

*Relate to the humor of this modern coming-of-age comedy that centers on a 24-year-old nicknamed as Haze. With the help of his friends, he tackles the challenges of adulthood in California while searching for his life's purpose.*

## **Quarter Life: Chronicles of Adulthood, Part 1**

By Matt Sanchez

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MATT SANCHEZ

# QUARTER LIFE:

CHRONICLES of  
ADULTING

PART #1



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# Chapter 1 – Hungover

Haze woke with a start. He squeaked one eye open to peek at the clock.

4:40 a.m.

He squinched his eyes, rubbed his face, and unstuck his tongue from the roof of his cotton mouth. His head pounded and roared like a train rumbling over the tracks.

*Fuck!*

He had to pee. His bladder was going to explode. He didn't want to move, but he couldn't risk falling back to sleep and pissing the bed, so he forced himself to get up.

*Okay. On the count of 3..., he thought. 1, 2... Not ready yet... Maybe if I count backwards... 3, 2, 1... That's it.*

He slid out of bed, shuffled out of his room, and stumbled down the hall. The light at the end of the hallway was on, and he heard gunshots and bombs exploding on the TV.

*Are they still awake?* He wondered.

He found his way into the bathroom, sat on the toilet, and relieved his swollen bladder. A little voice in his head told him he should stand up to pee like a man, but he didn't care. With elbows on his knees and head in his hands, he was too tired to stand.

He clumsily fumbled around to wash his hands in the dark. He then checked on the late-night activities in the living room. He found a rolled-up dollar bill, crumbles of cocaine and marijuana scattered around, and also the bong in its usual spot, a permanent fixture on the coffee table. Empty beer bottles, bottle caps, and an ashtray on the windowsill rounded out the décor. Chaz was passed out in the recliner with his mouth open, comatose.

Jay was playing a James Bond video game. He pecked the controller and turned it side to side. Without looking up from the game, he asked, "How was *your* night, Haze?"

He chose to ignore the sarcasm in his voice. “Why are you still up?” he grumbled.

Jay did not break his zombie stare at the screen. “I’m almost done. Going to bed soon, Mom.”

He stumbled back to his room, slinked under the sheets, and pulled up the covers. His head hit the pillow, and his eyes slammed shut. Instead of falling asleep as planned, he felt something unusual. A presence. He patted his hand around on top of the blankets until his suspicions confirmed his fear. Another person was in his bed! He freaked out as if he had touched something nasty, threw off the covers, and scurried back down the hall.

“Jay! What the fuck?! Who’s in my bed?” he cried as he barged back into the living room.

This time, Jay looked up. “You don’t remember, lover boy?” he cooed.

“Nooooo,” he squirmed.

“Does ‘M-Train’ ring a bell?” Jay asked with a smirk.

*Shit!*

In an instant, the night came flashing back to him. Cocktails and bong-hits in the apartment before they went out. Dinner down the street with his roommates. Mark joined them at their favorite neighborhood bar, The Creeker, where they had beer and whiskey shots and played pool. All was fuzzy after that. Vague memories of an Uber to the nightclub to meet up with Mark’s crappy girlfriend, Celine, and her friends. Jay said something about scoring coke off the “Dark Angel,” the drug dealer they always seemed to run into. The thoughts of vodka energy drinks, cocaine in the bathroom, thumping dance music, and a flashing strobe light made his headache worse.

He rubbed his forehead. *Oh, no! That’s right.* Flashes of making out with the girl at the bar. *What was her name? Oh yeah, M-Train.* One of Celine’s friends who had a crush on him.

He stared off into space, wide-eyed, as he questioned, *Did I have sex with her? No, my clothes are still on*, he rationalized. *Maybe I just passed out when we got back*, he reassured himself.

As if reading his mind, Jay asked with glee, “Did you consummate the marriage?”

“I don’t think so,” he said with lukewarm confidence. “My clothes are still on, and I think I would remember that.”

“Hmph,” Jay huffed and pecked a few buttons on the console. Explosions erupted on the TV as he twisted and turned the controller.

