

Ruminoid

990 words

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The school had a circular area off the parking lot with a flag pole and tasteful flowers, and a plaque sitting flush in a manicured patch of grass. Chris's first thought, getting out of the car, was oh no, there'd been an act of violence here.

Fortunately that wasn't it--in 2023 the school renamed itself LJ Crank Middle School after its beloved late-custodian.

There were two women in the office, one at a high counter and one at a desk, and Chris figured try the simple way first, and he said, "Good morning ladies. I'm here to see principal Haller please?"

The desk one started to pick up the phone to call Haller (Chris had looked up the dude's name) but the counter one asked what this was about.

Chris was tempted to pass himself off as a concerned parent but that wouldn't fly with the counter one, whose brow was starting to furrow --and Holy Smokes, could she actually call the police?

So no, thinking on the fly he said, “I’m the guy from the ACLPF commission? I spoke to Principal Haller in the past. On the issues with the plaque?”

“What about the plaque,” the counter gal said.

“There’s some news on that,” Chris said, “and we’re taking some heat from the media. It’s easier--and frankly more appropriate--that I speak to him directly. It’ll only take a few, and then I can report back to the attorney.”

This time the counter gal walked around the corner and came back with a fit-looking guy in a snazzy blazer.

The guy extended his hand. “Phil,” he said.

“Bill,” Chris said, and that sounded lame, he should have avoided the rhyming business but too late.

Chris pointed with his head and Haller said of course and after you please.

The guy closed the door and Chris said, “Where we at with this? Needless to say I’m more than a little ticked off they sent me out here.”

“I’m sorry?”

“The NAACP thing. They didn’t notify you?”

“Again I apologize, but no, I’m not following.”

“You let a teacher go, correct? For slinging around the N-word as part of a history lesson?”

“That’s true. But we were within our rights. Our district Counsel confirmed as much.”

“I see,” Chris said. “Except, you didn’t consult nationally . . . Now we have a major problem . . . Are you tenured?”

“Am *I*?”

“You.”

“Why of course.”

“Federal, state-wise or regionally?”

“Well certainly California-wise. That’s all that matters.”

“Used to be,” Chris said. “This little stunt you pulled--not sure what the big deal was, why you needed to go there--now we got the *ACLU agreeing* with the NAACP and ACLPF . . . A trifecta on our hands my friend . . . We lucked out, the one in Kentucky, but I can only do so much.”

“Sheesh,” Haller said. “I had no idea.”

Chris paused for effect, trying not to overdo it. “Put it this way. We’ve been harnessing the media, up to this point, on the story . . . Where we’re at--pardon my language--is one step away from all freaking hell breaks loose.”

Chris started taking notes and drawing arrows,

similar to how his therapist did it.

“Well . . .” Haller said, “I’ll certainly need to consult with our Counsel again. ASAP, it’s pretty clear.”

Chris held up his hand. “Don’t use any more abbreviations. We’re all in enough hot water . . . You ever testified before an HPYOO committee?”

“No . . . I can’t say I have.”

“Need to take my word for it,” Chris said. “That’s an experience that can rival prison . . . I can think of two or three off the top of my head, who testified and have never recovered.”

“Oh.”

“So you want to end up there--sure, let your lawyer go to work running his mouth and filing papers . . . It’s not *his* ass in front of the HPYOO folks.”

Haller opened a desk drawer and and Holy Toledo, he had a bottle, or at least a flask--and the son of a gun fills a plastic cup and takes a healthy gulp. Chris wondered if he was going to offer him a drink as well.

“I apologize,” Haller said, not offering that drink, but taking another good shot himself, draining the cup.

“Not at all,” Chris said. “My investigator and me, we put it together. Can you simply re-employ the teacher in question?”

“Likely not,” Haller said, and he was reaching around for more beverage. “What I wish, is that I simply told those fucking parents where to go.”

Guy was doing better now, making more sense, and Chris figured why push the issue--them bringing Marlene back here, which could have built-in lingering issues--just stick her somewhere else.

Chris said, “Phil, there’s a way out of this. Where we can effectively tell the ACLPF, and the HPYOO . . . and the New York Times and the Washington Post as well--all of them--effectively where to go.”

“That’d be good,” Haller said. Kind of a giddy emphasis on the good now.

“So all’s you do,” Chris said, “and start on this as soon as I’m through the door--and don’t come out your office or do anything else until it’s done--all’s it is, you use your contacts, you work the phone, you get the teacher in question another job. Starting tomorrow morning.”

“Where?” Haller said.

“Anywhere. LA Unified, South Bay, even Long Beach. Just keep her out of the rough districts. No South Central for example . . . You know how to handle it.”

“I’ll get on it then, I will,” Haller said.

“Put her quietly back to work,” Chris said. “And thank

God, we'll be dodging a bullet.”

Back in the car Chris figured let Marlene know. He'd met her by the pool and was possibly into her and yeah she lost her job but this was nuts.