

HAVEN



BY
DON

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Curriculum Research & Development Group

Arthur R. King, Jr., Director

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Francis M. Pottenger III, Director, Science Projects

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HAVEN

Introduction

Mrs. Engleberger, the school secretary, sighed and looked for the correction fluid again. It was hard to concentrate with all the noise around her.

She glanced at the closed door, the one with CONFERENCE ROOM painted in black letters on the patterned glass. The patterned glass was, she supposed, so people couldn't see inside. Too bad they couldn't do something about the voices, too. Mrs. Engleberger hoped it wouldn't go on all morning or, heaven forbid, much after noon. She had put her lunch in the conference-room refrigerator again.

She should've known better.

A person could starve to death around here.

She glanced at the door again. It seemed as if the volume had gone up another notch. Of course, that was Mr. Novotny from the school board. You could hear him across the parking lot.

"Exactly what does that mean, 'by any means necessary'?"

"It means whatever I have to do."

The second voice belonged to Mr. Morganfield, the principal. He wasn't shouting. He never shouted, never had to. His voice carried naturally, like summer thunder.

Mr. Morganfield cleared his throat. The door trembled. Mrs. Engleberger smiled slightly.

“A school,” his voice boomed through the door, “should be a place where students and teachers and staff can learn and work free of fear and the threat of violence. And you can rest assured that I am going to see to it that—”

“Violence has many causes, Mr. Morganfield.”

The third voice, the raspy, quick one that interrupted Mr. Morganfield, belonged to Mrs. Lopez, the parent representative.

Mrs. Engleberger frowned. It seemed that Mrs. Lopez was always interrupting *somebody*.

“It’s the streets,” Mrs. Lopez went on. “It’s movies and TV and it’s the economy—”

“The *economy*? Blame it on the economy? Sounds like Marx to me.”

That was Mr. Stefaroni, the other school board member in the meeting. Mr. Stefaroni used to talk a lot about communists. That is, until the Russia thing. Now he doesn’t. Mrs. Engleberger shook her head and typed another line. She wondered what that old TV comedian had to do with the economy anyway, for heaven’s sake. And wasn’t he dead? Maybe Mr. Stefaroni was just confused. Mrs. Lopez did that to people. She looked back at her work, sighed, and reached for the correction fluid.

“What about joblessness, poor housing, the frustrations of people who don’t have any—”

“All of that,” Mr. Morganfield rumbled, interrupting Mrs. Lopez and causing Mrs. Engleberger to smile, “stops at the front door. This is an institute of *learning*, of—”

“What are you going to do?” Mrs. Lopez interrupted again. “Build a moat?”

“As a matter of fact, yes. I have already contracted the job out. There should be a backhoe arriving sometime this morning to start excavating.”

“All contract work is supposed to go out on bid!” Mr. Novotny’s shout rattled the door, causing Mrs. Engleberger to type four Z’s in a row. “I didn’t see any authorization for—”

“I think,” Mrs. Lopez said, “Mr. Morganfield was being facetious.”

Mrs. Engleberger put down the correction fluid and reached for a pencil and her secretary’s pad. She always tried to write down words she didn’t know. To look up later. Especially, she thought, the ones *that* woman used.

“All we are trying to do here,” Mr. Stefaroni said, “is not see a repeat of Friday’s unfortunate incident.”

“You won’t,” Mr. Morganfield rumbled.

Mrs. Engleberger nodded. And, she thought, that’s that. Mr. Morganfield is a man of his word. And that should be the end of the entire discussion, and the meeting too. She glanced up at the clock on the wall and nodded again. Not even the start of the school day yet, and Mr. Morganfield has taken care of everything.

Including, she remembered, her fruit salad. It should be deliciously chilled by lunchtime.

Good for Mr. Morganfield.

“What are you going to do, declare martial law?”

Mrs. Lopez again. “I don’t see any way you can control—”

Mrs. Engleberger wondered how one spelled *facetious*.

“The police assured me they would increase their presence.”

Good for you again, Mr. Morganfield, Mrs. Engleberger thought.

“Well, you can’t have them in the *classrooms*.”

“The incident didn’t occur in a classroom, Mrs. Lopez. It happened in the parking lot, across from the basketball courts. And I assure you—”

“Still. I don’t see by what means—”

“Did you hear from the hospital?”

“The student was off the critical list as of Sunday,” Mr. Morganfield said. “I called them.”

“Could’ve been anybody’s kid,” Mrs. Lopez said.

“Could’ve been mine. Yours.”

“Students with knives,” Mr. Novotny said. “What’s next? Automatic weapons? Assault rifles?”

“Not at *this* school.”

“It’s the breakdown of the family,” Mr. Stefaroni said. “Family values.”

“I don’t want it to be my kid next time.”

“There won’t be a next time.”

“I don’t see how you can prevent—”

“I fully intend to. By any means—”

“Exactly how,” Mr. Stefaroni interrupted both Mr. Morganfield and the Lopez woman, “can you guarantee that—”

“As I said, by any means necessary.”

“What are you going to do, search the kids when they—”

“If I have to, Mrs. Lopez, I will.”

“That’s unconstitutional,” Mrs. Lopez snapped. “The ACLU—”

“Communists,” Mr. Stefaroni said.

And then they were all shouting again. Mrs. Engleberger looked at the clock. Actually, she thought, a room-temperature salad wasn’t all that bad. Preferable at times. Especially since the grapes sometimes got so cold they hurt a person’s

teeth. Tomorrow she'd—Mr. Novotny's voice rose above the others, and then Mr. Morganfield actually raised *his*.

When Mrs. Engleberger recovered, she looked down at the last line she typed and saw there were T's all the way across the page. She sighed and wondered if there was another bottle of correction fluid in the supply cabinet.