it doesn’t bother me that it’s the train. The only thing that bothers me is what I may leave behind before I jump on.”

“Like what?” Minkus asked.

Tom was about to answer when Nancy came inside. She glared at Stuart. “What are you doing here?”

“Morgan called me,” Minkus said. “I didn’t know this was his third time. You didn’t tell me that! You only said he went in once before!”

“Does it make any difference how many times when this is the end result?” Nancy said pointing at her husband lying in a hospital bed.
“Will you require any hospice care?” Minkus inquired his father. Tom was about to answer when Nancy interrupted him. “He’s going to be cared for at home. He won’t require any assistance from you.”

“That’s good,” Minkus said trying to keep his temper for his father’s sake. But Nancy continued. “The last thing that he needs is for you to take care of him as spectacularly as you cared for your grandfather!” Minkus glowered at her. “I meant to say that it was good that he’s dying at home. You know instead of being put away in some retirement center in Brooklyn to be forgotten!”

“That’s quite a remark,” Nancy glared.

“I’m sorry but it’s the best I can do,” Minkus said.

“I think you’d better leave,” Nancy said.

“He’s my father! At least let me be with him,” Minkus argued.

“Stuart,” Tom said weakly. “Maybe you’d better go.”

Stuart looked from his mother to his father. He then fished into his pocket to pull out a business card. “If you won’t see another doctor then you can talk to them.” He gave them a card for a law firm. “They will help work on your will, trust, probate whatever you need.” He gave his mother the card and left the hospital room not looking behind him.

Minkus came home to see his son playing Zombies Eat Your Brains 5: This Time They’re Really Dead with his friends. “Die zombies die,” Riley yelled.

Farkle motioned for his friends to turn off the video game as his father entered. “Hi Dad,” he said. “How’s Grandpa?”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Minkus said as he headed for his bedroom and flipped on his laptop. He then plugged in his headset to talk to his colleagues and work on the Venture upgrade.

Minkus sat in the doctor’s plush beige office facing the small dark-haired woman, Dr. Joanna Leslie.

Since he returned from visiting his parents, Minkus felt the shaking return. Sometimes, like now, it covered his whole body instead of just his hands. He went to see a doctor earlier that week to make sure that his condition wasn’t MS, ALS, Parkinson’s or something else neurological. When they found nothing, it didn’t help.

He also felt his heart clench into his throat and his body seemed to be filled with some nervous tension that he couldn’t name. He fingered the Chinese Worry Balls on Dr. Leslie’s desk and clinked them together as she asked him why he came today.

“Since the doctors said my shaking wasn’t neurological, they suggested psychological reasons,” Minkus said. “I figured that I would get that possibility out of the way. Also, my son is rather persistent about me seeking therapeutic help myself.”

“You think you need to?” Dr. Leslie asked.

“I don’t know,” Minkus said. “I’ve never been really interested in it for myself, but we, Farkle and I, have had a pretty rough couple of years. I’ve been divorced from a very long unhappy abusive marriage. My son attempted suicide and he lived with his mother for a time where she abused him and allowed other people to as well.”

“That must have been hard for you,” the psychiatrist suggested.

“Hard for him,” Minkus corrected. “The only hard parts for me were waiting for him to recover from nearly killing himself and trying to get the courts to favor me as the better parent over his mother.”

“Does your son have any post-trauma from his past, like nightmares, flashbacks, phobias,” Dr. Leslie asked.

Minkus nodded. “Do you?” the doctor inquired.

“Some,” Minkus said. “Nightmares mostly, thoughts really. I mean when your child has been in danger and you have been consumed with worry about him for so long, it’s kind of hard not to be. Even when you keep telling yourself that he’s alright.”

“Have you sought any sort of counseling for the abuse?” Dr. Leslie asked.

Minkus nodded. “Farkle and I are part of an abuse support group. We attended during my marriage
“Do you have any feelings about individual counseling?” the doctor asked.
“It’s really helped Farkle,” Minkus said. “His therapist has been working really well with him.”
“I meant for yourself,” Dr. Leslie asked. Minkus didn’t answer so the doctor continued. “Have you ever sought psychological counseling for yourself?”
Minkus nodded. “When I was younger, my parents used to drag me to several therapists.”
“Why is that?” Dr. Leslie asked.
“They thought I was abnormal even disturbed,” Minkus said. “I was your stereotypical nerd making straight As and they wanted me to an athletic BMOC. My genius intimidated them I believe. Eventually they stopped taking me to see therapists.”
“How come?” the doctor asked.
“I had a nervous breakdown in high school,” Minkus answered.
“What happened?” Dr. Leslie inquired.
“I was your classic overachiever,” Minkus said. “I wanted too many A’s. I was literally trying to kill myself to get them.” He added as an afterthought. “Plus, I ran away from home.”
“Let’s talk about that,” the doctor said.
“Not much to say,” Minkus said. “I didn’t get along with my parents for the reasons that I mentioned, so I tried to live with my grandfather. He couldn’t take care of me, so I was sent back.”
“You had your breakdown immediately after you returned home?” Dr. Leslie asked.
“Yes,” Minkus replied quickly. “My Grandpa Ginsburg and I were very close. We thought on the same wavelength almost. We were both geniuses and understood each other. But he had Alzheimer’s and couldn’t take care of me.”
“That’s when you had your breakdown?” the doctor inquired. Minkus nodded. “Were you angry at your parents for what happened to your grandfather?”
“Yes, I suppose,” Minkus said. “They shouldn’t have left him in that place. They shouldn’t have abandoned him! He didn’t know anybody! He was a sick old man! I-they shouldn’t have left him there!”
“You said ‘I’,” Dr. Leslie said.
Minkus blinked. “No, I didn’t.”
“You said ‘I’ shouldn’t have left him there,” the doctor said.
“What are you talking about?” Minkus said. “I was a kid! I couldn’t control where they sent him! I meant, ‘they’ my mother and father! I was trying to save him!”
“Are you still trying to save him?” Dr. Leslie asked.
Minkus stood up annoyed. “My grandfather is dead! I don’t pay $100 an hour to hear this! I’m going out to see my son!” He stormed out of the doctor’s office.
Minkus slumped into the waiting room and began work on the upgrade. He glanced through the outside window barely noticing the crowd. Minkus looked up again at the crowd walking around outside. Just your average New Yorkers walking past, business people on their way to work, cyclists getting exercise, tourists looking for Times Square. Minkus could see a group of people gathered by a bus stop. One woman stood out. She was tall, blond, and athletic looking. Minkus paled and stood slowly. The laptop fell from his knees and he picked it up still keeping his eyes on the outside window and the blond woman.
Minkus mechanically walked outside and opened the clinic door. “Hey,” he called to the blond woman. But she didn’t hear. The bus pulled up and she walked right inside.
Minkus ran out the door and tried to follow the bus, but it drove off down the street. Minkus rubbed his head. Maybe it was just a coincidence, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that he had seen Jennifer. If she was her, he wasn’t going to let her go after his son, not while he breathed.
He walked back inside the clinic. “Are you alright?” the receptionist asked.
Minkus looked up as the door opened and Farkle and Jordan emerged. “Sir?” the woman asked.
“Never mind,” Minkus replied. He then turned to his son. “How are you doing?” Minkus asked.
Farkle shrugged and nodded. “How’s he doing?” he asked Jordan.
“I think he’s going to be okay,” the therapist said. “He’s pulling through.”
“That’s the most important thing,” Minkus agreed. Minkus dropped his son off at school. “Have a good day,” he said.

“I will,” Farkle promised. Minkus barely heard his son when he saw a blond woman, a familiar looking blond woman enter the school. She stood in front of the doorway and talked to someone. Minkus approached her as she laughed and walked inside the building.

“Dad, are you alright?” Farkle asked.

“Yeah just fine Farkle,” Minkus said. “Why don’t you get to class okay?” He then headed towards the double doors of the school leaving his confused son behind.

When Minkus entered the high school, he pushed through a group of students heading for their next period. The blond woman walked far ahead of him. Her back was turned but Minkus recognized her anywhere, tall, short blond hair, athletic. She had to be Jennifer. Minkus’ heart clenched in his throat as the woman entered the main office. Minkus tensed knowing that she was going to call to have Farkle released. For all he knew, she may try to kidnap him!

Minkus followed the woman barely listening to a hall monitor ask, “Sir, may I help you with—“He entered the office door with a fury.

The woman had her back turned to him engaged in a conversation with a janitor. Minkus marched up towards her and grabbed her from behind. “What are you doing here?” he commanded. “You can’t have him! You leave Farkle alone do you hear me?”

“Let go of me,” the woman shouted as the janitor, Minkus could now see he was Harley Keiner, yell, “What the hell are you doin’, Minkus?”

Abigail Adams High School’s principal, Eli Williams emerged from his office. “What the hell is going on out here?” He asked. He and Harley continued to hold Minkus off from the woman that he attacked.

You leave my son alone, Jennifer,” Minkus shouted. “I won’t let you hurt him again!”

Harley pulled Minkus off of the woman. The shouting was enough to get the entire office interested. School employees and a few students looked at the adult fight.

Cory entered the office. “What’s going on,” he asked then he ran to Minkus. “Minkus what are you doing?”

“Jennifer entered the school,” Minkus said as he tried to reach for her again. “I have to stop her getting Farkle.”

Both Harley and Cory stood in front and held Minkus down as Cory yelled. “Minkus, she’s not Jennifer! She’s not Jennifer! Her name is Sandra and she works here.” Stuart stopped. “She works here, Minkus and you’re scaring everybody.”

Minkus looked closer at the woman. She wasn’t Jennifer now he could see that. Her face wasn’t as sharp or narrow, instead it was rounder, more flushed, than tan. Her eyes brown, not blue like Jennifer’s, were widened in fear and terror with tears filling the corners. Minkus looked around at the other people in the office. They stood silent, confused, and frightened of the mad man who had entered. “I’m sorry,” Minkus whispered to everyone. “I am so sorry.” Cory then led Minkus out of the office and into an empty classroom.

Cory turned to Eli. “That man needs help” the prinicpal said.

“I’ll do what I can for him, Mr. Williams,” Cory said.

“You’d better because my school had better be a safe and happy school or else, Matthews,” Eli hinted.

Cory nodded knowing Eli Williams’ sarcasm even when he was his Media Arts teacher in Philadelphia. “I’ll talk to him,” Cory added. He led Minkus out the door.

“I’m on break for an hour and this class is currently unoccupied,” Cory said. Cory asked. “Do you need anything like medicine?”

“I have a headache,” Minkus said.

“Ibuprofen okay?” Cory asked. Minkus nodded and shrugged as if to say whatever. Cory turned on the intercom. “Sandra, will you please tell Nurse Karen to send two Ibuprofens and water to Room 222?”

