

David Fredrichs meets Athena and Minerva

David Fredrichs entered the Yale Student Union building a little after 8 in the morning. He was bundled up against the sharp, cold air of a Connecticut February morning; at least it wasn't snowing. Immediately, he began pulling off his gloves, wool hat, and coat; it was far too warm in the Union to wear all of that for very long. He found an empty hook on the rack and hung it all up, and there was an empty spot on the shelf for his books. He had come in for a coffee to warm up before his 9 o'clock class; not many people were about, so he did not have a long wait. He dumped a packet of sugar into his coffee, stirred it, and brought it to his lips to blow on it to cool it off some. As he did so, he let his gaze travel the room, searching for anyone he knew. He made almost a complete sweep and had begun to take his first sip of coffee when he noticed two girls at a far corner table. What he saw caused a sharp intake of breath, which unfortunately coincided with his first sip. The result was a mouthful of hot coffee, which immediately tried to go down his windpipe instead of his throat. The subsequent coughing and sputtering were fairly impressive, and several people looked over. David managed to regain some control of his breathing in a few minutes, though his eyes were watering and his mouth was numb. He scrubbed at his eyes and took a deep breath. "*Oh, yeah, that was super cool,*" he thought.

Finally, somewhat stable, he looked back at the two girls he had seen earlier. They were still there and did not appear to have noticed his theatrics. He tried to study them without obviously staring, which was impossible. They each were engrossed in a book, and the more he watched, the more certain he became. There, not 50 feet away, calmly reading and drinking coffee, were the two most famous college-aged women, maybe the most famous women period, on the planet—Athena and Minerva. Either that or they were true doppelgangers. David was a huge fan of both of them; he followed them on social media, tried to keep pace with their reading list and work-out schedules, and had studied every image of them. He was certain it was actually them, incredulous, but certain. His thoughts ran wild. "*What on earth are they doing here? They're Harvard, not Yale. Am I dreaming? No, hot coffee proved I'm awake. So now what? Just walk over, plop down in a chair, and say hi? Do I have the balls to do that? What if it isn't them? But what if it is? Okay, take it easy.*" He took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. Then he took a sip of coffee and tried to relax. The two women had not looked up. "*Okay, David, it's now or never. They had enough guts to fight off those men in Rome, surely you have enough to go talk to them.*" With that, he snapped the plastic lid onto his coffee cup, squared his shoulders, and began what felt like the longest walk of his life.

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"Don't look now, but the fish has finally found his balls and is on his way," Minerva said as she sipped coffee.

"Finally, is right. Though with all that coughing earlier, I suppose it's a miracle he can walk at all," replied Athena.

They had been sitting at the table in the Student Union since 0700. Their security was present, but across the room. They had risen early, done a three-mile run, showered and changed, and had been the first ones in the door as it opened. Quite a few people had come and gone in the past hour; several had stared at them, but no one had approached. The only person to speak to them so far had been the barista at the coffee bar. Now it looked like they might have their first candidate.

Minerva surreptitiously studied the boy approaching. He looked like he could be either a sophomore or a junior. He was probably six feet tall, broad-shouldered, a football player, or maybe crew. He had tousled hair, light brown, almost blonde, square jaw, good build. He walked toward them fairly confidently, but she could tell there was the tiniest bit of hesitation, probably still not sure of their identities. As he neared the table, he appeared to make up his mind, and a determined look came over his face. She forced back a grin.

David strode the last few feet to the table. "Good morning, ladies. Welcome to Yale. May I sit?"

Athena and Minerva took their time about looking up. They both fixed their gaze directly on his eyes. Neither spoke. After about five seconds, which felt to David like five years, Athena waved her hand at an empty chair, inviting him to sit. He did so; they looked at him in silence, waiting for him to make the first move.

David coughed into his hand. "Ahem. I'm David Fredrichs, sophomore. And you are Athena and Minerva, or two actors and I'm on some horrible reality show for YouTube."

The women smiled. "No, no YouTube show, David. *Nous sommes ici, vraiment,*" replied Minerva.

