



## Chapter Two: Meet Dean Marvin Blankenship

Associate Dean Marvin Blankenship sat lodged behind a desk, an itchy mound of balding flesh, restrained malevolence, and administrative brusqueness. He quaked with a frenzied, irritated energy, juggling two cell phones while talking at the speaker of a desk phone. "There's no room in that class even if his father is a guest lecturer....good for him...No, that's it."

Blankenship motioned for Miles to enter and close the door. The dean, spreading his portly, fidgety form so that openings bulged between the buttons of his rumpled shirt, set the devices aside and ended the call. He reached for Miles' academic folder. After a brief glance at it, he gave Miles a withering glare.

"Mr. Chaplin, you're a fifth-year super senior in this university," Dean Blankenship's eyes locked with Miles'. "We no longer allow that."

"I've learned a great deal," Miles parried, his voice tinged with rebellion.

Exasperated by the contents of Miles's academic file, the dean continued, "You began in theoretical physics, excelled, and then... you switched to evolutionary biology towards the end of your second semester as a sophomore, essentially starting from scratch. Despite our reservations, we granted the change and urged you to focus."



"And then, against our objections, as a junior you switched to cultural anthropology. Do you recall that we required that you only register for core classes?" the dean continued, flipping through the papers.

Miles remained silent, disliking the lecture, the recounting of his academic history, and the implication that changing majors was a misstep. Though he bristled internally, he withheld a retort.

"Now, as a senior year super senior, you want to start all over?" The dean stared intently. "From the very beginning?"

"Well, it's not from the beginning," Miles began to explain.

"And it's not exactly a career move, is it?" The dean's eruption of sarcasm was unexpected. It quickly overwhelmed and permeated Miles' already muddled mind. "You want to learn how to dig in the dirt?" The Dean stared into Miles' eyes.

"It's archaeology," Miles defended with chastened nobility.

"Mr. Chaplin, you've accumulated enough credits to graduate, yet you lack a major. There's no degree for evading the real world... You have great potential," Blankenship's phones buzzed and beeped, exacerbating his irritation.

"I've heard that a couple of times, here and..." Miles faltered, his words trailing off.



Blankenship took a dramatic inhale, and laid down the law. "But you have to do something, Mr. Chaplin. Not just ponder, observe, or avoid it. Not just spend your time getting stoned."

"Stoned? What I do in my free time—" Miles started.

"There's no such thing as free time anymore," the dean coldly interjected. "Musing, pondering, endless contemplation, novel theories, living in your head... It's not genuine education or curiosity; it's a stubborn character flaw."

"I like ideas..." Miles interjected.

"Ideas?" Dean Blankenship exhaled dramatically with frustration. "Thinking that your ideas are worthy of endless rumination is the epitome of your recalcitrant self-obsessed generation. And the generation before yours...for that matter."

"They are good ideas," Miles persisted.

"Even so-called philosophers must explain their "good" ideas, subject them to scrutiny, and put them out into the world in some form or another," the dean expounded caustically. Clearly, he was no fan of philosophers. "Publish something, anything."

"Why?" Miles questioned.

Incredulous, the Dean stared at him. "To find direction, to secure a job, to contribute to society... to do something tangible," Blankenship's frustration overflowed into his revealing his bottom line. "To repay your student loans... to this university."

The dean paused, barely restraining himself from saying something vastly inappropriate. For Miles, the break in decorum was refreshing as a slap in the face, until the bitter sting of its brutality hit him. Although he should not have been surprised, in fact Miles felt a shock of desperation when he understood that he was being kicked out, excluded, and cast off as unworthy of attention or effort. Even though mentally he had been aware of it, his emotions were raw and unprepared. A disconcerting whirlwind of dizziness weakened him.

"Well..." Miles stumbled.

"Do you have anything else to say?" The dean's voice demanded. "Anything that will change my mind?" The dean's cell phones buzzed, the desk phone rang, and notifications clamored for attention.

"Probably not..." Miles sweetly responded.

Exasperated, Blankenship glanced at the wall clock. " We have an excellent reputation, especially for a state university. But all this infrastructure isn't here simply for Mr. Chaplin to develop his personal opinions, especially when, as far as I can tell, they lack a legitimate basis within our curriculum. You haven't exactly made many friends here, especially among the faculty, for whatever reason."

