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## Open a Window

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# Open a Window

Michael Collofello

The secretary's desk intercom sprang to life, "You can send in Miss Brown, Anna."

"Assistant Principal Oswald will see you, now, Jennifer."

"Oh, um, thank you, Miss Nannina."

Jennifer walked into the Assistant Principal's office. "Hello, Jennifer. Please, have a seat."

"Um, thank you, Mr. Oswald," she said, sitting in a chair across his desk.

"Well, I guess you had some excitement in class today, huh?"

"Yes, sir, but I hope Mr. Daniels is O.K., I don't want to say anything that will get him into trouble."

"Mr. Daniels is just fine. We just need to sort out what happened."

"Did Mr. Daniels get arrested? That's what Jacob Trumble was saying out in Miss Nannina's office. He said that they had to arrest Mr. Daniels because he is a threat to the students."

"Mr. Daniels did not get arrested. He's in with Principal Booth right now giving his story of what happened. I'm sure everything is going to be just fine. Now, why don't you tell me what happened?"

"Um, O.K. But I just want to say that I think Mr. Daniels was just having a bad day. He's a very good teacher and I'd hate for anything bad to happen to him."

"I agree, he is a wonderful teacher and also a very nice man. I'm sure everything is going to turn out just fine. Now, let's talk about today."

"Um, well, O.K. Well, you know how it's really hot today? I mean, it's like, especially hot for March, right? And I don't know if you realize this, but it's even hotter in the classroom."

"Mmm-hm, it certainly is an unusually warm spring day. Go on."

"Um, yeah, so, anyway, there was a quiz scheduled for today, it was a 10 question quiz on the Civil War, and Jacob Trumble asked if we could skip it because it was so hot and everything. He was very rude about it too, he didn't even raise his hand, he just blurted it out. But Mr. Daniels informed him that despite the heat, we would not be skipping the quiz. He said that he could open the windows and that if we all sat still it would not be so hot. Then Jacob said something to some of his friends in the back, it sounded like a cuss word, I don't really know, but Mr. Daniels told him to come sit up in the front row and he wound up sitting right next to me. Usually, people don't sit in the front unless they have to, but I always sit up there because then I can hear the teacher more clearly and I can participate in class more easily. I actually sit right next to Mr. Daniels' desk. Jacob Trumble always sits in back, and I doubt he even studied for the Civil War quiz."

"That's fine, Jennifer, but let's try to focus on the incident with the window for now."

"Oh, right. Well, Mr. Daniels handed out the quizzes and, like he said, he started to open the windows but when he got to the window that was near my seat, he

couldn't open it, it must have been jammed or something. I had already started on my quiz, but I noticed him struggle a little with the window and then he seemed to give up and he went and sat down at his desk. I didn't like having Jacob next to me because he kept looking at me, which was very distracting, and I think he was trying to cheat on the quiz. I was going to say something to Mr. Daniels but as I looked over to him, he was getting up and going back to the jammed window. He, um...he tried the window again, but it just wouldn't budge and I was trying to focus on my quiz but he was right next to me and um...he was saying something to himself, but I don't know what he said, he was just, um, mumbling. He was also, uh, perspiring a bit, but it was very hot and he was struggling with that window, after all. Jacob said something rude like 'what stinks?' or something like that and Mr. Daniels turned and looked at us and I guess I must have been staring because he apologized and told me to get back to my quiz and then he sat down at his desk. About five minutes later, he tried the window one more time and that's when everything went crazy."

"Now, Jennifer, for this next part, it's important that you tell me precisely what you saw happen, O.K.?"

"Um, O.K., but there's really not much to tell. Mr. Daniels took the chair from the seat behind me (no one was sitting there) and brought it over to the window where he stood on it. I think he must have been looking for a lock or something on top of the window. I don't know if he found anything but he got down from the chair and tried to force the window open again. He was really struggling and grunting and he was also, um, perspiring quite a bit. Then he, uh... he said a cuss word and..."

"What did he say?"