“What should I do?” he asked anxiously.

“What do you mean, ‘What should you do?’” Jay parroted. “Go back to bed,” he directed and pointed down the hallway.

Exasperated, he wrung his hands and whined, “I can’t sleep in there with her.”

Jay looked up from his game with disgust. “Go sleep in Mark’s bed,” he instructed. “He never uses it. He will never know.”

He had to agree. “Good idea.”

He tiptoed to Mark’s room and climbed into his bed. He lay there wishing he had not fooled around with M-Train. His mind drifted to his Cornell friend Mark, their fourth roommate, who basically lived with Celine. He was grateful that he kept a room in the apartment and paid rent, even though this was a major annoyance to Celine. He felt sorry for him because Celine constantly bitched about the money he was wasting on rent when he wasn’t even living there.

*So what? Why should Celine care?*

Mark respected his parents’ wishes not to cohabit with a girl until he was married, even though Celine called him “Momma’s boy.”

*Screw Celine.*



*Matt Sanchez*

He, along with Chaz and Jay, hoped that maybe Mark would ditch Celine one of these days and live with them again, like the old times, but this was futile. For now, he was happy to sleep and hide away in his room.

## Chapter 2 – The Sports Bar

The door to Mark's bedroom flung open violently. Chaz side-armed a basketball at Haze and hit him in the ass. "Wake up! We're going to the sports bar!"

He lay there seething in hatred for his meathead friend, the perpetual jock. He still hurt from the night before, but not as bad. Light came in through the window. He knew it was time to get up, but he just wanted to sleep in. He rolled over and pulled himself into a tight fetal position. He prayed Chaz would leave him alone and go without him, but he knew this would never happen. Just as he drifted back to slumber, the door flew open again and slammed into the wall. CRASH. Chaz charged into the room and ripped the blankets clean off him and entirely off the bed.

"Get up! Seize the day!" Chaz shouted with authority. "I made you a bagel with cream cheese. I poured you a cup of coffee. You're going to take a shower and wash the filth off your body. You have one hour before halftime. Let's get moving," he ordered.

His prayers were not answered. He had no choice. He looked up at Chaz, who had his shirt off, as usual, showing off his defined muscles, six-pack abs, and shaved chest. He stumbled down the hall and followed Chaz through the living room, which somehow had been cleaned up, to the kitchen at the end of the long, narrow apartment. Jay sat at the table under the window, eating bagels and bananas and drinking coffee. Haze's usual spot across from his high-school friend was open. He plopped down in it.

"Don't worry. She's gone," Chaz said to ease his worries. "You had your tongue down that girl's throat all night. Have you checked for cold sores yet?"

"Fuck off," he muttered. He would not hear the end of this for a while.

Jay passed around the pipe. "Nice strain of Sativa to get us going," he said as he held in the smoke.

"Wake n' bake!" added Chaz.

“Damn, Jay, you always have weed on you,” noted Haze.

Jay exhaled a huge cloud and then passed it to him. “Yep, I stopped at my regular dispensary yesterday and stocked up.”

He puffed the pipe. “Thanks, dude. Can I give you some money?” he offered.

“No way, man,” Jay said as he shook his head and waved his hand.

He sipped his coffee and chuckled. He knew Jay wasn’t going to accept money for pot, but he offered anyway. He listened to the music Jay had on the Bluetooth speaker.

*Give thanks and praise to the Lord, and I will feel all right. - Bob Marley*

When the song ended, Jay forwarded it to another one he liked.

Haze thought about suggesting a different playlist. *Why bother? He’s controlled the tunes and the pot since we were sixteen.*

Chaz spoke up. “I’m going to the grocery store tomorrow, and rent is due at the end of the month. I will tell you assholes what you owe me by the end of the week.”

Haze chewed his food and did not listen to what Chaz said but how he said it. Sometimes, Chaz demonstrated moments of intelligence and respect but often barked at them, like a senior citizen with dementia who suddenly had a moment of clarity.