Miles fell quiet.



"Our capacity is limited, and we provide a public service by helping young people find their place in the world, their life's work."

Miles's mind grew clear and calm. "Or maybe their work life. An oxymoron, with an emphasis on 'moron.'" Miles stood defiant.

Blankenship remained unamused. Having allowed Miles to speak his mind, the dean made his decision. "I will interpret your request to change your major to archaeology in your second super senior year as a request for some time off. I am changing your status to inactive, which puts a hold on your account. No more loans. You cannot enroll in classes until you figure this out."

Miles's brain understood. His emotions felt stupidly slow to catch on. They were not yet ready. They froze. His emotions were not ready to give up, and started to search for alternatives until suddenly they collapsed. There were no alternatives. That is why he was there.

He felt a wave of sadness, pain, and grief flood him. As his emotions caught up to his mind, they both recognized that this part of his life was over. His brain magnified his emotions, and his emotions amplified his desperate thoughts. It was over. His sinking emotions were the final signal of his defeat.

Physically, his character steadied itself and tried to stand firm, but he felt utterly broken and weak. His body tensed to preserve his dignity enough to escape the dean's presence, but strangely he stood there.

He was not done. He was not yet ready to leave. With the recognition that his formal education opportunities were on hold or over forever, he revealed a withheld request that he had not really voiced to himself. "Does that mean I can't participate in Dr. Yawney's dig?"

"You can do whatever you like outside this campus. I can't seem to get through to you," the dean replied.

"Oh, you've gotten through," Miles noted, still standing there.

The dean noticed that Miles was not yet moving to leave. The dean surveyed his continued recalcitrance.

"Always a clever retort..." Dean Blankenship observed coolly. "I should not say this, but I fear that you lack direction, that you are spoiled and oppositional. You're wasting time and money...but I did not mean it to sound personal."

"Sound Personal?" Miles repeated awkwardly.

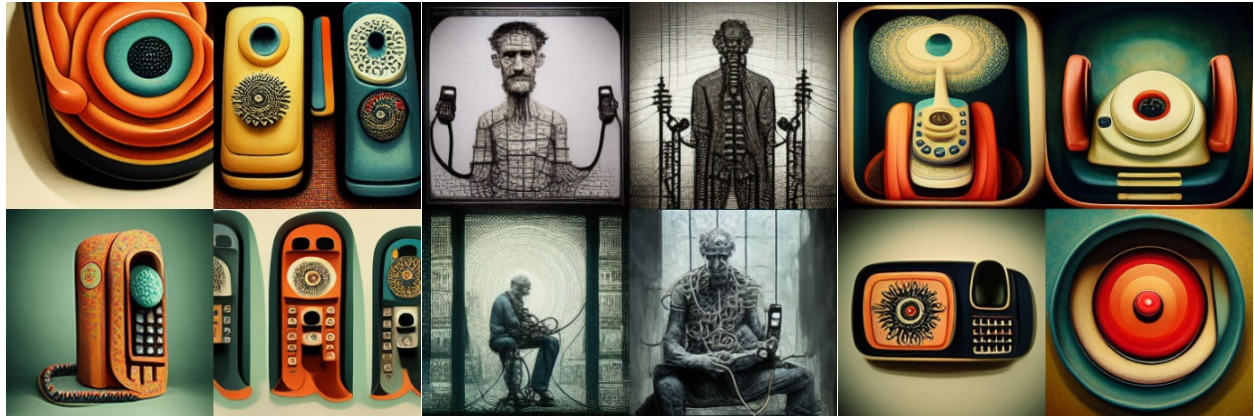
"Sound personal," the Dean said, "That's the standard for us as administrators. The way it sounds. It was personal to you, but I did not mean for it to sound personal to you," he clarified, twisting the knife further, for no reason.

"Ok..." Miles remarked uncomprehendingly.

"You could have made a significant contribution to this university, but you chose otherwise."

"I don't know what you mean, but Ok..." Miles felt he had to say something. "Bye."





As Miles left the office, the dean answered the persistently ringing desk phone, exasperated and fatigued. "Yes, what now? Send another one in then..."