"He said the 'F word.' Do you know what I mean? I'd rather not say it, if that's O.K."

"The 'F' word is fine."

"Um, so then Mr. Daniels said, uh, 'effing window' and then he picked up the chair that he had pulled over there and smashed it into the window and I guess I got startled because that's when I screamed. After I screamed, I just sat in my chair looking at Mr. Daniels who was holding the chair and looking out the broken window. Jacob Trumble got in front of me and he looked like he was going to try and fight with Mr. Daniels or something. When Mr. Daniels turned around, he looked like he forgot we were all there and gave a very confused glare toward Jacob, who had his fists clenched. Before anything else happened, though, Mr. Mann and you and Principal Booth all came in."

"Hmm, I see. All right, Jennifer, I have one more question for you and I want you to be completely honest, O.K.?"

"Of course."

"Did you at any time feel threatened by or in any kind of danger of Mr. Daniels?"

"Oh, no sir, Assistant Principal Oswald, I only screamed because I was startled. Like I said, I just think Mr. Daniels was having a bad day and it was very hot in that room. I know he would never hurt me, sir."

"Thank you, Jennifer. You can go back to class, now. Mr. Mann will be handling

class for the remainder of the day.”

“Um, thank you, sir. And again, I really hope Mr. Daniels isn’t in trouble.”

“I’m sure everything will be fine, Jennifer.”

“Anna, please send in Mr. Trumble.”

“Jacob, Assistant Principal Oswald will see you now.”

Jacob Trumble was watching Jennifer Brown leave the secretary’s office (he was certain she glanced back at him just before she went through the door) and he did not hear Miss Nannia the first time.

“Mr. Trumble,” she said more forcefully. “Assistant Principal Oswald will see you now.”

“Huh? Oh, right.” Jacob got up and went into the Assistant Principal’s office.

“Hello Jacob. Please have a seat.”

He sat down almost too comfortably. “You can call me Jake.”

“Hmm, O.K. Jake,” he said, “you obviously know that we’re here to discuss the incident in the classroom today. I’ve already spoken to Jennifer Brown and got her account of the days events concerning Mr. Daniels.”

“Yeah, Jennifer Brown-nose was out there all worried about Daniels. I’m sure she probably told you he was just having a bad day or something. I swear, she’s totally in love with the guy. You know he’s a drunk, right? Hey, did you guys have him arrested?”

Assistant Principal Oswald removed his glasses, closed his eyes and squeezed the thin area above his nose, “Look, Jake, I’m going to have to insist that you keep your opinions and comments to yourself. Mr. Daniels did not get arrested,” he replaced his glasses and looked at Jacob Trumble, “he’s in talking to Principal Booth right now. I’d really appreciate your cooperation so that we can determine what happened in the classroom today. I just want to hear your account of what occurred, O.K.?”

“Yeah, yeah, that’s cool. I didn’t mean to upset you or anything. It was just crazy, what happened today, that’s all. Daniels totally lost his mind. It was freaky but I guess it was also pretty cool, ya know?”

“That’s fine. Just tell me what happened and please refer to your teacher as Mister Daniels, O.K.?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, sorry about that,” he responded, “so, where do you want me to start?”

“Why don’t you start from when you got into class.”

“Um, yeah, all right...well, first of all it’s hot as hell in that room.”

“Jacob, please watch your language.”

“Oh, um, sorry, but I mean it. I really think that that classroom must be as hot as it is in Hell. Seriously.”

“Fine. I understand that it was very warm in the classroom.”

“No. Not ‘warm,’ hot.”

“Understood. Continue please.”

“Well, because it was so hot, I asked Daniels...I mean Mr. Daniels, if we could skip the quiz. It’s not that I was trying to get out of taking a quiz, but you know how hard it is to think when it’s really hot? Anyways, I guess I said something to upset him because he make me sit up front by Jennifer Brown-nose.”

“Please refer to Miss Brown as ‘Jennifer.’ I’ve already asked you to keep your comments to your self.”