“Sure Mr. Matthews,” the woman said her voice obviously still shaken from the attack.
“I’m sorry for what happened, Cory,” Minkus said.
“Well I suppose we can both brag that you scared the crap out of Harley Keiner,” Cory said.
“Sandra’s his girlfriend. Now, what happened?”
“I don’t know,” Minkus said. “I thought she was Jennifer. I thought I saw her outside the clinic when I was waiting for Farkle and just now. I thought she was going to hurt or kidnap Farkle.”
“She’s in Europe,” Cory said. “She has like a million foot long restraining order keeping her away from him. There’s a warning at the school that if she tried to release Farkle from school or sent someone to represent her, they wouldn’t let her take him and would notify you and the police immediately.” Cory, Minkus, and Eli had worked out the Safety Plan together to ensure Farkle’s safety in the event that Jennifer changed her mind and wanted her son back. So far they were lucky.
“I know,” Minkus rubbed his forehead so much that he ruffled his hair almost madly. “What’s happening to me?”
“When was the last time you slept?” Cory asked.
“I don’t know,” Minkus said. “Two maybe three days.” He had broken sleep filled with nightmares a lot longer than that.
Cory and Minkus jumped at a knock on the door. Cory looked through the window to see Nurse Karen stand by the door. He opened the door and accepted the tablets and glass of water from her with a thanks.
Cory then set them on the table in front of Minkus. “What are these for?” Minkus asked.
“Ibuprofen for your headache remember,” Cory asked.
Minkus nodded. He then swallowed the tablets and the water. “Go ahead, Cory,” Minkus said dryly. “Tell me that I’m crazy.”
“I don’t know about that,” Cory said. “But I think you’ve been on high alert for so long about Jennifer that it’s affecting you. Maybe you need to take some time off or something.”
Minkus shook his head. “I can’t. I have too much to do.”
“Minkus, you’re not going to be any good for Farkle or yourself if you keep going on like this,” Cory said determined. “You need help.”
“I’m just fine Cory,” Minkus said trying to stabilize his breath. “It’s silly now that I talked about it and I will certainly compensate Harley and that woman, what’s her name, Sandra for the attack. I appreciate it if Farkle did not hear about this, though I know school gossip as well as you do. He probably will.” He stood up.
“Minkus has this been going on since your dad’s been sick?” Cory asked.
Minkus glared at Cory. “Morgan told me,” he said.
“Is anything a secret in Matthews’ Land?” Minkus asked witheringly. “There is no correlation between my father’s illness and what happened to me today. They are just two unrelated events in my life right now. It was probably an optical illusion and it meant nothing. Thank you for the Excedrin and the talk. But I really have to go, Cory. I’m late enough to return to work as it is.” He left the classroom with Cory behind.
When Minkus checked his smart phone, he received several phone calls from Morgan and his mother. Even before he turned them on, he knew what they were about.
Stuart and Farkle stood by Tom Minkus’ coffin. Morgan walked up to her boyfriend to hold his hand, but Minkus brusquely pushed her hand off. “Are you okay?” she asked.
“I’m fine,” Minkus insisted.
“Stuart,” Morgan began.
“I’m fine,” Minkus said with more emphasis. Morgan stepped back.
Minkus tried to will himself to feel something anything, grief, depression, a sense of loss anything. But he couldn’t. He couldn’t break free from this abstract numbness, this feeling that he was at the funeral for a total stranger. Come on, you idiot this is your father, he kept telling himself, Feel something. He tried to think of any happy memory, any good feelings that he shared with him, but he got nothing. He wondered if he should be home instead working trying to figure out a way to upgrade the technologies. His hands shook and he could feel his body begin to perspire. Instead of acknowledging it, he looked towards Farkle. His son had remained quiet throughout the
visitation. He looked down at the coffin, tears falling down his face.

“Are you alright?” Minkus asked his son.

“Yes,” Farkle answered.

“You haven’t had any panic attacks or anything?” Minkus began.

Farkle shook his head. He reached into his pocket and pulled out something. “What’s that?”

Minkus asked.

Farkle held the object closer for his father to see. It was a small gold pin with the number ‘78 on it and the word “Track” engraved over the number.

“It’s Grandpa’s track pin, he gave it to me a couple of months ago,” Farkle answered.

“I didn’t know that,” Minkus said. How could Farkle’s grandfather have given him something that was so important to him and his own father be unaware of it?

Farkle shrugged. “We talked a few times on the phone, I mean not a lot but you know every once in a great while. The last time we talked was um, a few weeks after I moved back in with you. After Maya and the others rescued me,” Farkle reminded his father.

Minkus nodded. “What did you talk about?”

Farkle plucked at the edges of the track pin. “Well I told him what had been going on and why I couldn’t stay with Jennifer. I also told him that I started running at Washington and I still liked to. I mean I don’t run for teams or anything and I’m not interested in the sport. But sometimes I still like to run in the morning or on the weekend just to clear my head. Grandpa told me that was fine as long as I had somewhere to run to. He sent me the pin as a reminder. That time when we talked, he said something that I will never forget. He said, ‘It’s a damn good thing that you came back to him son and that you have somewhere to run to again. He needs you as much as you need him.’

“Sometimes more,” Minkus said giving his son’s shoulders a tight squeeze. “I never knew that you two talked.” He fingered the pin. “I had no idea.”

“I knew that you were mad at each other and I didn’t want to say anything,” Farkle said. “It wasn’t like what you shared with Great-Grandpa. We weren’t as close as you two were. It was just nice to talk to him. I don’t know, maybe in the end, Grandpa understood you more than you thought he did.”

Minkus winced at the thought as his son placed the pin inside the older man’s coffin. Tears stung his eyes at the words that somehow through Farkle, Tom Minkus said words to his son that he never could by himself.

Nancy walked past the coffin and tapped Stuart on the shoulder. “I won’t keep you too much longer. I’m sure that you and Farkle have to be going.”

Stuart turned to face his mother. “We don’t have to leave until Monday, Mother. I can stay if you need my help.”

Nancy shook her head. “With what would I possibly need your help?”

“His estate, paperwork, his legacy,” Minkus said. “I don’t even know what you are going to do with yourself now.”

“Do you really think that I am incapable of handling any of that on my own?” Nancy said.

“Of course not,” Minkus said. “But I think that I should be a part of it.”

“Why?” Nancy said as if that were the most ludicrous suggestion that she ever heard. “So you can swoop in and play the Do-Gooder Millionaire for the family that you never cared for when he was alive? So you can pick up the pieces at the last minute? How many times have you looked in on him in the hospital? How many times have you even cared to call on his birthday or inquire about his health? You taking care of things now won’t make my husband any less dead! Just like it didn’t make my father any less dead when you couldn’t take care of him either!”

Minkus glowered, his breath slow and measured. “I took care of Grandpa! You sent him away and then you cut him off from me!”

“Then he had to come back here, because his finances interfered with your life!” Nancy accused.”You threw him away!”

“You threw him away first,” Minkus accused back. “You resented that we got along so well! You
resented that he wanted to be a part of my life when he couldn’t be a part of yours! You resented that we were so alike!”

“How alike you were and how alike you are,” Nancy shot back. “People don’t matter to either of you! You are an unfeeling ungrateful machine incapable of any human emotion or feeling! You don’t care or feel love for anyone!”

There was a deep silence until Farkle interrupted quietly. “That’s not true, Grandma.”

But Nancy continued. “How would you know the love that your father and I felt for each other? How would you know the pain of a child’s rejection? All you know is how to hurt and how to abandon people in your climb up to the top! Now you have it and you think that gives you license to come back down to earth! My God, it’s no wonder Jennifer treated you the way she did!”

The silence from the other funeral reception attendees became even tenser. Minkus drew back in buried anger at his mother’s final words. Farkle held onto his father’s shoulder in an attempt to hold him back from attacking. “What did you say?” Minkus asked witheringly.

Nancy stammered trying to counter back with her earlier statement. “Well- I told Tom that she shouldn’t have hurt you so much, but,”-Her voice then became firmer and more decided. “-My God, Stuart, did it ever occur to you that maybe you deserved it?”

The silence was deafening. Farkle stood behind his father terrified of the outcome. Morgan completely paled standing between her parents. Minkus looked to his son and his girlfriend in an incredulous shock then at his mother. He pointed at himself. “I deserved it-?” He said in disbelief. “That I deserved it? That she shouldn’t have hurt me so much?” He smiled and sarcastically applauded. “Thank you, Nancy! It’s nice to know that my former wife should not have hurt me so much! Just out of curiosity, basis in comparison what is the-um-dividing line between deserving it and not deserving it? Did I deserve it when she was high on cocaine or drunk and she threw things at me? I suppose I deserved it when she would leave me with black eyes or broken ribs because I stood in front of my son so she wouldn’t go after him? Is it considered her ‘hurting me so much’ when her pet names for me consisted of words like ‘spineless’ and ‘nothing’ and the only thing that she ever said I was good for was to give her money! And exactly how far does this dividing line go between deserving it and not deserving it, I mean does Farkle apply to this too? Did he deserve it when his mother told him that she was better off without him leading to his near suicide? Now I can’t figure it out whether it’s considered hurting Farkle so much when he lived with her and she and her father beat him into submission or she let her friends molest him. Now, in your world Nonnie is all of that deserved?”

Minkus didn’t wait for his mother’s answer. Instead he turned on his heels and was ready to walk out the door. He turned to his son. “Are you coming, Farkle?”

Farkle looked to his father and to the other people at the funeral. He turned to his grandmother. “Um, I’m sorry,” he said and followed his father.

“Stuart,” Morgan called Minkus as he walked out of the funeral home. In a rage Stuart turned to face his girlfriend.

“What?” he said angrily.

“Get back inside,” Morgan demanded.

“What she said to me was unforgiveable,” Minkus said.

“It was wrong and she shouldn’t have said it,” Morgan said. “It’s not true either, but you can’t just end it like this!”

“I’m not going back in there,” Minkus said. “She said what she needed to say!”

“You said some pretty shitty things to her too,” Morgan countered.

“I thought you were on my side,” Minkus countermanded.

“I just want you to talk to her,” Morgan said. “You have to go back in there and apologize! There’s still a chance that you can start over!”

“Morgan,” Minkus snapped. “I told you not to interfere! Now I know that you’re not with me! If you make me go back inside, or you do yourself, I will consider it an act of treason!”

“You’re not a country, Stuart,” Morgan said. She turned her heels and headed towards the house. “It’s not going to end just because you walk away from it.”
Morgan walked back inside the house amidst Stuart’s sigh of resignation at her decision.

“Not going to end it because I walk away from it what was she thinking.”

” Minkus said pacing back and forth inside their apartment.

The father and son hardly said anything on the return trip from Philadelphia. Mostly Minkus mumbled to himself very jittery and angrily. Farkle remained silent, but in mental anguish and concern for his father’s mental state.

Minkus was shaking all over and pacing back and forth. Farkle sat on the couch watching his father wondering if he should talk his father down himself or call someone. Farkle sat straight and still, his hands clenched together. Minkus continued to move back and forth talking as though Farkle were really not in the room. “I deserved it, of course I deserve it! She calls me an unfeeling machine then she accuses me of being too close to her father. How can a machine have no feelings in one example and then have too many as a counterexample I ask you.”

“I don’t know, Dad,” Farkle said. “But she’s wrong. You do know how to love.”

Minkus nodded. “I do know how to love. I know how to love so much that it hurts. It hurts me to not have any real way of protecting you from danger. The solution is to find an answer, a way to protect you, to take care of you.” Almost in a trance, Minkus picked up his wallet, keys, and some other items and was about to head out the door.

“Dad, where are you going?” Farkle called back holding his father by the elbow.

“I have to get back to work,” Minkus said hypnotically. “I have to upgrade the technologies!”

