

## Chapter 1: The Chapter About Batten Hall

Batten Hall is named after William Henry Batten III, a dentist from Ohio who invented some kind of microwavable meal in the 1970s, which made him incredibly rich. He donated some of his sizable fortune to help fund the construction of Batten Hall, although to this day his connection with the University itself is still a mystery. Batten Hall is located on the farthest point on campus from the main green. It doesn't have any subject focus, but at least once a year you'll have a random class located in Batten and have to make the half hour trek up there. The building is most famous, however, for its disappearing café.

The debate about Batten Hall's disappearing café is an ongoing one. Most are of the opinion that it doesn't exist. The rumor is that whenever you find yourself most lost in Batten (the building is also famous for its complex layout) the café will appear. You won't find it if you're looking for it, but if you are truly and completely lost the café will reveal itself to you.

I first found myself truly and completely lost in Batten Hall the fall of my freshman year. I was looking for some vague general education class that I can't remember the name of now. Instead, I stumbled upon the disappearing café. This was well before I had heard any of the rumors of the café, so I only thought that it was a little strange to have a café located so deep in a building. At this point I had completely given up on finding my class so I walked up to the sole person working there. This was how I met Aaron.

At the time, Aaron was a twenty-something super senior who had been at the university for as long as anyone could remember. The question of whether he was

actually enrolled in any classes was well debated. He had jet black hair, multiple piercings, and an impressive semi-ironic collection of 80s British punk rock on vinyl. By university standards he was way cool.

“Hi, can I get a vanilla chai latte?” I asked. He gave me a very long look.

“You’re kidding right?” he said. I pointed to the glowing Starbucks logo to his left.

“It says you sell Starbucks,” I said. There was no menu posted.

“We sell coffee,” he said.

“Okay, then can I have a mocha latte?”

“I said we sell coffee.”

“A latte is coffee.” I was getting frustrated.

“Coffee. Black. That’s it.”

“What kind of café only sells black coffee? It’s a café, not a depressing office kitchen.”

“You’re a freshman, aren’t you?” he said. I was offended. I liked to think that I usually passed as a sophomore, or junior even. One time someone had even mistaken me for a senior.

“I’m a sophomore,” I lied.

“Well you’ve obviously never heard of the Batten Hall café. This is the *Batten Hall café*,” he said it like it was supposed to mean something. I just looked at him blankly.

“Right, it’s a café, and I want a latte,” I said.

He put his head in his hands. “Man, kid, you have no idea how lucky you are. What’s your name?”

“Eric.”

“Right, Eric, I’m just going to make you a normal black coffee, okay? None of that hippie shit.” He turned away to go make the coffee.

“How is a latte ‘hippie shit’?” I muttered under my breath. If Aaron heard me, he didn’t respond. He was concentrating on making the coffee. I tapped my foot and tried to crane my neck to see what he was doing but couldn’t see anything. Finally he turned around and handed me the cup.

“That’ll be \$2.85,” he said.

“What!” I exclaimed, “You’re charging me? You didn’t even make what I ordered.”

He shrugged. “Business is business.” I dug out my wallet and handed him five dollars.

“Pleasure doing business with you,” he said as he handed me back my change. I grumbled something under my breath and sat down at one of the three small tables. There was no point in trying to find my class this late so I resolved to do some homework and try to enjoy the coffee. I took a grudging sip and my eyes widened. I took another sip just to be sure. It was the most delicious thing I had ever tasted. Deep, rich, subtly sweet yet smoky. I felt as though I had never tasted coffee before. All those years and years of overly complex Starbucks orders. Was this what coffee was supposed to taste like?

“This is delicious!” I exclaimed to Aaron. He smirked.

“Told you.”

“Thank you,” I said, taking another sip. I finished the rest of my coffee in silence, not bothering to open up my laptop and do work. I savored each mouthful, letting the luxuriously bitter taste of it linger on my tongue before taking my next sip. I could feel the warmth of it filling my chest. To this day, I still remember that very first Batten Hall café coffee. It was the best cup of coffee I’ve ever had.

It would be another few weeks before I found the disappearing café again. After that first cup I tried to find it again many times but with no luck. I spent entire afternoons in Batten Hall, desperately looking for that little café, with no success. I was just about to give up for good when luckily (or unluckily, depending on how you interpret the future events of this story) I found Aaron.

He was walking along the main green. At the time I assumed he was on his way to class, but now I’m certain that was untrue. I didn’t know his name, but I ran up to him instantly.

“Hey, hey!” I called, desperately waving my arms. Only a very good cup of coffee could have made me behave this way. He turned to look at me and frowned, no recognition in his eyes.