“Oh, yeah, sorry, it’s just...everybody calls her Jennifer Brown-nose, that’s all. Anyways, so I’m up there in the front row, right next to Jennifer and in front of Mr. Daniels’ desk and I’m trying to take the quiz but it’s real hard because it’s so freakin’ hot and I’m also distracted by um, Mr. Daniels trying to open the window. Not only is he struggling trying to get it open, he also starts sweating like crazy and that’s why I know he’s a drunk because he smells like...ya know, like alcohol or something.”

“Jake, different people have different body odors. Perhaps Mr. Daniels has a unique scent that you confused for alcohol.”

“No,” Jake said without humor, “I know this smell. It’s the smell of a drunk.”

Assistant Principle Oswald softened his voice, “O.K., Jake, let’s move on. What else happened?”

“Yeah, so, he tries to open the window a couple of times and I don’t think anyone was working on the quiz because we were all watching him. At one point he even cussed, he said ‘goddamn window’. He said it pretty quietly but not quiet enough, ya know. So, like the third or fourth time he’s trying to open the window, he drags a chair over there and checks if it’s locked. Then he tried to open it one more time and after that he totally lost it and smashed the chair through the window.”

“O.K., slow down. Explain exactly what happened at that point.”

“All right, um, after he climbed down from the chair, he tried to force it open again. I thought he unlocked it or something but apparently he didn’t. He was breathing heavy and sweating like a pig and staring at the window. Then he picked up the chair and yelled ‘fucking window!’ and smashed it open. That’s it.”

“How did the other students react? I understand Jennifer Brown screamed, right?”

“Yeah, she let out a scream and a lot of the kids headed toward the door.”

“What did you do, Jake? Jennifer says you got between her and Mr. Daniels?”

“Yeah. I guess I did.”

“Why, Jake? Jennifer said that you looked like you were prepared to fight with Mr. Daniels. Did you feel threatened or in any kind of danger?”

“No. I mean, not really...I wasn’t afraid or anything.”

“So why were you prepared to fight? You realize that if you would’ve struck Mr. Daniels, you would be in very serious trouble right now.”

“Yeah, I know, it’s just...like I said, I could tell he was a drunk and I guess I thought he might try to hit Jennifer or something. So, I figured if he was gonna do that, then he could just hit me instead, or try to at least. But when he turned around and looked at me, I realized that he wasn’t gonna hurt anybody, so... no big deal, ya know?”

“Jake, why did you think Mr. Daniels might hit Jennifer?”

“Because,” Jake was looking down now, hiding the tears in his eyes from the Assistant Principal, “sometimes drunks hit people, ya know?”

For a moment, Assistant Principal Oswald said nothing, then, “Thank you, Jake, you’ve been very helpful, and I think what you did today was very brave.”

“Yeah, whatever,” Jake sat up straight and rubbed his eyes, “for the record, I don’t

think Daniels is a bad guy, he's just got a drinking problem, that's all."

"I appreciate your perspective, Jake. Do you need some time to collect yourself?"

"No, I'm cool."

"O.K. then, why don't you head on back to class, Mr. Mann will be finishing off the day."

"For real," Jake stood up, "sweet, Guy is so cool. Well, take it easy." He turned and walked toward the door.."

Assistant Principle Oswald picked up his phone and pressed a button on the phone's keypad which caused a light to flash on Principle Booth's phone. Principle Booth picked up the line, "Hey, Harvey, how's it going?"

"Hey, John, I just finished with the two students. Seems there was quite a scene in there and believe it or not, it could have been a lot worse than it was. All in all, though, it looks like everything should be O.K."

"I'm glad to hear that it went well, but I'm not ready to be too optimistic just yet. We still have some headaches to face."

"Yeah, I know. Actually, I've got another issue to discuss with you unrelated to this mess with Jack. It has to do with Jacob Trumble."

"Great. What has Mr. Trumble done this time?"

"No, nothing like that. This is something with his home life. I think we might have a domestic violence issue here."