“But Dad this is a holiday weekend,” Farkle reminded his father. “Everyone else will be out until Tuesday.”

“I’ll do it myself,” Minkus said. “I can do it at the office. I have better equipment there! I can get it done. I have to get it done! Everything must be done perfectly!”

“Dad,” Farkle began. “You just got back from Grandpa’s funeral! You haven’t slept in days! Now is really not the time for you to be going back to work!”

Farkle stood in front of the door and Minkus shook his head continuing to shake. “No, I have to get it done. It has to be done! It’s important, I have to do it!”

“You have to stay here with me,” Farkle said looking at his father in the eyes. Minkus’ eyes glassed over. He seemed to be looking elsewhere. “Dad, you’re sick. You need help,” Farkle whispered.

“I need to go,” Minkus commanded quietly. “Now get out of my way. Don’t betray me too.”

Minkus gently shoved his son out of his path as Farkle moved out of the way.

And opened the door. “There’s food in the fridge. I’ll call you if I need anything. I don’t know what time I am coming back.” He closed the door before Farkle could argue again.

Author’s Note: 24 chapters down, one more to go! :D If you are interested in reading more you may wish to check out the TV Tropes fanfic page for the Minkiad at http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Fanfic/TheMinkiad

It covers both “Unhappy In Its Own Way” and “Lives of Genius.” Feel free to read, review, add any comments, tropes that you recognize and enjoy it as a supplement to these fics. (It’s still in the working stage so some spoilers are more revealed than they should be, I do apologize for that.) Thank you again for being a wonderful audience with your rates, reading, and reviews. :D
Minkusville II: Opening the Door (Stuart Age 37; Farkle Age 15)

Chapter Summary

Stuart Minkus suffers a nervous breakdown with his son, Farkle, caring for him.

The Lives of Genius
A Boy/Girl Meets World Fanfic
By Auburn Red

Chapter Twenty-Five: Minkus Ville II: Opening the Door (Stuart Minkus Age 37; Farkle Minkus Age 15)

Author’s Note: The SNL and Jimmy Fallon sketches are based on my interpretations of what I think they would say about Minkus’ breakdown. The books that Minkus reads during his recovery are real. Man’s Search for Meaning is particularly moving.

On Tuesday morning, Eddie Giatti greeted Jessie Goloff in front of the Minkus Technologies building. “Good morning, Jessie,” he said warmly.
“Good morning Eddie,” Jessie said. “Good weekend?”
“You bet. Just sat back, watched the Mets game, and had conspicuous amounts of junk food,” Eddie said. “If science has found a way to surgically attach myself to my recliner, I think I succeeded.”
“It was great for me too,” Jessie said. “My girlfriend, Andrea, and I went out for a picnic Monday. One thing was nice to not hear the name Rusty Venture, Boy Aventurer for three days!”
“Yeah I hated the show when I was a kid now I remember why,” Eddie quipped. “He was so annoying! Age hasn’t seem to improve him!”

Jessie laughed as she reached the Minkus Technologies door. She was about to stick her key inside when she saw that the door was already unlocked. “That’s strange.”
“Maybe Stuart came in early,” Eddie suggested. He nodded at Stuart’s nearby apartment. Jessie shrugged and opened the door. The business partners entered the building confused. Jessie looked around, “The lights are on,” she observed and nodded over at Minkus’ office. “Stuart’s office is open.”

“Like I said he went in early,” Eddie said. “I’m getting some coffee, want some?”
“What oh yeah sure,” Jessie responded as Eddie entered the break room. Despite Eddie’s reassurances, Jessie couldn’t shake the feeling that something weird was going on. She just felt some sort of tension in the air like something had happened. Jessie crept through the office keeping an eye on the layout to see any signs that they were robbed. No everything seemed in order. Still her mind wasn’t yet as ease.

Jessie gingerly approached Stuart’s office and tapped on the open door. “Good morning Stuart,” she said before she entered. “Eddie and I came in and we want to know if-“

She never got to finish what she said. She was stunned and frightened by the appearance of the office and Stuart Minkus kneeled on the floor. “EDDIE!!” Jessie yelled.

Eddie came as soon as he heard Jessie call. “Oh my God,” Eddie said looking at his business partner and friend. Stuart still kneeled on the floor crawling around. The walls were marked with numbers and diagrams. The office was a mess with papers and markings everywhere. Minkus looked like a wreck too. His clothes were rumpled. His blazer, turtleneck, and trousers hung on the chair. He was dressed in nothing but his boxer shorts and undershirt. He was unshaven. His hair was matted and greasy, and his eyes were red-rimmed and unfocused.

“Problem,” Minkus said in a hyper tone like he was hypnotized. “Access cannot be maintained
without the proper figures. If we tabulate these codes here and figure out x and y, a solution should preside,” he continued on unaware that he was being watched.

Eddie reverted to being more business-like. After all, he was now in charge. “Jessie, call 911,” he said. “And call Farkle’s teacher, Mr. uh Michaels-“

“-Matthews,” Jessie corrected.

“-Matthews,” Eddie repeated. “He’ll probably want to know what’s going on.”

Jessie was about to make the phone calls when she turned to Eddie. “What are you going to do?” She asked.

Eddie knelt down at Stuart’s side. Stuart was unaware of the commotion around him. He mumbled, made a mark and cursed angrily. He crossed over the mark to make another one. “I’ll stay with him until help arrives,” Eddie said determined. Jessie nodded to make the phone calls.

Cory had written the names “Sigmund Freud” and “Carl Jung” on the smartboard. Then he wrote the words “Abnormalities” Vs. “Mental Illness.”

“Now you’re just making names up Matthews,” Maya groaned.

“Now that would be considered abnormal behavior,” Cory said. “In another time period, Maya, what you just said could have rendered you delusional. You may have been locked up, beaten, chained. Until the early 19th century, people could have paid a half-penny to see you in all your delusional glory as a form of entertainment. Now what do you have to say about that?”

“Those aren’t names you just made up Matthews?” Maya guessed.

“That was how mental illness was treated until the early 20th century. Even in the early parts of the last century, treatment in mental hospitals was sometimes more painful than the illness themselves,” Cory said. “People thought of the mentally ill as people who weren’t like them, people who were meant to be shut away from society, to be experimented on, and sometimes to be mocked and jeered. It took people like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung to bring the field of psychology to a new light. They realized that the potential for abnormal behavior exists in all of us. What is the neurologists’ definition of a mental illness?”

Smackle raised her hand. “Excess serotonin in the brain chemicals resulting in excess or minimal fluids in certain areas like adrenaline or dopamine making neurological or psychological behaviors unpredictable. Case in point my Asperger’s. I do not always get enough receptors within my emotions. Of course that’s one of many theories.”

Cory nodded. “Right and there are other theories. Some behaviorists believe that people are born with mental illnesses, other clinical psychologists believe past traumas result in such behavior. Most psychologists believe that it is a combination of factors how you are born and the circumstances of your life that help you deal with factors that contribute to mental illnesses. Now we all have behaviors that are considered abnormal, can you name some of them?”

“Sometimes people think I smile too much,” Riley said. “They think that’s weird.”

“I’ve been to see therapists about my anger management,” Lucas said.

“My counselor said that I’m a buffet or neuroses and emotions,” Maya replied almost proudly. Farkle raised his hand. “Well mine are pretty much laid out for the world to see,” he indicated his arms. “I was thought weird even before then, well, and since.”

“Right, we all have behavior characteristics that some may think are weird or abnormal,” Cory said. “But what is the difference between being weird or unique and having a mental illness?”

“When it affects your daily life,” Lucas suggested. “When you can’t go outside or talk to people, or function.”

“When you get fixated on certain things and you create these weird ways to get around them,” Maya said. “Like washing your hands several times a day or checking your locks several hundred times.”

“When you feel trapped by your emotions and feelings and you can’t find any other way out of it except to hurt yourself or to hurt other people,” Farkle said.

“Right those are clear signs when the abnormality becomes an illness and the person needs help,” Cory replied.

Suddenly the intercom crackled, “Mr. Matthews,” a voice called.
“Yes,” Cory answered. “You have a phone call from a Ms. Goloff,” the voice called. “She says it’s urgent.”
Cory looked at his class stunned. Farkle in particularly paled with terror. “I’ll be right there, Sandra. Thanks,” he said. “Would you all excuse me for a minute?” He asked before he left the room.
The class was abuzz with the usual excitement that a classroom has when a teacher left. Some students even suggested implementing the 10 minute rule that if Cory didn’t come back in 10 minutes, class was over. Farkle leaned over to his friends. “I have to get out of here,” he said panicking.
“Farkle what’s wrong?” Maya clearly concerned. “Are you having another panic attack?”
Farkle shook his head. “No, I have to get to my father! Something’s wrong with him!”
“How do you know?” Lucas asked.
“Jess- Ms. Goloff is my father’s business partner,” Farkle said. “The call’s about him!”
Cory followed Jessie into the Minkus Technologies building. By the time he arrived, there was already quite a commotion. Mike, Christine, Lonny, Ali and several other employees had arrived. Cory had arranged for a substitute teacher to take the next couple of classes for him, though he planned to be back to school by lunch. “The ambulance will be here any minute and you’re his ‘in case of emergency contact person’ so we figured that you would tell Farkle,” Jessie hurriedly explained as she dashed ahead of Cory.
“I’m glad you called me,” Cory said. “I can try to be of help, though I don’t know what exactly I can do for him.”
Jessie led him inside the office where the employees had gathered around the front of the door. They parted to let Jessie and Cory through. Cory gasped to see Stuart Minkus kneeled on the floor, marking the walls, and mumbling to himself.
“Think he’s lost his mind,” Jessie said with tears in her eyes.
Cory knelt down and inched closer to his friend. Eddie stood up mechanically to give him some room. “He didn’t say much to me,” Eddie said hoarsely. “Mostly just talking about those figures and the upgrade. Something about accessing and opening doors, I don’t know.”
Cory gently touched Minkus on the shoulder as though he were a hunter approaching a wounded baby deer. Minkus looked up startled, but then looked back at the wall marking on it again.
“Minkus are you okay?” Cory asked. “Do you need help?”
“Cory,” Minkus said. “Every problem has an answer right. I know, there has to be. Look at me, I’m a mindless freak again. Is the answer 7? If there is a door and it has no openings, no way of getting inside, how do you get inside?”
“If it doesn’t have any openings, Minkus, it’s not a door, then it’s a wall,” Cory said trying to find some reason in his friends’ rambling. “There isn’t a way in.”
“There has to be Cory,” Minkus said. “My child is on the other side. I can’t get to him.” He wrote down some more figures. “I have to find a way to access it. Everything can be upgraded, everything can be accessed, and everything can be opened. Everything has to be perfect and done right! My son is in trouble and he needs me and I can’t get to him! I’m not there! He hurt himself and I’m not there! His mother and his grandfather have hurt him and I’m not there! Soon he won’t even remember who I am! Why aren’t I in there, Cory? Why am I out here? Why am I never in there when they need me? Where is he, Cory? Where is my son? WHERE IS HE?”
Cory jumped back at the force of Minkus’ last words. A frightened voice whispered,” Dad? I’m right here.”
Cory stood up to see Farkle, Lucas, Maya, and Riley standing next to him. “When did you guys get here?” Cory asked partly worried for Farkle and Minkus and partly annoyed that his daughter and her friends technically cut class.
“Did you really think we weren’t going to follow you?” Maya asked.
Farkle didn’t listen to any of them. Instead he knelt down next to his father and put his hand on top of his father’s writing hand. The marker dropped on the floor and Minkus’ hand flattened against the wall. Farkle then held his father’s shoulders by his other arm and whispered, “Come here,
Minkus’ eyes watered as he looked at his son as if seeing him for the first time. “Farkle where are you?” Farkle then pulled his father closer as Minkus sobbed on his son’s chest. “I’m right here, Dad,” Farkle said. “It’s alright. Farkle’s here, Farkle’s here. He won’t let anyone hurt you either.” Farkle looked up as the paramedics arrived and helped the father and son stand.