*When he’s at work, does he order everyone around like this? I guess his position with the commercial real estate company allows for this behavior. Maybe he gets away with it because his dad owns the business.*

His daydream about Chaz’s job turned to curiosity about Jay’s career. *I know he is in the entertainment industry, but I’m not exactly sure what he does. Maybe he will explain it someday.*

He wondered what his contribution to the household was, if anything, and if his friends cared about his career. *What can I do this week to help out around here? I guess I don’t know. Why do they always take care of*

*everything? Do they think I'm stressed at work or something? Do they even know what I do? Do they care?*

After the bachelor breakfast, he sauntered to the shower while his roommates cleaned the kitchen. The weed and coffee kicked in, the warm water felt good, and the food settled his stomach.

*By God, the idea of going to the sports bar is starting to sound all right. In fact, a Bloody Mary is what I need next.*

The three friends left their apartment for the cold and dreary San Francisco morning. They shoved their hands in their puffy coat pockets and shivered. Thick fog blanketed the entire city. The streets and sidewalks looked like it had rained, and all the big city noises were muffled. They walked silently across the dewy grass on Washington Square as they passed a group of Chinese people performing Tai Chi. They heard bells ringing from the distant cable cars on Mason Street and squawks from a few seagulls at Fisherman's Wharf. Suddenly, the church bells of Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church echoed across the square.

Haze realized it was Sunday. He had not even looked at the clock since 4:40 a.m.

*I should be at church.*

His gut churned as he watched the parishioners walk into Mass. The haunting Catholic guilt weighed on him and tugged at him.

To distract himself from his shortcomings, he broke the foggy silence by asking, "Is Mark going to join us?"

"Hey, jackass," barked Chaz. "Don't you remember the conversation around the pool table last night? We all made plans to go to the sports bar today. It was actually Mark's idea because Celine is shopping with her mom today or some shit like that."

"Oh yeah, that's right," he replied, even though he only vaguely remembered.

They were greeted at the sports bar with the familiar smell of stale beer and old carpet. A smoke cloud filled the dark and dingy pub, even though smoking indoors had been outlawed.

He thought to himself, *Maybe this smoke is from the deep fryer and the other poorly performing kitchen equipment.* Then, he commented out loud, "This place always reminds me of our fraternity at Cornell."

"Sure does," agreed Chaz.

Their waitress, Ally, a cute girl who wore tight shorts and had just enough cleavage exposure to get a few more percentage points on her tip, led them to their table. She did a double take at Chaz, which was common with any human who could not resist his handsome complexion. Most people were attracted to him, but his frat-boy persona turned off anyone with decency.

"Hi, Ally. How are you?" he cooed while he stared a second too long at the name tag dangling off her boob.

"Fine, thanks. Right this way to your table," she chirped, unable to contain her smile.

They rounded the corner and found Mark intently watching the football game. He wore a Ben Roethlisberger jersey, a Steelers hat on backward, and a yellow terrible towel draped on his shoulder.

Haze wondered why he was such a diehard Steelers fan because there seemed no valid reason. *His dad does not like the Steelers, and he's not from Pittsburgh. Maybe he just likes to wear black and yellow, and boy, he has it today.*

The Steelers were playing the Ravens.

*This is serious!* Haze thought as he sat down at the table.

"Wassup?" said Mark casually, not looking away from the game.

"Round of Bloody Marys for us, please," said Chaz to Ally with a sleazy wink.

"You got it," she replied enthusiastically.

“Any money on this game, Mark?” asked Jay.

Haze heard Jay’s question and laughed to himself. He figured the only reason Jay joined them on days like this was because of his academic fascination with society’s interest in sports and gambling and his cultural obsession with athletic competition. Besides the occasional X Games, Jay hadn’t watched much sports on TV in the eight years they had known each other, but he enjoyed hanging out with his friends.

Mark turned to Jay. “No,” he whimpered. “Celine doesn’t like it when I gamble.”

Jay knew this would be the answer but had to stir the pot anyway, and it worked.

“What the fuck?!” barked Chaz. “Grow a sack, you fucking pussy.” He never missed an opportunity to berate Mark about Celine. He had good intentions, but Mark was the eternal whipped dog. Nothing would change that now.