"Jesus. Yeah, all right. I'm just finishing with Jack, I'll call you when I'm through and we'll try to get this all sorted out."

"It's gonna be a long night, John."

"Yeah, yeah, I'll talk to you soon."

Principle Booth hung up the phone. "That was Harvey. He just finished interviewing the students."

"What'd he say? What's up with Jake Trumble? I don't know what that kid claims I did, but he's lying. You know he is a problem student."

"Relax, Jack, the situation with Jacob Trumble has nothing to do with your... situation."

"Are you sure? After I, uh... broke the window, I turned around and I thought the boy was going to attack me. I wouldn't put it past him to make something up about me."

"No, from what Harvey said, the students' account of what happened seems to look good for you. The Trumble issue is something unrelated."

"Sure, sure, all right, So what happens now, John?"

Principle Booth sat back in his chair and stared across at Jack, "What is going to happen now, Jack, is that you are going to take a little time off. Today is Friday, which works out nicely because you are going to take the next two weeks off, which will back up to spring break, giving you a total of three weeks to get yourself in order. your two weeks will be a suspension, without pay, but you will receive your holiday pay for the break..."

"Jesus Christ, John, I can't go two weeks with you pay. Can't we work something out?"

“Work something out?!” He sat up straight, almost rising out of his chair, “You’re lucky you still have a job, Jack, and I’m not even sure you will when all is said and done. As it is; I have to write a letter to the school board explaining that you’ve been under a great deal of stress in your personal life, which I don’t even know if that’s true or not; either I or Assistant Principle Oswald will have to meet with any parents who want an explanation, most certainly Jennifer Brown’s parents will; and on top of all that, because of this incident, Lincoln-Kennedy High’s five-year accident-free run has come to an end!” Principle Booth took a deep breath, held it, and exhaled heavily, “That is what we’ve ‘worked out’, Jack. You get to take three weeks to get your shit together, got it?”

Jack’s eyebrows slanted inward toward his nose. His shoulders sagged and he stared at the paperweight of a scorpion encased in clear plastic on Principle Booth’s desk. He looked up to find the principle staring angrily at him. “Yeah, O.K., John, I get it. I’m sorry, man; it’s been a helluva day. I just...I need a...I need a vacation or something.”

Principle Booth sat back in his chair and let his eyes relax a little, “You weren’t going to say ‘vacation’ just now; what you meant to say was that you need a drink. What you actually need, though, is help, Jack. You have a problem that you need to acknowledge.” He softened his tone, “Look, I’m saying this as a friend. You’re a good man and a great teacher. I’m pretty sure I’ve saved your ass this time, but there won’t be any second chance. You need to get help and there are programs I can get you into through the school but I can’t force you into it, you have to come to me.”

“John, I’m fine, I appreciate you concern.” He rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hands, “It’s just...like you said...I’ve been dealing with a lot of stress in my personal life, that’s all. Ya know, I think this time off will probably be good for me. I just need a break, that’s all”

Principle Booth looked toward Jack and shook his head very slightly. He looked down at his finger tapping on his desk. He looked up at Jack again and raised his right fist up to his mouth, tapping his lower teeth with an extended knuckle.

Jack broke the silence, “John, I’m fine. Seriously, man. Look, I’ll consider what you’ve said while I’m off and if I feel I’m having a problem, I’ll do something about it, O.K.? But, truthfully, I’ve got it under control.” His eyes darted toward the scorpion, “Anyways, let’s change the subject, who will you get to cover me? Do you have any subs lined up?”

Principal Booth took a deep breath through his nose and then let it out slowly, “Well, for now, it looks like Mr. Mann will cover your class. I’m trying to find a competent sub, but it’s difficult this time of year.”

“Guy?! The gym teacher? You’ve gotta be kidding me. He’s a muscle-headed moron. His biceps are bigger than his brain. Isn’t there anyone else?”

“No there isn’t. To be honest, I’d rather use someone else but Guy will have to do...at least for now.” He looked down at a paper on his desk. “Besides, I’m sure with your class notes, he’ll be do just fine...and the students seem to like him.”