Farkle tensed as he remained in the waiting room. He was surrounded by Lucas, Maya, Riley, Cory, Topanga, Eddie, and Jessie. Morgan had flown up almost as soon as Farkle called her and she stood by the window with a lost terrified expression on her face. Farkle felt a sense of déjà vu wondering if this is how his father must have felt when he had attempted suicide, lost, uncertain, and shattered. If Farkle had any lingering thoughts about suicide, they were gone now when he realized that he never wanted to put his father through those emotions again.

The door opened as Dr. Leslie appeared at the door. “He’s heavily sedated and he’s sleeping comfortably now,” she said. After being taken to the hospital, Minkus had been troubled by hallucinations and disjointed thoughts. It took the sedative to finally calm him down and relax him.

“What’s wrong with him?” Farkle inquired the psychiatrist.

“Your father has been suffering from sleep deprivation and burn out,” Dr. Leslie replied. “He is physically and mentally exhausted. In laymen’s terms, he had a mental breakdown.”

Farkle looked down at his shoes not wanting his friends and father’s co-workers to see his emotions, but knowing that they registered plainly on his face. “How long do you think he’s going to be like this?” Cory asked.

Dr. Leslie reasoned. “I would recommend that he remain here in the hospital for at least two or three days, then I would also recommend that he take at least another two weeks off from work so he can relax.”

“May I see him?” Farkle asked.

“I would let him sleep for tonight but you may see him tomorrow morning,” Dr. Leslie suggested. She returned to the front desk as the small group sat in tense silence.

“No problem,” Eddie said to Farkle with false bravado. “Your dad just needs to take some time off. In the meantime, we’ll take care of everything. Don’t worry. We’ve been telling him that he needs to take a vacation anyway, right, Jess?” He nodded to Jessie.

“Yeah,” Jessie agreed. “He’ll be fine, Farkle. Your dad doesn’t look like it, but he’s tougher and stronger than anyone I know.” Jessie gave the teen boy a big hug and Eddie gave him a friendly chuck on the shoulder and fist bump.

“We’d better tell everyone else,” Eddie said as they left. They talked quietly but were unaware that Farkle was listening in. “I don’t know who’s going to tell Dr. Venture.”

“I’ll be happy to discuss the matter with the great Rusty Venture now,” Jessie practically spat.

“Driving him to this, I’d really like to do more than talk to him.”

“It’s not just his fault Jess, you know that,” Eddie reminded her. “Stuart’s always been like that. As much as he pushes us, he pushes himself twice as hard. I don’t know, this time, his mind just finally pushed back.”

Farkle watched Eddie and Jessie leave and barely heard Lucas get his attention until he called him again. Lucas looked up from his smartphone. “Farkle, I just talked to my Mom and she said you can stay with us as long as you need to.”

Farkle shook his head. “No, tell her thanks, but I probably should be here to be with him in case he needs me.” He looked through the window inside the hospital room where his father lay asleep and unmoving on the bed.

“Farkle it’s not good for you to be here in the waiting room or at your home by yourself,” Topanga suggested.

Cory nodded. “You should be with others right now who can help you. That’s what put your father in here, building so many walls around himself and keeping everyone else out.”

Riley gave her friend a hug. “He’s going to be okay, Farkle and you worrying about him isn’t going to change that.” Morgan silently hugged the teenage boy and then squeezed his shoulder firmly to
let him know that his dad was going to be fine and that she was with them.

Farkle turned to Maya. “Is he really going to be okay?” he asked knowing that Maya was the voice of reason not one to give into false hope. If his girlfriend said that his father was going to be okay, then he was.

Maya held her boyfriend’s hand. “Farkle, the best thing right now for you and your dad is to wait it out. If he needs time to be somewhere, to sleep, to relax, and get better then that’s what he should get and that’s what you should get too. It won’t do any good to him if you make yourself sick worrying about him like he is about you.” Farkle nodded and kissed Maya slowly on the lips as the two held hands in comfort.

Farkle pulled away as Lucas upheld his friend trying to cheer him up. “Come on, Roomie. Let’s go back to your place and you can pick out any clothes and stuff that you need. Then we’ll go back to my place and get some pizza and upload something action-packed and bloody from Netflix.”

“Okay,” Farkle nodded as his friend practically led him out of the hospital waiting room.

“We probably ought to get going too,” Topanga said to Cory and Riley.

Topanga, Cory, and Riley rose. Maya was about to join them when she saw Morgan meander off to the vending machines. “Are you coming Maya?” Cory asked.

Maya held up one finger. “Yeah, just give me a sec.” She said as she followed Morgan.

Morgan mechanically placed a dollar into the machine and ordered a diet soda to calm her anxiety over her boyfriend. The hospital ward was so quiet that she didn’t hear Maya call her name until she jumped startled.

“Maya, you startled me,” Morgan said.

“Sorry apparently, I have that effect lately,” Maya said.

“Would you like something to drink?” Morgan offered.

“Sure I’ll have a regular Coke,” Maya suggested. Morgan accepted it and gave her niece’s friend a drink.

“You know Morgan,” Maya said. “You don’t have to be scared every time you see me. I know why you’re scared of me. I’m just saying you don’t have to be.”

Morgan relaxed. “I’m not scared of you, Maya. It’s not your fault and I don’t hold it against you at all.”

“That my father raped you,” Maya said. “I’d hold that against me.”

Morgan tilted the teenage girl’s chin up. “We can’t be held accountable by what other people do. Sometimes when things like that happen, it effects a lot more people than the attacker and the victim. It effects everyone that they come in contact with. He raped me and that’s something that we both will have to live with for a long time. But I think that if we live with it together, then it won’t be as bad.”

“I’m sorry for what he did,” Maya said. Morgan didn’t respond instead she hugged the blond girl closely.

Morgan pulled away. “Besides our boyfriends are father and son. You and I have to stick together to hold onto those Minkus men!” The two women laughed good-naturedly. “I should have known something was up with Stuart,” she said more to herself than to Maya. “I should have recognized that ‘I’m fine,’ is Stuart Minkus code for ‘I’m not fine! Will you please help me?’”

“Farkle’s the same way,” Maya said.

“See when you date a Minkus I have a feeling that you have to learn to translate the language,” Morgan added knowingly.

“Like when they say ‘Want to hear something interesting?’ means ‘I’m going to talk about quantum physics or the government of Outer Mongolia for an hour whether you are interested or not.’” Maya said.

Morgan nodded. “Or ‘I’m the smartest greatest man in the world’ means ‘I really don’t feel that smart or that great, but you think I am don’t you?’” Maya and Morgan clinked their bottles in a toast and laughed.

“Maya between you and me I think guys like them need girls like us to bring them down to earth,” Morgan said.
Maya agreed. “And girls like us need guys like them to help us think things a little deeper and be better people.” Morgan nodded and agreed. Maya put her arm around Morgan’s shoulders. “If it’s any consolation, I like you way better than the former Mrs. Minkus.” Morgan returned the embrace and the two joined Cory, Topanga, and Riley in leaving the hospital.

Dr. Joanna Leslie entered the hospital room. Minkus lay quietly as she approached. “Well I suppose it’s unnecessary to say that you finally need individual counseling,” the psychiatrist said dryly. She sat down. At first she checked Minkus’ vitals and asked him questions about his daily activities and how they have changed in the last few days, then she inquired on personal matters. Minkus at first was very reluctant, but then he began to talk. “I lied to you earlier when I said that my breakdown happened immediately after I came home. It happened almost a year later. My parents tried to keep me from my grandfather by moving him and not telling me where they sent him. They sent him to a home in Brooklyn where he was alone. They didn’t tell me that he had Alzheimer’s, but I knew and thought that I could take care of him single-handedly. He forgot who I was and ordered me to leave. That’s when the police found me and sent me home. When I returned home, I was so furious with my parents that I said I was finished with them. We didn’t speak for almost a year after that. We lived in the same house, but we were like strangers. I kept pushing myself at school, studying, making my lessons perfect, not sleeping, and barely eating. I did what I’ve always done: push myself in the things that I can control until I can’t even control that.”

“Was that the last time you saw your grandfather?” Dr. Leslie asked.

Minkus shook his head. “No after my marriage, I had enough money to pay for him to move to a better retirement home in Manhattan. I took care of him there until my former wife’s overspending caused his eviction. He got sent back to Philadelphia to be with my mother and that was the last I saw him alive. As a kid, he was the only person that I ever loved and I failed him twice.”

“This former wife is the same woman that abused you and Farkle,” Dr. Leslie asked.

Minkus nodded. “It seems every time I think I love someone they end up hurting me or they end up getting hurt.”

“Like Farkle,” Dr. Leslie said.

“Like Farkle,” Stuart agreed. “I keep having this dream where he’s in danger. He’s with his mother and she’s hurting him and I can’t get to him. I keep going down this corridor that I think is never going to end, but when I finally get to the end, I come up to this door or wall. He’s behind there and I can’t reach him! I can’t save my little boy!”

“And you’ve been trying to save him,” Dr. Leslie said. “That’s also why you hallucinated that image of your wife. You’ve been pushing yourself at work and at home, so you can save him.”

“He needs me,’ Minkus said. “And I need him! We’re nothing without each other!” Next to the psychiatrist, Minkus began to sob.

Farkle timidly entered his father’s hospital room. Minkus lay on the bed. His eyes were closed but he slowly awoke. Unlike when Farkle was in the hospital, Minkus wasn’t only wearing a hospital gown. Instead he was wearing white and black striped pajamas and a white bathrobe. “Farkle, hi,” he said hoarsely and slowly.

“They said I could come and see you,’ Farkle said sitting on a chair next to the bed. “They told me that you needed your sleep so I didn’t come last night.”

“That’s okay,” Minkus said slowly. He was clearly still languid and medicated, but he smiled. “I’m glad you’re here now.”

“I was really worried and scared,” Farkle said with tears in his eyes.

“I know,” Minkus said. “I’m sorry. I just felt-I just felt-“Minkus couldn’t articulate and couldn’t push those feelings to the surface. “I don’t know what I felt.”

“How are you feeling now?” Farkle asked. “Tell me the truth, Dad.”

Minkus sighed. “Tired, very tired.” He leaned back on the bed.

“I think I know what happened,” Farkle said.

“You do?” Minkus asked.

Farkle nodded. “I think you gave Jennifer so much and she never gave anything back and you think
you have to be that way with me. You spent so much time taking care of me and everyone at work, and everything else that you forgot something: You forgot that as much as you need to take care of me, I need to take care of you too. You think that you always have to be strong for me but you don’t. We have to be strong for each other.”