“Suck it, Meat Dick,” he retorted.

“I love you too,” he replied as he blew him a kiss.

*Geez, thought Haze, this love/hate relationship between Chaz and Mark goes back to freshman year.*

They watched the game in silence as their hangovers began to creep back. The Bloody Marys arrived just in time, and the four friends toasted and took a sip.

*Oh man, does that hit the spot!*

The deep red drinks had just the right amount of tomato juice, steak sauce, and spice. Speckles of horseradish danced around the ice. The long, plastic sword skewer had two stuffed olives and one lime wedge. Celery and candied bacon topped the stir sticks. Tasty seasoning salt covered the glass rim. Vodka was present but not overpowering.

After the Bloodies, it was time for a pitcher of beer and an order of buffalo wings. The game was well into the second half, with the score tied. It was a hard-hitting battle.

The wings came out steaming hot. If Bloody Marys were the best thing the pub had, then buffalo wings were a close second. They were meatier than most wings, with hardly any fat. The house-made sauce had pieces of spicy hot pepper, but not crazy hot. They burned going down and stung the following day.

The game went into overtime. The sweaty, exhausted players had stains all over their helmets, jerseys, and pants. The Steelers finally won in dramatic fashion with an amazing game-ending play. Mark and Chaz cheered and chest bumped in the middle of the restaurant. Haze slapped a couple of high-fives, and Jay gave a hearty "Harrumph!"

Ally came over to check on the raucous group. They all high-fived her as well. It was time for another pitcher and a couple of nachos orders. The Niners and Seahawks game was next.

Always timely, Jay pulled out pot gummies and passed them around as he quipped, "Gotta have the right blend of alcohol and THC."

"Yep, just like mixing oil and gas. Gotta have the correct ratio," added Mark, who learned this from his farm boy days in the Central Valley of California.

"What's that ratio? 60:40?" asked Jay.

"Sounds about right to me," added Haze.

Chaz watched Ally's butt as she walked by.

The Niners and Seahawks battled, just like the Steelers and Ravens. Haze, Chaz, and Jay, all from California, had legitimate reasons to be Niners fans, unlike Mark, who could not justify why he liked the Steelers so much. Their excitement inspired a round of whiskey shots.

"Round of whiskey, please!"

The cohort felt buzzed by the second quarter and borderline shit-faced by halftime. Jay played on his phone. Haze stared at the TV but didn't pay attention to what was happening. Mark wandered off to the bathroom and Chaz followed him in.

Chaz fixed his hair in the mirror and calmly chanted, "Let's go, Niners, let's go, Niners, let's go, Niners." He looked around for Mark and noticed his feet in a stall.

"Ah ha!" he yelled. "There you are!" He proceeded to do a high-knee, fist-pounding mosh around the bathroom while yelling, "MARK'S TAKING A SHIT! MARK'S TAKING A SHIT! MARK'S TAKING A SHIT!"

A forty-something-year-old father tried to help his frightened seven-year-old boy wash his hands. The irritated father did not like the belligerent behavior and foul language in front of his son. He quickly ushered his child out of the bathroom. However, he paused before he left, looked back at the scene, and slightly grinned as his heart grew three sizes larger. He remembered his glory days. For a second, he wished he could relive them with his friends and behave like a carefree idiot. He put a loving arm around his boy and said, "Don't worry about that guy, son. He means no harm." The moment passed, and the father and son returned to their table.

Meanwhile, Mark held his breath and sat very still. *OMG! What is going to happen now? Should I sit here until he leaves or pull my pants up and get the hell out of here?* He chose the latter and leaned forward to wipe when suddenly, WHAM! Chaz kicked the stall door open, smacked Mark square in the face, and knocked him back onto the toilet. "Ugh."

Chaz realized the door had hit him in the face and went into the stall. "Oh shit, dude. Sorry, I didn't mean to smack you in the face."

"What the fuck, man?"

"Oh crap, your nose is bleeding." He quickly unwound a massive wad of toilet paper and stuck it in Mark's face.