“You work at the café, right? The Batten Hall café?” I said, panting and out of breath. His eyes widened.

“Keep your voice down!” he said.

“Listen,” I said, “I need to find it.”

He stiffened, his whole demeanor becoming instantly hostile. “Why? What for?” he asked suspiciously.

“That coffee,” I gasped, still not recovered from running over, “That coffee was the best coffee I’ve had in my life.”

He paused, then tilted his head back and let out a roaring laugh. “All right,” he said after regaining his composure, “If that’s your reason then I’ll show you how to find it. I’m Aaron, by the way.”

“Eric.” We shook hands. This was my first real interaction with him. You can say things went either uphill or downhill from there, but either way the events that subsequently occurred were entirely his fault.

My second cup of coffee with Aaron was good, but it wasn’t nearly as good as the first. “Chasing the dragon,” Aaron called it when I told him this. He was leaning with his forearms on the café counter. The more I looked at the café, the plainer it seemed. There was an elaborate looking machine in the back, a display with one stale blueberry muffin, and just the glowing word “CAFÉ” above Aaron’s head, which tinted his skin slightly pink. I squinted into the dark depths of my coffee, realizing something.

“How did we get here?” I looked up at Aaron.

“What do you mean?” he asked, his face betraying nothing.

“Well one minute I was begging you for a cup of coffee,” I said, “and the next minute we’re here.”

“You don’t remember walking here?”

I tried to remember. “No.”

“I’m sure you remember walking here.”

I rubbed my head. “I think... maybe. I don’t know. What is this place?”

Aaron sighed and rubbed a hand across his face. "Freshmen," he muttered.  
"It's the Batten Hall Café."

"So?" I said.

"It's impossible to find, haven't you heard the rumors?"

"No."

"Jesus, kid, don't you have any friends?"

"I have friends," I said, indignant. Roommates counted as friends, right?

Actually I still wasn't sure whether or not mine liked me.

Aaron sighed again. He was acting very world-weary for someone who couldn't be more than 23 years old. 24 years old? Actually, he could be 30. I pushed this question into the back of my mind for later pondering. "Rumor is, you can't find the Batten Hall Café unless you're truly and completely lost. You can't be looking for it," he said.

"But I'm always going to be looking for it!" I said, "This is the best coffee I've ever had! I can't track you down every time I want some."

When I said this Aaron got a weird glimmer in his eye and the corner of his mouth quirked up slightly. "Are you in any clubs?" he asked.

"Well I was trying to join the debate team—"

"So no clubs," Aaron interrupted. I glared at him over my coffee.

"Listen," he said, "would you want to come to a party?" I nearly did a spit take.

"A what?" I said, stunned.

Aaron gave me another one of his exasperated why-are-freshmen-like-this looks. "You know, a party? People, alcohol, dancing?"

I made myself exhale, trying to act cool. "Yeah, duh, I know," I said.

Aaron wrote something down on a piece of paper and handed it to me. It was an address with a road I vaguely recognized as off-campus. "Tonight. You should come."

"What time?" I asked. Aaron rolled his eyes.

"Come, I mean it," his voice had taken on a suddenly serious tone. I wondered if this was what peer pressure felt like.

"Okay," I said. Aaron seemed to relax.

"Finish your coffee," he said, with what could almost be interpreted as a smile.

It wasn't until I was back in my dorm that I realized he hadn't charged me for the coffee. I was twitching nervously, which could be due to either my nervousness about the party or the three cups of coffee I had just drunk. Luke was lying on his bed reading something when I walked into the room.

"Is that... the communist manifesto?" I asked.

Silence. I pattered around the room, opening and closing the drawers of my dresser. It had suddenly occurred to me that I didn't own any clothes. Or at least any clothes worthy of wearing to a party. I stopped. What the hell do you where to a party? I glanced over at Luke. He always managed to look stylish but also like he didn't care. His hair was perfect. And blond. I hated him.

“Hey Luke,” I said, speaking before I could stop myself, “would you want to go to a party?” Luke lifted his head up from the book, showing the first sign of interest in weeks.

“Where?” he asked.

“Some off campus house. Tonight,” I said.

“Girls?” he asked.

“Uh... probably.”

“Okay,” he said.

“Okay? Really?” I said, suddenly overjoyed. I had never really hung out with Luke outside of our room. He lowered his eyebrows as if to say *don't make it lame*. I suppressed the excitement I was feeling and went back to opening and closing drawers.

“Hey Luke,” I said again. He grunted, annoyed. “What do you wear to a party?” He didn't respond. I guessed that would be the end of our interaction. I pulled a plaid shirt from my closet. I picked out a tie, then decided against it. I paced for a bit, then laid down on my bed and waited for night to come.