“Are you saying that you want to be the father to my son?” Minkus asked.

Farkle shook his head. “I’m just saying that sometimes we have to be an equal partnership and partners rely on each other when things go wrong. They talk to one another, they share concerns and anxieties, they don’t hide from each other or how they really feel. If we keep doing that, then we’re left with this.” He pointed at his arms and then at the padded cell around them. “-or this. I don’t want to come back here and I don’t think you do either.”

Minkus lowered his head. “I couldn’t protect you. All of the things that happened to you, especially in the past year and at Jennifer’s. You shouldn’t have had to go through that and you did. It’s like I could hear you call me and I couldn’t save you.”

“Dad, you did save me,” Farkle said. “You sat with me when I was in the hospital. You got me out of the Bassett’s house and took Jennifer back to court so she couldn’t hurt me again. Every time that my mother made me feel worthless and unloved, you let me know that I deserved to be loved. You still do that because every day you remind me that you love me. You’ve saved me so many times that I can’t count them all. Maybe Dad, it’s time that I saved you. Let me.”

Stuart’s hand shook as Farkle held onto him to steady him. “Please save me, Farkle,” he begged. “Remind me that I’m worth saving.”

Farkle sneaked into his father’s office with his friends close behind. “I don’t know what you’re planning on doing with this, Farkle,” Lucas said.

“If I’m going to someday inherit my father’s company and be the voice and face of Minkus Technologies, then I’m going to have to learn to speak to the clients. The best way to do that is to get one of them on our side while my Dad is recovering.”

If there was one thing that Farkle learned living in his mother’s house, it was to never let anyone even an adult force him into silence. He knew that to help his father, he had to stand up to Rusty Venture and his grandmother.

“I can’t believe that your dad’s client is Rusty Venture, Boy Adventurer,” Riley said excited. “My Dad and Uncle Eric were fans of his!” She held up a metal lunchbox and an action figure that was still in its box. “They wanted to see if he will sign these!”

“How did you get the contact information anyway, Farkle,” Maya asked her boyfriend.

“Uh well I hacked into my father’s private email accounts,” Farkle said sheepishly. Maya nodded approvingly. “Alright I always knew my boyfriend had a dark side!” She kissed him. Farkle smiled and pressed on the Skype code for the Venture Lab. Hank and Dean Venture were standing inside the lab engaging in some sort of fight.

“Loki, you can’t compete with my super strength and my hammer,” Hank announced.

“I don’t want to be Loki this time,” Dean moaned. “I always have to lose!”

“Hi guys,” Farkle greeted warmly.

Hank and Dean dropped what they were doing and looked at the computer.

“Hiya Farkle,” Dean called grandly.

Hank giggled. “Farkle,” he laughed at the name. “Hey Farkle, got to Farkle, Farkle?”

“Yeah that was funny the uh…. first 100 times I heard it,” Farkle said sarcastically. “Actually it was never funny.”

Hank and Dean noticed that the three of them weren’t alone. Hank winked at Riley and Maya. “So who are the pretty girls?” Hank asked and smiled. Maya rolled her eyes but Riley giggled.

“These are my friends Lucas Friar,” Farkle introduced pointing at Lucas then at the girls. “Riley Matthews and Maya Hart.”

Hank felt nauseous realizing that if they were Farkle’s friends he just flirted with a couple of minors. “Well if it weren’t illegal maybe you two and I would hit it off sometime.”

Riley giggled. “The blond one thinks I’m pretty!”

“Hey hold on there,” Lucas said pointing at Riley. “She’s my girlfriend and-“He pointed at Maya
“Hold on there,” Hank said. “Just kidding. Anyway Deano and I have girlfriends of our own, so no worries. We’re just being friendly.”

“Never mind that,” Farkle said. “Is your Dad around? I really need to talk to him.” Dean nodded. “Sure we can call him if you want.” Farkle nodded.

Hank and Dean both held their wrist communicators near their mouths and mimed like they were going to turn them on when they turned back their heads and yelled in unison “DAAADD!!” Rusty Venture appeared at the doorway of the lab and glowered. “Millions of dollars, countless sophisticated technologies and equipment and you still have to shout! What is it now?” He glowered at the screen and saw Farkle’s face. “Oh it’s you. What do you want kid?”

“I need to talk to you about my father,” Farkle began.

“Yeah well make it fast, I have a little get together that I’m late for,” Rusty said.

“Doc,” Hatred’s voice called. “Do you want me to pack the whips and chains for you?” Farkle winced and Rusty rolled his eyes and shook his head. “Fine Hatred,” he said.

Rusty then turned to Farkle. “So what is so important with your Dad that it can’t wait? Don’t tell me let me guess, He tried to upgrade the technologies and they blew up in his face again?” Rusty sarcastically asked.

Farkle was beginning to get annoyed with Rusty’s lack of concern about his father’s condition. “No,” he said. “He’s in the hospital.”

“No more money out the wazoo?” Rusty asked quoting the Super Bowl commercial. “I knew he couldn’t handle it!”

“My father had a nervous breakdown because of you,” Farkle commanded. “He’s sick because he tried to please you! The least you could do is give him more time to work on the upgrades instead of pressuring him.”

Lucas, Riley, and Maya stepped back letting their friend take over. Rusty sniffed. “Well kid, I warned him that it might be too much for him but your father insisted.”

“It’s his whole life,” Farkle said. “You know that he would be perfect for your company because he has the same drive and the same love of science and technology that you do, Dr. Venture. Someone like Alvin Meese would just look on it as another business deal, but you and my father both are scientists, you want to see the products through. My father would kill himself to prove it, this should have shown that. But if that doesn’t mean anything to you and my father is nothing more than just someone for you to step on, then maybe you don’t deserve to work with him and he doesn’t need your business after all.”

Rusty glowered. “Well I was going to say that I would like to continue working with your dad and I hope he gets better, but after your stirring speech I think I will pull my business immediately.”

Farkle drew back realizing that his hardball approach did more harm than good. “Well sir what I meant to say was-“

“Really?” Farkle said.

“Yeah,” Rusty said not wanting to show much emotion. “You got a lot of spirit, Finkle-“

“Farkle,” Farkle corrected.

“Whatever it reminds me of something my two little rugrats would do,” Rusty said.

“Two little rugrats? But Hank and Dean are older than me,” Farkle said.

“Daad,” Behind Dr. Venture several guys dressed in butterfly costumes had grabbed Hank and Dean and dangled them over a railing,

“I wish they would just move out,” Rusty sighed. “Take care of it, Brock.”

“Sure thing Doc,” Brock said as he sneak up to the railing to pull Dean and Hank to safety while Rusty and Farkle talked.

“Are you sure you don’t want to take care of this, Dr. Venture?” Farkle asked. Behind them Brock took a knife and engaged in martial arts combat against the Monarch’s henchmen.
“Don’t worry about it kid, it happens all the time,” Rusty said nonchalantly.
“Really guys in butterfly costumes kidnap your sons and the big burly guy saves them?” Maya asked.
“More times than I can count Girlie” Rusty said. As one of the Butterfly henchmen had a handheld device and appeared to be taunting Brock Samson. Brock then knocked the henchman in the groin.
“Oh right in the yin yang,” Lucas said.
Another butterfly henchman tried to sneak up behind Brock and he kicked him.
“Hope you like the Doors,” Riley said as the henchman hit his head on the emergency door.
“Thank you Dr. Venture,” Farkle said as he and Rusty ignored the fight behind them.
“It really means a lot to my father that you would do this for him.” Rusty glowered. “You’ve got a good Dad, Finkle.”
“-Farkle,” Farkle repeated again.
“Why do you keep making that sound?” Rusty asked. “Something that not too many people have, I should know.” Farkle nodded knowing that his father would have probably thought the same thing when he was younger.
Behind them Brock and the Monarch engaged in their struggle while Brock threw the henchmen over the railing.
“Uh oh, railing kill,” Maya pointed out.
“Butterfly-“Riley began.
“Butter DIE kisses,” Maya joked.
“You’re really nice Dr. Venture,” Farkle said to the super scientist.
“Well don’t let it get around,” Rusty glowered. “I’ve got a reputation of being a bastard to uphold.” Brock swung Hank and Dean to safety. The butterfly henchman who fell over the railing pushed a button. Lucas motioned for the girls to duck down. Brock and the Venture brothers counted to three on their fingers. An explosion rocked the compound as Farkle ducked down in surprise. Rusty just turned around annoyed.
“Can’t you think of something better to do than blow up the lab?” Rusty moaned. “Great now my insurance is going to have to pay to clean up this mess again!”
“I guess we’d better go,” Farkle said. “Thanks again, Dr. Venture.
“Yeah yeah whatever,” Rusty said.
“Um Dr. Venture,” Riley said. “Would this be a bad time to ask if you would sign my father’s action figure and my uncle’s lunch box?” Upon Rusty’s withering glare at the burnt lab, she gulped. “Okay, I guess so.” Rusty answered by turning off the communicator.
“Well that was a fun day at the office,” Maya said dryly.
“Apparently that happens so often that it’s boring to them,” Farkle said with a shrug. “I want to make one more phone call.”
He reached over to the house phone and dialed a number. He listened to the voice mail sounding sadder and more serious than the last outgoing message: “Hi this is Nancy Minkus, I’m not in right now but if you leave your name and number I will return your message as soon as possible.” Farkle winced remembering his grandmother’s previous message began with “Hi this is the Minkus residence, Nancy and Tom are not in right now…” She must have changed it in the last few days. Farkle waited for the beep and spoke into the message. “Grandma it’s Farkle, I would like to talk to you. Okay, I’ll make this short. You’re wrong about my Dad. I don’t know maybe you only see what you want to see in him. Maybe you only see a genius who can be very arrogant and acts like he knows everything and I’ll grant you, you’re probably right. He has flaws like everyone else. He thinks too much about things. He gets too excited about status. But not knowing how to love, that isn’t one of his flaws.
He has always been there for me. He raised me himself, even when my Mom was living here. I have never felt unloved by him and if you ever really looked at or listened to him without seeing what you wanted to see, then you would know that too. He really loves me and I know he loves you and Grandpa. He just isn’t always the best at showing it. In his own way, I think he was trying to get you to accept him for who he is. Well that’s all I wanted to say. Good-bye Grandma, I love
you.” Farkle then hung up the phone.

In Philadelphia, Nancy Minkus lay on the couch and listened to the phone message. Then she reached over and unplugged the phone with tears in her eyes. Minkus followed his friends and his son inside his apartment. He walked inside his bedroom slowly and methodically. “So what are you planning to do with your vacation Dad?” Farkle inquired. Lucas and Rachel said that Farkle could stay with them while his dad was recovering, but Farkle was persistent. He knew that he needed to protect and take care of his father like he had always done for him.

“Well first I want to check things out at the office and make sure everything is working okay,” He just got out his laptop when Farkle picked it up and held onto it. Minkus reached for it but Farkle held it away from him. Minkus then took out his Smartphone but Farkle grabbed that too. “Dad, you are on vacation,” Farkle said. “That means that you are not going to use your laptop, your smartphone, or even the house phone to call work!”

“But Farkle-“Minkus began.