Haze looked over at the bathroom and saw an older man walk in. The poor old guy observed the scene in the stall with Mark seated on the toilet with his pants down. Chaz stood in front of him with his hands on Mark's



head. He heard Chaz say something to the effect of, “Oh shit, it’s all over your face.”

The old man didn’t need to see anymore. He quickly exited the restroom and grabbed his wife from their table. “We’re leaving!” he commanded and vowed never to return to the sports bar ever again.

Blood poured from Mark’s nose. He made it to the sink to wash off his hands and face. The soaked toilet paper was no longer effective. His only choice for stopping the blood was the Terrible Towel. He doused the beloved yellow Steelers towel in cold water and applied it to his nose while tilting his head back. Chaz held back his laughter and tried to help. He was useless. Finally, he couldn’t contain himself anymore and burst out in hysterics.

“Fuck you!” mumbled Mark.

That was Chaz’s cue to tell the others. He left Mark in the bathroom and hurried back to the table with laughter tears rolling down his cheeks.

“Dude, what’s up with you?” asked Haze.

Chaz held his guts and tried to explain. He could barely get the words out, “Oh man... Mark was taking a shit in the bathroom, and I kicked the door in...hahaha... and it fucking smacked him in the face... ah... and now he’s got the worst bloody nose ever... and he’s trying to stop the blood... hahaha...with his... hahaha... TERRIBLE TOWEL!”

Haze’s jaw dropped wide-eyed in disbelief.

“Are you kidding me?” asked Jay.

Chaz couldn’t stop laughing. “NO... hahaha.”

Poor Mark approached them with the blood-stained Terrible Towel still on his nose. They took one look at him and erupted in another round of laughter – gut-clenching, eye-watering, cheek-cramping, uncontrollable laughter.

Even Mark had to chuckle, “I can’t believe it.”

Ally, the good tip-earning waitress, brought over an ice pack and kissed Mark on the forehead as she flashed a sassy wink at Chaz. The kiss made Mark feel much better until his thoughts turned to Celine. He rapidly pulled out his phone to check for messages.

“Oh, shit,” he moaned and put his hand on his forehead.

“What?” asked Haze.

“I’ve got five texts from Celine and three missed calls. I was supposed to check in with her an hour ago.”

Jay smirked. Chaz’s face turned red, and his veins began to pop out.

Haze put his hand on Chaz’s shoulder. “Hey!” he commanded, then in a whisper, “Ally keeps looking at you.”

Chaz’s head snapped in her direction like a chihuahua after a squirrel.

Haze turned to Mark. “Everything gonna be all right?”

“No,” he whined. “I’m supposed to go to dinner tonight with Celine and her mom. Now my face is all busted up. Damn you, Chaz!”

Chaz turned back to Mark and snorted. “Sorry, dude.”

Mark stood up and snatched his bloody towel off the table. “I gotta go,” he mumbled. He began to take money out to help pay.

Haze put his hand up. “No. We got this.”

“Thanks,” he said and walked away.

He watched him go, shrugged his shoulders, and said, “Well, guess we don’t get to spend the day with Mark after all.”

They stayed long enough to confirm the Niners’ victory over the Seahawks and pay the bill. They left Ally a twenty-five percent well-earned tip. After logging a good five hours in the sports bar, they walked home in silence through the lingering fog to their third-floor apartment. They retired to their respective bedrooms. Jay put on his headphones and listened to music. Haze watched the night game and fell asleep by 8 p.m. Chaz dreamed of Ally’s gratuitous cleavage.

## Chapter 3 – Monday at Work

Haze slouched in his cubicle and stared at the computer screen with the weekend hangover still lingering. He tried to work but couldn't focus. The San Francisco fog had invaded his brain. Concentration was a chore. Anna brought him a cup of coffee.

"Snap out of it, lover boy. Get to work," she ordered.

"Thanks, Anna," he replied sheepishly.

She regarded him for a second, "Let me guess. You got drunk Saturday night, went to some nightclub off Union Square, and fooled around with a girl you shouldn't be messing with. Then, you spent all day yesterday in the sports bar drinking beer and eating shitty food."