“Well, that’s just wonderful. I’ll have to repair whatever damage he’ll do when I get back.”

Principle Booth stood up and turned to walk around his desk. “Don’t blame Guy for any ‘damage’ that you’ll have to repair. This whole mess is because of you.”

Jack stood up. “Um, yeah, right, I know. I just meant as far as re-teaching the students and...nevermind.”

Jack grabbed his coat and picked up his briefcase. Both men walked toward the door. Jack stood in the doorway and Principle Booth extended his hand, “Jack, I’m going out on a limb for you this time. Please don’t make me regret that decision. Like I said, there won’t be a second chance.”

Jack shook the principle’s hand, “I know John, and thank you. Jack shook the principle’s hand, “I know John, and thank you. And I promise, you won’t regret it.”

“Take care of yourself, Jack”

The painted sign on the large picture window read *Ford’s Tavern*. A little bell above the door jingled as Jack walked through. Inside was a single bar going straight back with around fifteen barstools lined up before it. On the opposite wall there was a jukebox near the entrance followed by three small tables with two chairs at each table. A fan was whirring behind the bar. The place was empty except for the bartender.

“Hey ya, Ruby.”

A large man behind the bar looked toward Jack as he walked in. “Hey Jackie-boy, how’s it goin’?” He smiled at Jack. “Hey, it’s only two o’clock, what’s the deal?”

Jack made his way toward the end of the bar. “Oh, don’t ask. Let’s just say I’m taking a little vacation and I get to start it early.”

“Vacation, huh? Goin’ anywhere special?”

“I’m there my friend, I’m there.” Jack sat down at the last seat at the far end of the bar. He was near the back entrance, which stood open, allowing what little breeze there was in from outside. On both sides of the back door were two home style windows. There were windows like these in his kitchen when Jack was a child. Looking back toward the windows now caused Jack to think of his childhood, sitting at the kitchen counter while his mother would make him a sandwich. On summer days, she would open the windows and let the fresh air flow in. He remembered the way his mother smelled, a mixture of coffee, gardening soil, and the fake-flowery smell of household cleaning products. The windows here were both closed. Jack turned his back on them and faced the bar again.

“So what’s up, bud? You plannin’ to start drinkin’ this early?”

“Hmm? Oh, yeah...yes, that is indeed the plan, my friend. Set me up with a full round. I want a scotch on the rocks, a shot of your worst whiskey, and a tall Miller Lite.”

“Ah, a man who knows what he wants. Anything else?”

Jack tossed a few peanuts into his mouth from the dish at the bar. “Yeah, you got any pizzas? I haven’t eaten anything all day.”

Ruby set the glass of scotch, the bottle of beer and an empty shot glass in front of Jack. He poured into the shot glass from a bottle that read *Black Death* and had a picture of a skull wearing a top hat on it, “I don’t have anything made, it’s too early. But if you want, I can throw one in for ya, it’ll only take about ten minutes.”

Jack took a drink from the glass of scotch while Ruby said this. He set the glass down, “that’d be great, I’ll take the whole thing. Hell, it could be my breakfast, lunch and dinner.” He chuckled at his own joke and took a long drink from the bottle of beer. “Oh, man, does that taste good!”

Ruby smiled, but not with his eyes, “I’ll get right on that, Jackie-boy.” He wiped the bar with his rag and replaced the bottle of Black Death. He turned and walked toward an open doorway.

“Holy Christ is it hot today. You should turn on the air, Rube, I don’t know how you can stand this heat.” Ruby stopped in the doorway and turned toward Jack, “aw, the heat don’t bother me, and you know this is just temporary. I ain’t gonna turn the air on just for a little heat spell. Besides, it’ll cool down by tonight.”

“Yeah, I know, I’m just saying...it’s brutal in here, that’s all.”

Ruby looked at Jack. “I’ll tell ya what, if ya want,” he pointed toward the rear entrance, “go ahead and open a window.”