"Oh, thank God," said David. "I was almost certain, but you must admit, the odds of you being here as I came in for coffee are rather astronomical. Actually, they are astronomical for you being in Connecticut, much less at this table."

Athena smiled again. "Well, we have to be somewhere, why not here?"

David laughed. "Very true, but why are you here? New Haven in February is not exactly a tourist spot."

"No," said Minerva. "We were down in Boston, where our parents live. We came to the States after Christmas. Harvard and Yale have always been such rivals; we had a few free days so we thought we would come scout the enemy camp."

David chuckled. "Good one. Next time come in May, much nicer. Say, did you do your run already today? You usually run early; I know. I have to admit I skipped today; the sidewalks and the outdoor track have four feet of snow on them, and the indoor track is too far from my dorm."

"We rose at 0530 and ran 3 miles," said Athena. "We used the street; no one was out, so we had it to ourselves."

David stared at them. "Well, now I feel like a total loser. Big tough lacrosse player and I wimp out. Well, that stops." He sipped his coffee and leaned forward. "Look, I'm going to play it straight. I could beat around the bush, but that would be pointless." He paused. "I admire you two. I follow everything you post; I read, or try to, everything you read. I'm in a beginner Latin class. I work out a lot, this morning was an anomaly. I don't have anyone to teach me unarmed combat,

which isn't the usual karate, but I'm looking. I think General Ross must be the most amazing person ever and you two are with him every day. I would give everything I own for just a week with him." He stopped and took a deep breath. "Whoa. Geeked out a little there, didn't I? Geez, I must sound like an idiot."

Athena and Minerva glanced at each other, then they turned to David and smiled. "No, you don't sound like an idiot," said Minerva. "Maybe a little scattershot. But why do you admire us? Why are you trying to do everything we do? Why is the General so amazing? We don't spend much time with people our own age, you see."

David snorted. "Ha! No, you hang around with dukes and princesses and Jack Munster. Look, a buddy of mine is at Harvard. He was at the speech you gave, and he told me about it, sent me a cellphone video someone recorded. Although the audio wasn't the best, that confirmed what I had already determined from watching you on TV. You are not like any other college girls I've ever met. Hell, you're not like *anyone* I've ever met. Everything I've heard says that less than a year ago you were regular students, but four months after starting with General Ross you are killing bad guys in Rome with your bare hands. You get on TV and give speeches to thousands of people like it's no big deal. You have millions of followers, and you engage with them, us. You are studying more than I will my entire time here, and important things at that, not this drivel we get. And General Ross? Are you kidding? A 60-year-old man attacking with a ballpoint pen? My father was in the army; he told me men like that are very rare. Most people just go with the flow; General Ross is one of those who make the flow go his way. So, if I can't be there with him, I'll do the best I can by following along with everything you do."

"That was quite a speech," said Athena. "I do like the flow thing. I will be sure to pass it on to General Ross—he loves a good aphorism. Now, you said you get drivel here. Expound, please. If you are dissatisfied, why are you here?"

David sipped his coffee and tried to order his thoughts. "As for why I am here, I suppose it's like you said, I have to be somewhere. I had planned to become a lawyer, and for that, you need a degree. Now I'm not so sure about the lawyer thing. As for the other, well, once you get a dose of Homer, Plato, Sowell, and Hayek, it's difficult to listen to professors ranting about privilege. Like they aren't the most privileged nincompoops on the planet. My grades have suffered because I stopped being such a parrot. I would not mind it so much if they would accept that a different point of view *might* exist and *might* have some merit. One of them was babbling about how dogmatic the Puritans were, totally ignoring the irony of his own dogmatism."

Athena and Minerva glanced at each other. Bingo.

"I see," said Minerva. "Well, I need to hit the head. Athena?" She stood.

"*Moi aussi*," said Athena. "Here, David, please give us your email and phone number. Perhaps we'll chat again." She stood as well.

David scrambled to his feet. "Oh, that would be awesome! Just meeting you has been the thrill of a lifetime, although I'm sure you hear that all the time. Thank you for talking with me."

"It was a pleasure, David," said Minerva. "Now write your info on this paper. *Au revoir*." She and Athena walked away, leaving a very happy David Fredrichs.