He considered this. *Am I this predictable? Apparently, I am.* "Well, yes," he admitted out loud. "However, the food at the sports bar is quite good—the best quality Bloody Marys and wings in town."

"Oh, okay," she said sarcastically.

He took a sip of his coffee. "Besides, what did you do all weekend?" he countered. "Let me guess. You went to see some Indigo Girls rip-off band Saturday night in The Castro, and yesterday, you watched one of your friends play rugby in Golden Gate Park with her all-girls team."

Anna scratched her chin and contemplated, "Touché... Get some work done, and we'll catch up at lunch."

His computer dinged because he had an email to read. He ignored it and thought about the conversation with Anna. *Once again, she pulls no punches and says it like it is.*

"Ding," another email.

He looked around at his co-workers, who pecked away at their computers. He liked most of them, but Anna was a true friend he respected. He noticed she wore long sleeves to cover the tattoos up and down her arms again. She covered the tattoos, not because she had to, but because she felt

the workplace was a professional environment and people should dress professionally. Her short, blond hair was spiked with pride, and her fingernails were freshly painted. He remembered the song "Short Skirt/Long Jacket" by the band Cake.

*With fingernails that shine like justice.* - Cake

"Ding, Ding, Ding," the emails piled up. He ignored them, slurped his coffee, and continued to think of Anna. *The last time I saw her outside work, she looked like a bartender in a biker bar or like the musician Pink. Today, she looks like an executive.*

"Ding," the morning market update from his firm, Darkrock, the world's largest money manager, had arrived in his inbox.

He got up from his cube and sauntered to the break room for another free cup of coffee and a banana. He made a pit stop at the restroom before returning to his desk. Finally, he forced himself to read the market update so he could begin his day as an internal sales consultant. He mustered the strength to email several financial advisors about Darkrock investment products as he succumbed to the symphony of keyboard pecking, taps, clicks, and beeps. Another email dinged at him. This time, it was from Sandy, the external consultant he supported who met with financial advisors in person.

His gut churned, his heart raced, and his tail curled between his legs. *How is she going to condescend to me today?*

He thought of Anna and her excellent working relationship with Tevon, one of the firm's most well-known and respected external consultants. *How does Anna get to work with Tevon, and I'm stuck with Sandy?*

At lunchtime, Anna poked her head back into his cubicle, "Let's grab a sandwich, Hazer. I want to hear about your new girlfriend."

Sarcastically, he said, "Great... All right, let's go," with a sigh.

They left the building and walked down the block to their favorite sandwich shop, leaving behind the well-stocked break rooms at Darkrock, full of help-yourself foods and snacks. Today, they needed to go outside and take a break from the Darkrock culture so she could have a proper

discussion with him. They ordered and sat in the corner booth with their table tree playing card, ace of spades.

“Thanks for asking me to lunch,” he began. He tried to avoid the inevitable inquisition. “Nice to save the firm some money on bagels, yogurt, coffee, chips, juice, soda...”

“All right, who is she?” she probed.

“Why are you making me relive this?” he whined.

“Come on. Confess to Sister Anna,” she instructed.

“This girl, Melissa. We call her M-Train. She’s friends with Celine and has a crush on me. I got drunk and fooled around with her,” he admitted.

“Why do you call her M-Train?”

“Because she’s a fucking train wreck,” he barked a little too loudly.

“How is she a train wreck?”

“She kinda looks like a cross between a heavy Mona Lisa and a short Frida Kahlo, and she smells like she bought her clothes at a vintage clothing store. She also does this annoying grunt laugh after everything she says. Like, ‘duh-hut.’”

“Why do you think Celine is friends with her?”

He shrugged. “I dunno. I’m guessing it’s because Celine stands out with her with her flappy eyelashes, puffy lips, and fake boobs. Celine bosses her around all the time.”

“Does Melissa put up with it?”

He nodded. “Oh, yeah. She follows her around like a stray dog.”

Anna contemplated this. “Did you have sex?” she pressed.

“That’s none of your business!” he exclaimed.