“No buts Mister,” Farkle said. “They are going to remain under lock and key until I’m convinced that you’re better!” Minkus couldn’t resist sulking, but Farkle wasn’t about to cave. “You can have them back after the recovery.”

Cory leaned over to Topanga,” Wow, he’s strict.” He teased. Minkus sighed. “Fine, I just wanted to check on things.” He swayed back and forth, his voice droning. “Mostly, I just feel tired. I think I’ll lie down for a little while.” He leaned down on the bed and crawled under the covers. Farkle wrapped his father up and removed the laptop and smartphone from the room.

The next two weeks were not easy for Minkus or Farkle. The first few days, Minkus was troubled by hallucinations, anxiety attacks, and high fever. Farkle soothed his father by placing cold compresses on his forehead, talking to ease him out of the thoughts, and holding his hand when he was terrified. Once Minkus hallucinated that he was in the endless corridor and kept listening to Jennifer’s taunts telling him that he was worthless, broken, and he would never find “her” son. Minkus tumbled out of bed only to be held up and placed back in bed by his son. Farkle tucked his father in like he was a small child and held onto his hand until he could be sure that he was asleep. Farkle never left his side throughout the illness. He remembered how his Dad stuck by him in the hospital during his suicide attempt and knew that he had to do the same for him. He remembered long ago Stuart told him that that’s “what daddies do: they take care of their children.” As his father lay on his side, Farkle leaned over to him placing the freshly wetted compress back on his forehead and whispered, “Children take care of their daddies, too.”

During the worst of the fever, Minkus dreamt that he was banging against the wall again hearing Jennifer’s laughter. He kept pounding on it with his fists until he was ready to collapse. He sank down to the ground in a fetal position.

“You’ll never get him, you pathetic loser,” Jennifer’s voice threatened. Suddenly, he stopped when he felt something else. A hand touched his. Minkus craned his neck upwards as the hand continued to hold onto him. Minkus was confused until he saw another hand appear through the wall and hold onto him by the hair. The hands pulled Minkus to his feet and Minkus could see his son, Farkle, standing next to him. “You didn’t need to save me, Dad,” Farkle said. “I needed to save you.” The father and son hugged as the walls disappeared around them. Minkus sprang awake from his dream. He felt the cool chill characteristic of a fever breaking. Farkle’s hand lightly touched his. He glanced over to his son, dozing off with his hand on Minkus’. Deciding not to wake his son and still feeling exhausted, Minkus fell right back to sleep.

Even though the fever, hallucinations, and nightmares had ended after that. Minkus still was too sick to go to work, Farkle decided. Minkus spent the rest of the two weeks sleeping. He was exhausted and couldn’t bring himself to get out of bed. Farkle often gave his father breakfast, sometimes coffee or cereal, and on days when he was feeling particularly adventurous in cooking, pancakes or waffles and bacon, before he left for school. Minkus ate, but sometimes picked at his food not feeling much energy in eating it. Farkle came into his room at least once or twice a day
after school giving him supper or a late lunch. The two talked mostly about minor issues like Farkle’s day at school or things that his friends did or what Mr. Matthews said. Minkus also watched TV, mostly old sitcoms, cartoons, or the music channels that played classical or soft rock music. Occasionally he would watch the news or regular programming. His breakdown had apparently ended up in the gossip fodder. Comedians made jokes about how Stuart Minkus had “cracked up.” (Jimmy Fallen during his Thank You Notes: “To Stuart Minkus thank you for proving that being super smart equals being super insane, something that Donald Trump will never have to worry about.” Studio audience laughter. “I’ll never have to worry about it either!” More studio audience laughter.) SNL had a sketch in which Minkus, played by Taran Killam, hallucinated elves in the middle of a board meeting to be knocked over on the head by guest host, Samantha Bee as “Morgennifer.”(In the sketch version of Minkus’ insanity, he confused his current girlfriend, Morgan, with his ex-wife, Jennifer and kept calling her by different names as she hit him.). Commentators criticized how someone with so much fame and money could possibly have something wrong in his life to “have a nervous breakdown.” Others said obviously it’s a sign of weakness in the man. According to TMZ, a popular Youtube video featuring a montage of clips of Minkus to the old song, “They’re Coming to Take Me Away, Haa Haa” had reached several billion hits. Minkus rolled his eyes and turned off the TV not really caring about public opinion and turned back to watch cartoons. Minkus also spent a great deal of time reading philosophical books like the Human Comedy by William Saroyan, The Creative Process edited by Brewster Ghiselin, Hero with a Thousand Faces by Joseph Campbell, and Man’s Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl. Frankl’s book particularly touched Minkus as Frankl described his time in a concentration camp and how he chose not to let despair get to him. Two particular passages struck Minkus’ heart. Frankl wrote about how in the camps he tried to find happiness in seeing a flower, or remembering a child’s laugh or his wife’s face. He wrote “Choose happiness.” Frankl also wrote that he couldn’t change the circumstances around them so he could only change the way he looked at them. For example when the Nazis burned a book Frankl had worked on, Frankl realized it gave him a chance to “Rewrite it. Make it better.” Minkus highlighted those passages feeling a deep connection to his situation. One day Minkus felt compelled to rise from his bed just to look in on his son. He found Farkle in the kitchen pulling bread from inside the oven. He was dressed in a white apron over his clothing. Minkus cleared his throat. “Hi Dad,” Farkle said. “How are you feeling?” “Okay I guess,” Minkus replied. He glanced at the stove as Farkle tested some soup. A bowl of salad had already lay on the table. “Fixing supper?” he asked. “I figured that you might need something to eat,” Farkle said. He sank down across from his father, Minkus noted, in a manner similar to an overly busy housewife sitting down for the first time all day. He then poured the soup into a bowl and handed it to his father. Minkus sipped it through a spoon. “It’s good,” Minkus replied. “Don’t forget the salad, it’s good for you,” Farkle said handing him the bowl. Minkus looked around the apartment. The room smelled of lemon cleanser and disinfectant. “Did you clean the house?” Minkus asked. “Yes,” Farkle said. “I also took care of the laundry.” He nodded at the fresh clothing and towels that had lay in their proper spots. Farkle put his hand on some stacks of papers. “I paid all the bills and credit card statements, so you’re up to date on that. I did all the shopping so there isn’t anything that we need for now. I answered your correspondence and emails. Even though I’m not permitted to upgrade the technologies, I’ve been keeping in touch with Eddie and Jessie at work. They have been working with some of Dr. Venture’s people and they’re pretty close to finally getting things working. You have an invitation to attend the Technologists Conference in Washington D.C. for July 11. I told them to make it tentative for now.” Minkus sat stunned at his son’s speech as well as guilty. Farkle then reached into his pocket to
glance at his smartphone. He put it back without answering.

“Who’s that?” Minkus asked.

“Oh just Riley,” Farkle said. “She, Lucas, and Maya wanted me to hang out with them this weekend. We’re supposed to go to a movie or something, but I told them that I might be too busy.”

“Have you been missing out on plans with them to do all of this?” Minkus asked.

“Yeah, well sometimes,” Farkle replied. Something guarded in his voice told Minkus that it was more than “sometimes.”

“Farkle, have you been missing school so you can take care of me?” Minkus inquired concerned.

“The first couple of days when you had that fever and the dreams I didn’t go. But only a few times since then,” Farkle said. “I’ve been keeping up with classes though.”

“That’s not what concerns me, Farkle,” Minkus said. “I don’t want you to give up your life to take care of me.”

“Dad, I’m just trying to make things easier for you,” Farkle said. “I don’t want you to have to worry about anything. You’ve been through so much stress and I don’t want you to have any of it.”

“So you’d rather put it on yourself,” Minkus asked. Farkle lowered his head and Minkus could see that despite his earlier seemingly cheerful façade, the teenage boy was clearly overwhelmed and exhausted by his new role as caregiver and family head.

“I promised that I would take care of you,” Farkle said. “I want to give you everything that you need.”

Minkus held his son’s hand. “Farkle, the only thing that I need from you is for you to be 15 years old. I don’t want you to feel like you have to grow up too fast, especially to nurse me or to take care of things at home. You did that enough with your mother. You don’t have to do that with me. You have already done so much, but I don’t want you to do this at the expense of your own life.” Farkle continued to look downward and Minkus rubbed the boy’s shoulder. “I do appreciate what you have done. Just let me be the parent again.”

Farkle nodded. “So you want me to be 15, can I have a car?” He teased.

Minkus laughed. “Get your driver’s license next year son and then we’ll talk about it.”

Farkle smiled and checked his smartphone. “I guess I should answer them shouldn’t I?”

“Why don’t you go?” Minkus asked. “I’ll be fine here. You could use the break.”

“Really?” Farkle asked. Minkus nodded and Farkle took off his apron and picked up his jacket. At the end of the two weeks, Farkle and Minkus sat together for dinner. “You’re doing much better, Dad.”

“I feel much better, Farkle,” Minkus said. He did feel like a more whole relaxed person.

Farkle took a key and unlocked a drawer. “You’ve earned the right,” the teenage boy said. He held out his father’s laptop and smartphone. “These are for you.”

Minkus pretended to cry fake tears and he kissed the electronics items. “Welcome back, fellas! I missed you!” He said jokingly. He opened his laptop and was about to open his business account when he stopped. “You know, they’ve handled this for two weeks,” he said. “Two more days isn’t going to kill anyone.”

“You serious,” Farkle asked.

“I trust them. I’ll get back in touch with them on Monday in person when I go back to work.”

Minkus then put aside his laptop and smartphone. “In fact I have a better idea.”

“What?” Farkle said.

Minkus grinned. “Tomorrow what say you and I go out for breakfast? Then we’ll go for a drive upstate and you and I go star gazing.”

Farkle smiled. “I would like that sure,” he said joyfully.

“Me too,” Minkus said. “I think I’m finally ready to choose happiness.”

The next night, Minkus and Farkle looked out at a hill at the stars through their telescopes. They pointed out constellations, shooting stars, and other celestial objects while sitting in front of a small fire.

“Hey Urseus Minor,” Minkus said getting his son’s attention. “Thank you for saving me.”