“Of course, it is.”

He gave in and whimpered, “No, I don’t think so. I woke up with my clothes on. I actually forgot she was there, and then when I remembered what happened, I went into Mark’s room.”

She furrowed her brow, and the tone of her voice sharpened. “Wait, you woke up in the morning with her in your bed, then realized she was there, so you went and hid in Mark’s bed?”

“Yeah. Something like that.”

She threw up her hands. “You men are pigs. This is why I’m a lesbian.”

The waitress brought their sandwiches and gave her a knowing look.

“Right. I’m not proud of it,” he said as he took a bite of his Italian sub.

She dug into her veggie sandwich with hummus and changed the subject. “What’s your afternoon like?”

“I have a scheduled call with Slimy Rick.”

“Ugh,” she groaned, with a mouth full of sandwich. “He’s the slippery financial advisor who always calls Sandy with questions about various mutual funds and then dumps it on you, right?”

“Yep... Really, most of the financial advisors Sandy works with are slimy. Like attracts like; she probably stayed out with Rick too late the other night.” He took a bite and slurped his soda.

“Yuck. Have fun,” she quipped.

“How about you?” he inquired.

“I have to put together a few portfolios for some Jones Wealth Planners.”

He was jealous again. “Why do you get the cool people to work with?”

“I dunno.” She thought for a minute, set down her sandwich, and fearlessly asked, “Haze, call me crazy, but you don’t seem so happy with this job. Is this a career for you? Do you see yourself working for Darkrock in the next five years?”

He rolled his eyes. “What? Are you my boss now? I don’t know. I never thought about it.”

“Well,” she asked, “Why did you come to work for Darkrock in the first place?”

He shrugged, palms up. “My parents acted like it was a good idea for me to work in the financial industry. Darkrock had an awesome booth at Cornell’s career fair, so I applied, and they hired me.”

“Nice, so what are you going to do with your life, Haze?” she implored.

Exasperated, he took a bite of the sandwich. With food bulging his cheek, he challenged her, “How the fuck should I know? Are you my mom now? What about you? What are you going to do?”

His sassiness rolled off her like water from a duck’s back. “Yeah, I want to be a financial advisor someday. After working with them for a couple of years now, I know that’s what I want, and I think I would be good at it. This job at Darkrock has helped me learn and understand the industry. I feel like helping people achieve their financial dreams is my purpose.”

He considered this while he chewed. *Once again, she has her life together, and I do not.* He conceded, “You’ll make a great financial advisor, Anna. I’ll invest my money with you someday.”

She smiled proudly and exclaimed. “Thanks, Hazer!”

He sighed, “All right. I give up. How did you determine your career goal of becoming a financial advisor? Why is helping people achieve their financial dreams your purpose?”

She nodded in approval and explained, “I started by writing down what I want my life to be like in five years. This includes where I want to live, what I want my income to be, what my relationships will be like, and how I want to feel physically, emotionally, spiritually, and so on. Every day, I write down three tasks I must accomplish by the end of the day to put me in a position to achieve my five-year vision. These tasks can be work-related or personal. This gives me a daily plan, helps me feel organized, and by the end of each day, I feel accomplished and satisfied knowing I’ve achieved a short-term task for the benefit of a long-term goal.”

His mind churned, and his head throbbed, but he had to admit, “This is why you kill it, Anna.”

She offered, “I’m available for consulting whenever you are ready to pull your head out of your ass.”

He put his head in his hands. “Don’t hold your breath.”

With that, they finished their lunches and slid out of the booth. She gave a quick head nod and a sly wink to the waitress before she opened the door for him. They strolled back to work with warm sunshine on their faces.

After another pit stop in the bathroom, he returned to his cubicle, dreading his call with Slimy Rick. He adjusted his fantasy football lineup to pass the time.