Farkle hugged his father. “You’re welcome, Urseus Major. Thank you for saving me and for being
there every day of my life.”
Minkus tensed before he walked into the Minkus Technologies office. He wasn’t sure what he
would find there. Eddie and Jessie said that things were working fine and that they were looking
forward to his return. It made him nervous to return to the scene of his breakdown. What if he
couldn’t produce like he had before? What if this would mark him as a failed computer scientist
and businessman for life? There was only one way to find out. He had to go through that door and
return. He held his breath, opened the door, and walked inside.
Minkus entered the main office but it was quiet. “Eddie, Jessie?” Minkus asked. “Guys?” He asked.
He inwardly glowered. Perhaps they felt with the boss out, they shouldn’t be in either.
Suddenly, he saw several people jump up excited and yell “Surprise!” He jumped startled but
smiled as his business partners and employees appeared with a cake and signs that said “Welcome
back, Stuart!”
“We thought that we would cheer you up when you came back,” Jessie said.
“It worked thanks guys,” Stuart said as Eddie handed him a large cake knife. He then cut the cake
open as Jessie took pictures on her smartphone. Then they handed pieces to the coworkers.
“So how are you feeling Stuart,” Christine said.
“Much better, thanks Christine,” Stuart said.
“Oh I guess he doesn’t need our gift after all,” Lonny quipped pretending to hold the gift bag
behind him.
“No, I’m curious,” Stuart said. Lonny grinned as he handed the bag to his boss. Stuart looked
inside at the card which had all of the employees’ signatures then he picked up the gift: A wooden
plaque with a brass sign saying ‘World’s Greatest Boss’ with engraved signatures of Minkus
Technologies’ employees as well as from Ingrid and Elliot Iverson-Smackle.
Minkus smiled letting tears fill the corner of his eyes. “Stuart, you’ve been through so much for us
and we just wanted to remind you how much we appreciate it,” Ingrid said holding Elliot’s hand.
“Thanks everybody,” Stuart said. “I will treasure this.”
“Hey can we come in for the free food?” the Boston accented voice of Pete White, Venture
Industries/Ven Tech’s technology expert entered. He smiled at Minkus. “Just kidding man! Doin’
alright?” He clasped Minkus’ hand as he, Billy Quizboy, Dean Venture and a few other Venture
employees entered.
“Come on,” Minkus said with a nod. “Enjoy yourself.”
“We’ve been working with the Venture crowd on the updates,” Eddie said.
“I know Farkle told me,” Minkus said. “It must be quite an adventure.”
“Well that’s a word for it,” Pete joked grandly. He flipped on his laptop. “And I think wait for
it-He pressed the final code. “We have access!”
Minkus looked at his employees then at the information. The technologies to both Minkus
Technologies and Venture Industries had been completely updated and combined. Minkus looked
around. “You guys did this all while I was out?” He asked.
“Yeah does it look alright?” Ali asked.
Minkus smiled. “It looks great, I just wish I were a part of it.”
Eddie and Jessie exchanged grins and smiled. “Stuart, you actually were,” Eddie said.
“I was how?” Minkus inquired.
“Well those figures and codes that you made when you were going through your breakdown,”
Jessie began. “The ones you put on the walls and in your laptop, most of them were right! They
were just, I don’t know, scattered about and repetitive, because you were all-ayah!”-She moved her
hand away from her head to show insanity.
“It took forever to sift through most of that and put it together,” Pete said.
Billy “Quizboy” Whelan nodded. “Once we made sense of it, it was pretty easy to figure out.”
Plus, Billy and I added a few touches from our own much better more superior corner of the
world,” Pete boasted as he and Billy struck superhero poses at the others. The Minkus
Technologies employees smirked at him.
Minkus looked from his employees to the Venture employees. The answer had been there all along
and Minkus just never noticed it. “They do say genius and insanity go hand in hand,” he said.
“Why don’t you just be a genius and leave alone the insane part,” Eddie suggested.
Minkus grinned. “I will.”
Rusty Venture entered the building. “Okay, let’s see what crap that we wasted time on.” He glanced at the upgrade and smiled impressed. “Well, it works. I like it.” He glanced at Minkus. “I can see why people keep you around. You are okay….sometimes, Kid.” Minkus and Rusty clasped hands. “So are you….on occasion, Old Man,” Minkus returned.
"Anyway you’re sort of a good guy,” Rusty said. "And you even have a good kid. That Farkle has a good head on his shoulders."
Minkus was moved. "Rusty, you called my son Farkle."
Rusty scoffed. "Oh I'm sorry, Finkle." Rusty smirked again as the two engaged in another volleying insults competition.
Minkus knocked on the Matthews’ front door. Morgan appeared through the screen. She was dressed in a navy blue sweater and long floral print sky blue skirt. She complimented Minkus’ blue trousers and sweater perfectly. “May I help you?” she asked.
“I want to talk to you,” Minkus began.
Morgan opened the door warily. “Okay, we can talk,” she said. She nodded at Farkle who stood by his father. “Did Farkle tell you, I called because I did. I did see you once but you were out of it, so I wasn’t sure-“
“-Yes, he told me and thank you,” Minkus said. “There’s a lot that I need to discuss with you.”
Amy opened the door. “Farkle, would you like to come inside and see pictures of your teacher when he was younger?”
Farkle jumped up overly enthusiastic. “Yeah, Riley and Maya would call that blackmail!” He walked into the house leaving his father and father’s girlfriend alone.
Morgan and Minkus walked around the block as they talked. “You were right, Morgan, I did try to walk away,” Minkus said. “It seems when things get hard, I do that. But the more I walk away, the more the things that I try to walk away from catch up to me. I pushed you away and I’m sorry that I did. I’m sorry for what I said.”
“Thank you, Stuart,” Morgan said. “I’m sorry for anything I’ve ever said too. Remember I pushed you away too after my rape and you’re right. The things that you don’t want to deal with become bigger the more you try to avoid them.”
Minkus looked down at his hands. “I thought that I finally stopped this,” he said. “They’re still shaking.”
Morgan held Minkus’ hands firmly. “Is that better?”
Minkus’ hands steadied as Morgan continued to hold on. “Yes it is,” Minkus said. “Then if you let me do this from now on, maybe they will finally stop shaking,” Morgan suggested.
Minkus looked downward. “Morgan, I’m not going to ask you to marry me.”
Morgan shook her head. “And I wouldn’t accept it if you did. I know that there are better men out there than Dustin, and Kermit and I hope you know that there are better women out there than Jennifer. Let’s be those better people for each other. Just let me inside and I will do the same for you.”
“I can do that,” Minkus whispered. “I love you, Morgan.”
“I love you too, Stuart,” Morgan said.
“It took me a long time to say it, does it bother you?” Minkus asked.
“Stuart, I would have to have been pretty stupid to have thought otherwise,” Morgan answered.
“Still it’s nice that you said it.”
Minkus and Morgan then grinned and looked in each other’s eyes when a voice interrupted him.
“Ah Mr. Minkus and Ms. Matthews.”
Minkus and Morgan looked up to see Feeny glance at them from next door. “Hi Mr. Feeny,”
Minkus said as he put his arm around his girlfriend.
“Lovely June weather, perfect for lovers,” Feeny hinted. He turned to Morgan. “Does this mean
that it’s real, Ms. Matthews?”

Morgan nodded. “Yes it does, Mr. Feeny.”

“I suppose this is the point where I quote Frank Capra’s masterpiece, It’s a Wonderful Life,” Mr. Feeny began.

“You mean ‘No man is a failure who has friends?’” Minkus asked.

“No,” Feeny corrected. “‘Why don’t you kiss her instead of talking her to death?’”

Minkus and Morgan laughed. “I think I have that taken care of, Mr. Feeny,” Minkus said as he held Morgan closely and the two were lost in their kiss.

As much as Stuart enjoyed being with his girlfriend. He knew that he had one more thing to do in Philadelphia. He said good-bye to Morgan and Mr. Feeny and walked to his mother’s house. Minkus heard his mother bid him to come inside. He opened the door as his mother looked up. She had lain on the couch dressed in a white nightgown and bathrobe with a sleep mask over her eyes. Minkus looked around the house to see that there was very little attempt at cleaning. Dust had collected and some photos and other items were carelessly strewn about. Minkus noticed that some bottles of light beer as well as sleeping pills were on the coffee table by his mother’s side. Nancy sat up straight and removed her sleep mask when her son entered. “I am going to scream in a minute and then I am going to call the police,” she warned.

Minkus held up his hand. “Just hear me out,” he began. Nancy sat even straighter and waved her hand as if she didn’t care and he could talk. Minkus held his breath. “I just want to say that you were right about certain things. I could have made things better. I could have at least tried to be the son that you wanted. I could have talked to you and told you how I really felt. I could have visited or called after I moved out. Instead, I was angry at you and Tom. Instead of telling you, I swallowed my anger and hatred and withdrew from you. The truth was as much as I hated you both, I hated myself more. I kept that anger inside because I felt like I had deserved it that if I couldn’t measure up to your expectations then maybe I was unworthy of being loved. I tried to reach out to Grandpa and he only ended up getting hurt because of me.”

“After Jennifer abused me, it only confirmed what I had suspected. Even as I climbed higher and people kept giving me all of these accolades, I couldn’t see them because at home was someone who kept telling me what I believed all along: I was a worthless nothing who deserved to be hurt and was unlovable. After Farkle was born, I couldn’t imagine loving anyone more than I love him, but as he grew, I felt that my love wasn’t enough to keep him from being hurt. My whole life I have felt either hurt by others or have sat idly by watching those that I love get hurt. I keep swallowing that hurt and anger until I don’t recognize myself and it becomes too big to hide. I don’t want to swallow it anymore. I don’t want to be angry anymore and I don’t want to hate you two anymore.”

Minkus paused for emphasis. When Nancy didn’t say anything, Minkus continued. “Well that’s all I needed to say. I guess I’ll be going.”

“I only saw what I wanted to see,” Nancy muttered remembering earlier words. “Stuart wait,” Nancy said. Stuart turned around and faced his mother. Nancy took a deep breath. “When I found out that I was pregnant with you, I was terrified not for the reasons that most first-time parents were, financial, physical though those were important too. I was afraid to love you. Your father understood that. I never gave myself fully to him and he accepted that. He knew that I was often unable to feel things very deeply.

I was afraid to love this little…thing that was growing inside of me. What kind of a mother would I be? What if I disappoint him? What if he disappoints me? Even if we didn’t disappoint each other, one day he will up and leave me and then what? I was so afraid to love you, afraid of what you would become and what we would be to each other. I was afraid of being hurt by you, so I tried to avoid being hurt. I kept looking on you objectively finding any reason to confirm my suspicions and my fears. I was so worried about being hurt and abandoned that I ignored this wonderful little boy that I brought into the world. I saw only things that I wanted to see in you, the unfeeling machine or the wife beater and I got your father to go along with it.

You say that you have been hurt by Jennifer and I believe you but you have also been loved by
Farkle and...your Grandfather and if what Morgan says is true by her,” Nancy sighed. “What’s worse than being hurt, Stuart, is avoiding being hurt. Because even when you do, you can’t avoid it forever because it’s still there.” Nancy looked around her home crying and in mourning for her late husband. “People are going to leave you eventually and it will still hurt. It makes it harder because all you avoided was love.”

Minkus sat down next to his mother and held her hand. “Maybe it’s about time we stopped avoiding and being angry with each other and started being a mother and son...Mom.” Nancy nodded and sobbed as Minkus held her with tears in his eyes as well.

Nancy pulled away to dress. When she came down, she was dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. The two talked well into the evening catching each other up on their lives. Minkus mostly talked about Farkle and showed images of him on his smartphone to his mother. “I can never get over how much he looks just like you,” Nancy said. “You must be proud of him.”

“He makes me proud every day,” Minkus said.

“I don’t know where you learned it,” Nancy said. “How to be the parent that you are with him.”

“I guess it was easy,” Minkus said. “I just let myself love him and let him change me for the better. Someone once told me that was the secret of life.”

Nancy smiled as Minkus showed his mother another photo. “This was at the Feenix release party.”

He stopped to explain. “-That’s-“

“-The portable device that you make with your new company, I know,” Nancy replied.

Minkus looked at his mother quizzically. “How did you know that?”