He wondered why people like Slimy Rick were successful in life. *This guy spends all his time getting little old ladies to invest all their money with him so he can earn a commission. He doesn’t even research the investments or put together the portfolios. He has some twenty-four-year-old kid right out of college like me do it for him. What the hell do I know? Guys like Slimy Rick give the industry a bad name.*

He then prepared for his daily debrief with Sandy. He imagined calling her “Slutty Sandy” but figured building this habit would get him fired if he ever blurted it out loud. He fantasized about moshing around the office yelling, “Slutty Sandy Sucks! Slutty Sandy Sucks! Slutty Sandy Sucks!” because, as he learned from Chaz, things always sound better when you chant them. He pondered how long it would take him to get fired if he did this. *Immediately? A day or two after an internal investigation? Or weeks after a grueling arbitration?*

He completed his calls with Slimy Rick and Sandy and then watched the clock to count down the minutes. His day of a couple of phone calls, some emails, and several trips to the break room and bathroom finally wound down. His biggest accomplishment: the lengthy fantasy football adjustment and his “come to Jesus” lunch with Anna. It was almost time to log off and go home when BZZZT – the unmistakable vibration of a text message on the cell phone.



Mark: "Dude C wants you to call M-Train."

Haze: "Fuck that!"

Mark: "Come on man. C will be up my ass if you don't."

Haze: "All right. Fine."

Mark sent M-Train's number.

He slammed down the phone and let out a deep sigh.

Anna piped up from her cube, "What's going on over there, Hazer? Everything okay?"

*How does she know?* He wondered. "No," he said out loud. "Mark wants me to call M-Train. Actually, Celine wants me to call her."

"Good! That's what you need to do," she scolded.

His attitude was back. "What? Are you my priest now?"

"Somebody's got to keep you in line."

"Ugh," he groaned while rubbing his temples.

He contemplated how to do this. If he sent her a text, she would certainly reply and start a conversation he did not want. If he called her and she answered, he would have to talk to her which was even worse, but if he called from his work line, then maybe she would not recognize the phone number and wouldn't answer.

*Yes! That's the solution.*

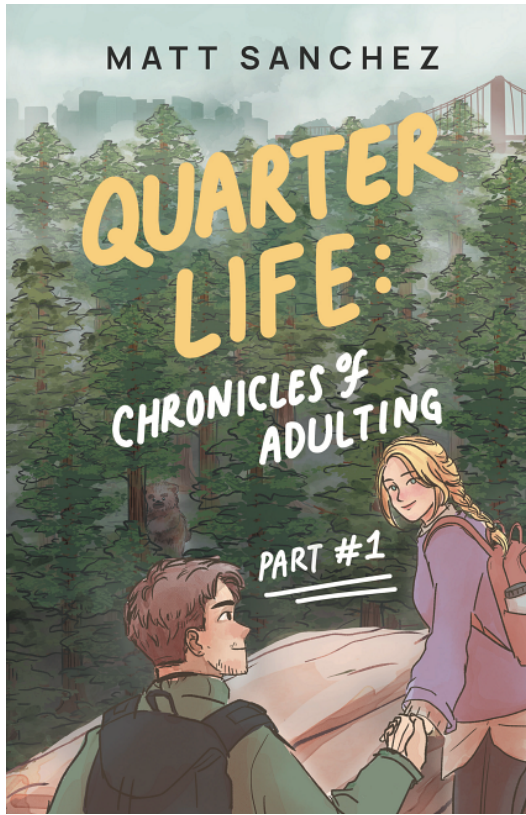
He took a deep breath and dialed the number. It went to voicemail.

*Yes! Yes! Yes!*

Fist Pump! Fist Pump! Fist Pump! The other internal sales geeks looked over and thought he had gotten a financial advisor to place a big trade. He said in a monotone voice, "Hi M... Melissa, this is Haze. Good seeing you the other night. Sorry we missed each other Sunday morning. Maybe I'll see you again sometime." Click.

Anna looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

“Don’t hate. Don’t judge,” he said with a smile of relief. “Time for me to go.” He logged off his computer and scurried out of the office earlier than he was supposed to, but before M-Train could call back.



*Relate to the humor of this modern coming-of-age comedy that centers on a 24-year-old nicknamed as Haze. With the help of his friends, he tackles the challenges of adulthood in California while searching for his life's purpose.*

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