Nancy held up a finger and walked up to the bookshelf. “I have a confession to make. Actually it was more from your father. When you were born, he vowed that he wanted to make a scrapbook of the trajectory of your football career, starting in school and so on until you won the Super Bowl and the Heisman Trophy. So he could look on your achievements and say he remembered you when.”

“Well obviously that didn’t work out,” Minkus pointed out.

Nancy held out a book. “But he still kept the idea.” She lay the book on her son’s lap as he opened it.

Minkus was stunned. He could see the milestones of his career and life unfold as he flipped the pages. There was the first newspaper article that mentioned the MIMS device, the first ad that included the “Technology for Those Who Need it the Most” slogan, early articles citing Minkus International as a rising company, the engagement announcement between Stuart and Jennifer in the Tribune and Farkle’s birth announcement in People, ads that showed the various technologies that Minkus had produced over the years including the Farkle phone, the video games, and others; profiles from Forbes, Wired, Scientific American, and Business World Weekly on Minkus and his successes; gossip articles from OK, People, and US weekly about the Minkus divorce and child custody battle. Minkus read a note in his father’s handwriting that said “Bitch better not get my grandson!”

Also included was a Time article which profiled Minkus creating the new Minkus Technologies, helping Farkle through his difficulties, and the creation of the Feenix device. The cover story was called “Out of the Ashes.” Next to the Time cover was another handwritten note that said, “Stuart Minkus Minkus Technologies MVP.”

“It’s like I’m seeing my whole life,” Minkus said with tears in his eyes. “I didn’t know that he felt this way about me.”

“He did,” Nancy said.

Minkus looked closely at the “MVP” note and compared it to the “Bitch” note. “He didn’t write the ‘MVP’ note. It’s not his handwriting,” he looked at his mother. “You did.”

Nancy looked downward. “I didn’t always understand or trust you as a person, but I was always proud of what you achieved and have always admired your ability to pull yourself out of adversity.”

The mother and son hugged tightly.

There was a knock at the door. Nancy looked upward to see Morgan at the door. “Come on in, Morgan,” she called.
“Is all quiet here,” Morgan asked as she entered.
Mother and son smiled. “Things are just fine here,” Nancy smiled.
Minkus nodded. “What’s Farkle doing?”
Morgan laughed. “Beating the crap out of my brother in Halo 5. Those screams you hear are Josh’s from NYU living with the agony of defeat.”
“I hope you favor blood over water, Morgan,” Nancy teased.
“Are you kidding?” Morgan rolled her eyes. “Josh turns into a total idiot when he wins! I’m Team Farkle all the way!” Nancy and Minkus laughed.
“Oh Stuart my parents and I wanted to know if you and Farkle want to have dinner with us tonight,” Morgan asked.
Minkus looked towards his mother. “Go,” Nancy said. “The only thing I have in my refrigerator is a light bulb.”
“Actually Nancy,” Morgan said. “My parents wanted to know if you wanted to join us too.”
Nancy Minkus was stunned. “Really?” she asked looking from her son to her son’s girlfriend. Morgan nodded as Minkus stood and held out his hand. “Really,” he agreed. Nancy stood and took her son’s hand.
Nancy looked around at the table of the photographs, photos of mostly herself and her late husband. “It’s starting to look barren now,” she said.
Minkus opened up a picture, a miniature version of the portrait that Maya drew of Ginsburg. “How about this?”
Nancy looked closely at the picture. “I’m not quite ready to put that up yet. Maybe someday I will be.” She took the picture and put it inside the drawer.
Minkus shrugged. “Okay, how about this one?” He handed his mother a photograph of himself and Farkle sitting next to each other.
Nancy smiled. “Perfect,” she placed the picture right next to one of her and Tom.
At the abuse support group meeting, Minkus explained the highlights of the past few weeks including his breakdown, recovery, the upgrade, and his reconciliation with his mother. “I think that my mother and I are finally ready to choose happiness with each other and I am ready to rewrite my life to make it better.” He said.
The group applauded, particularly Katy who gave her friend a thumbs up. The counselor stood and said, “Thank you, Stuart. Why don’t we take a break and we’ll reconvene in 15?”
The group separated and split into small groups to have refreshments and talk. Stuart noticed that a short dark-haired man stood in the doorway. He and Katy walked towards the man at the door.
The man looked at Stuart up and down. “You’re—he said stunned amazed that he was next to someone famous.
“Here I’m just Stuart,” Stuart said to him. “Are you lost?”
“This is the Adult Support Group for Abuse right?” he asked.
Stuart nodded and the man sighed relieved. “I’m just glad to know there’s another guy here. I mean when Desiree—my ex-wife—well I thought I was the only one.”
Stuart held the other man by the shoulder. “You’re not. Trust me, we’ve all been there.”
The man looked upwards nervously. “My kids are upstairs. I hope this won’t be too much for them.”
“I’m sure they’ll be fine,” Stuart said knowingly. “What’s your name?”
The man smiled nervously. “Jason, Mars—just Jason.”
Stuart walked Jason inside. “Well Jason, this is Katy and welcome to our group.”
“Hi Jason,” Katy said shaking his hand. Katy and Stuart led Jason through the group and introduced him to other members. Stuart finally understood Morgan’s words, something good can come from trauma.
It was a month before Nancy Minkus visited her son and grandson in Manhattan. Stuart led his mother inside Topanga’s Bakery. “Mom, if you want to spend the weekend at my apartment just say so.”
“Oh Stuart as kind as the offer is, Eunice already agreed to put me up at her place over
Central Park,” Nancy said. Minkus smiled at the thought of his mother and his former mother-in-law in the same room together. “You once said that she was an uptight snob,” he teased.

“Well I like her a lot better since she and Edward split up,” Nancy replied. “Besides we have a lot to talk about.”

Morgan approached her boyfriend and kissed him. “Hey you,” Morgan said.

“Hello there,” Minkus said as he kissed her.

Nancy and Farkle exchanged a grin. “Hi Nancy,” Morgan said.

“Hi Morgan,” Nancy answered. She leaned over and pretended to whisper to Stuart but spoke loud enough for Morgan to hear. “I like her, Stuart. Hold onto her.”

“I intend to, Mom,” Minkus said as he and Morgan held each other closely.

Nancy approached the bar to order a cappuccino and smiled at Cory and Topanga. “You two I would recognize anywhere,” she said. Nancy gave the couple a hug.

“Hi Mrs. Minkus,” Cory said.

“You still teasing my boy?” Nancy asked.

“Ehh, sometimes,” Cory said with a grin.

“As long as you give my grandson good grades,” Nancy said. “Otherwise you’ll hear from me.”

“Oh he earns them alright,” Cory said nodding at Farkle who was engaged in a conversation with his friends and girlfriend.

“And Topanga, you’re still as sharp as ever,” Nancy remarked. “You always were a smart girl.”

“Thanks Mrs. Minkus,” Topanga said. “Coming from Stuart’s mother, I will consider it a compliment.”

Nancy accepted the cappuccino from Katy and looked closely at the man talking to her. “Wait a minute, I know you,” she said looking closely. “You’re that Hunter boy!”

Shawn held up his hands. “I plead innocent on all charges.”

Nancy laughed and turned to her son. “I told you that you should make friends with them!”

“It took a while, but eventually I did,” Minkus agreed.

Shawn leaned closer to Nancy. “Did you know that your son was a teacher’s pet?” He asked.

Nancy nodded. “Absolutely. He’s had brown on his nose since the day he was born.”

“Beats being a recidivist,” Minkus taunted back at his friend.

Farkle approached his father with a paper in hand. “Dad,” Minkus turned towards his son. “I wanted to show you something but I needed your permission for it.”

He handed the form to his father. “What is it Farkle?” He looked closely at the address on top. “Civil Courts? Is there something you’d like to share with the rest of us?”

Farkle hesitated. “Well I looked up the information online and I spoke to them on the phone, but they said since I was a minor that I would need your permission and for you to sign this consent form.”

“For what Farkle?” Minkus asked.

“I want to change my name,” Farkle said.

Minkus looked at the form still folded confused and hurt. “Well alright Donnie, if that’s what you want—”

Farkle shook his head. “No, not my full name. I just want to change my middle name.” He said.

Minkus understood. Farkle’s middle initial, J., was a tribute to his mother Jennifer. “I want to cut that last link.”

“What do you want to change your middle name to, son?” Minkus inquired.

“Read it and find out,” Farkle said.

Minkus read the form. He read the name out loud with a grin. “Farkle Malachi Ginsburg Minkus!”

“Is it okay?” Farkle asked. “May I?”

Minkus smiled gladly. “Of course it is.” He signed the form with a proud flourish.

“It’s a fine name, Farkle,” Nancy said.

Farkle gave his grandmother a hug. “Thank you, Grandma Nancy.”

Nancy shook her head. “Please call me Grandma Nonnie.” Farkle’s mouth dropped open with
happiness and he hugged his grandmother tighter.
Minkus looked to his mother. “I was ready,” she said. Minkus understood. She put up her father’s picture. “After all these years, maybe it’s finally time I forgave your grandfather.”
Farkle looked downward. “Maybe someday I’ll feel the same way about Jennifer,” he said. “Maybe not today or anytime soon. But maybe someday.”
Minkus gave his son’s shoulder a tight squeeze. “For now son it’s enough that maybe someday we’ll want to.”
Nonnie and Stuart watched Farkle show the paperwork to his friends as they teased him by calling him Ginsburg. “Are you going to recompose Howl now?” Smackle asked holding Zay’s hand. Zay pretended to be a wolf howling at the moon. Smackle grimaced and rolled her eyes, but gave a small laugh at her boyfriend’s joke.
“Don’t see how I could wear out that name either,” Lucas quipped as he held Riley’s hand.
“You’ll always be Farkle to us,” Riley said “The Farkliest Farkle we know.”
“Thanks guys,” Farkle said.
Maya walked up to her boyfriend and smiled. “Farkle Malachi Ginsburg Minkus, I will always love you because you showed me how.”
“Thank you, Maya Penelope Hart. I will always love you because you reminded me that I’m worth loving.” Maya and Farkle leaned towards each other and kissed.
Stuart and Nonnie Minkus grinned at Farkle’s conversation with his friends. “What’s wrong, Mom?” Stuart asked.
Nonnie had a little tear in her eye. “It’s just, I wish your grandfather could be here to see this,” she said. “He would have loved it.”
Stuart exchanged grins with his son over a secret that they shared. Over the conversation and the smell of baked goods, Minkus could faintly detect a sweet familiar odor. He could almost feel the touch of a hand on his shoulder and if he listened hard could almost make out a soft rhythmic voice calling him “Little Man.” “You know something, Mom?” Stuart said. “I think he is.”
Nancy nodded and smiled. Stuart Minkus looked around the bakery at his mother, his son, his friends, his girlfriend, and his son’s friends and thought about his grandfather, his father, his colleagues, and everyone else he knew and cared about feeling love for them and loved by them. Surrounded by this love, Stuart Minkus felt his heart grow warm and become warmer.
The End
Author’s Note: 25 chapters! My longest fanfic to date and the longest time spent on one fandom over one year between this and “Unhappy In Its Own Way,” but it was well worth it! Thank you again for being such a wonderful group of loyal readers and thank you for all the reviews, reads, and raves! I am glad to see my story of the Minkus men has been so well received. I myself feel my heart grow warm and become warmer. :D

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