



**...AND SOME  
IN HELL**

**a novel**

*A story of fear, courage, and the terrifying,  
twisted passages of the human heart...*

**Steve Mamchak**

# *And Some in Hell*

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*Steve Mamchak*

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*To Susan:  
Friend—  
Wife—  
Soul mate mine—  
When I have wept,  
You have tasted salt;  
When you have laughed,  
My sullen heart flew free;  
And when our fingers touched,  
I looked and saw  
One hand  
That led us forward—  
One.*



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# Prologue

## What the Old Man Wrote

*Sorrow is a kind of rust of the soul,  
which every new idea contributes  
in its passage to scour away.*

*It is the putrefaction of  
stagnant life.*

—Samuel Johnson, 1765

ALL OF LIFE IS A SEARCH FOR POWER, and those who have the least of it will do the most to achieve it.

Those who have the least of it will seek for it on torn hands and bloodied knees, if necessary, just to touch it; just to hold it for a second's breath. The helpless infant seeks it with his bawl and screech. The toddler seeks it with his "NO!"—emphatic and enraged. The adolescent seeks it with rebellion; seeks it by crawling, scrambling, inching toward anything—longing to embrace anything—that anyone who has ever loved him has told him, with compassion, is wrong or bad or will cause him harm.

Power lies coiled and steel-spring ready in the bedroom and on the street and in the corners that comprise the lives of all who walk and sweat and scheme.

All of life is a search for power.

Some find it in themselves and some in others. Some find it in their hate and some in love; some in tears and some in laughter.

Some find it in Heaven, and some...just some  
...find it in Hell.

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When the hospital would finally allow visitors, and later when he was released from Cooper Memorial, his story would remain the same. At first, the media listened, some with pad and pen and some with videotape, and there were a very few who tried to get into the small house where his wife, harried and frazzled, answered the door with angry eyes. His story never changed.

Even later, when the media no longer remembered; when the neighbors no longer cared and could only barely recall the mess the vampire press had made of their lawns and traffic patterns—even then he would tell it just the same.

One year later, his gray wife was diagnosed with cancer. A year after that, she rested safely in the ground the priest had blessed. Soon, he had taken to spending afternoons in the cool, dark place where others sat and sipped, as he looked deeply into the amber glass. Even then, the story never changed. It never changed when he sat over the empty shot glass of his pain and repeated it in hazy litany. It never changed when he told it to some hapless newcomer who had the audacity to ask him how he was.

The story never changed.

There came that half-time, locked between the moment when the thought was conceived fitfully and when it was born and screamed and finally spread its wings and rose. Perhaps it was seconds—perhaps days. That time—however long or short—was an infinity of potential. He became a traveler, looking down a thousand side streets leading to a bridge, gleaming steely-cold and hazy in the distant day, beyond which lay a land only God, or so he understood, could fully comprehend.

When they found him—found him with the paper neatly pinned to his shirt—there was no great excitement, and the police had no great trouble determining what had happened. The fingerprints on the revolver were his alone, as was the pistol, purchased legally many years before. The angle of entry, the splatter pattern, and the wound itself were all ample testimony to what had happened. The only thing that gave the authorities even a moment's concern was the last sentence of the four-line note he had affixed to his shirt prior to pulling back the hammer and raising the Smith & Wesson to his head just slightly forward of his right ear.

“I got no reason to go on,” the first sentence proclaimed.

“I hurt a lot,” the next line affirmed.

“HE knows about hurting, HE will forgive me,” read the third.

All this had been written on less than the top two inches of the 5 by 7-inch page of yellow notepaper. The fourth line covered the remainder of the sheet.

The heavily pressed, blue ball-point shouted, “I did not leave the door open I did NOT NO I DID not leave it open I LOCKED IT I put the chain on it and I put the padlock on it I CHAINED THE DOOR I CHAINED THE DOOR as God is my witness I NEVER HURT A KID.”

Later, his daughter came all the way from West Long Branch, New Jersey, and they showed her the note, even though it was speckled with pinpoint of brown that had once been a wet red. She looked up, then—looked up at the officer.

While she was, truly, looking directly at that man, her fingers were slowly crushing the yellow paper, and her ears inside were trying not to hear her mother’s weak and trembling voice tell her—in a terror-filled moment before death—what her father never had. It would not be denied. It was there—the story she had been told of *The Skyler Incident* and the time in the dark and dusty room... the blood that oozed through her father’s fingers... the heavy pipe brought down in hate that had torn and ripped his skin... the screaming... the sweat that flew in silent golden beads as the fist landed... the crack of bone and the death rattle in the throat... the smell of burning flesh...

She continued to crush the yellow paper, and she did her best as well to crush those memories of what had happened in that school a growing number of years behind, even though she doubted if such a thing were possible.

Her moist eyes caught the gleam of the overhead lights.

“His story never changed,” she affirmed. “It just never changed.”

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All of life is a search for power.

Some find it in themselves and some in others. Some find it in their hate and some in love; some in tears and some in laughter.

Some find it in Heaven, and some... just some

...find it in Hell.



# PART ONE

## Incident in Period One

*He that fears not the future may enjoy the present.*

—Thomas Fuller, 1732



# 1

## The Clockwork Day

*Time is that in which all things pass away.*

—Schopenhauer, 1851

### **STARTING WITH MRS. AIRES**

YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND. No one person knew everything that happened. When it was over; when the mourning and the screaming and the accusations and the fury had run their courses... well. When those whose task it was to impose some sort of order on the chaos that had ruled for a while with sharp talons and hot, hot eyes... when they finally got to it... well... well...

It was rather like being called to a museum where an old and very delicate vase, brim-filled with history, culture, and the dreams of a race long dead, had fallen precipitously from its perch and landed on the marble floor, its delicacy showering out in shard upon shard upon tiny slivers and bits. It was rather like being asked to put that vase back together in order that the curators and visitors might understand the fullness of what they were seeing.

It was rather like that.

So, because somebody had to start somewhere, someone decided upon Mrs. Aires in the teachers' lounge.

\*\*\*

Virginia Aires, 'Ginny' to almost everyone but the kids, took a sip of the dark liquid she had picked up in the school's cafeteria and made a face.



*Institutional coffee*, she thought, summing up her opinion of the brew.

She had a few minutes, or so she verified with a glance at the clock on the wall. She was one of only four teachers at Skyler Middle School who did not have a homeroom, and she tried to make the best of that fact. For her, it was a few wonderful moments to correct papers or prep for the coming classes.

“Enjoy it while you can,” one of her colleagues had grinned. “You’ll get a schedule like that maybe once every fifteen to twenty years!”

And, she did enjoy it. She did enjoy the sixteen minutes almost always spent alone in the teachers’ lounge of Skyler Middle School.

On this day, however, the day in question, Mrs. Aires did not prepare tests or make notes for class. Instead, she sat and sipped from a Styrofoam cup and watched the late October sunlight slant its way through the blinds and fall in stripes across the table that dominated the room. To her, it looked like vibrant, golden ribbons wrapping the two jelly doughnuts, dictionary, and seventh grade literature anthology that were the table’s contents.

It was then, she would later recall, that the enormity of the situation struck her.

She was a teacher, and she loved it. She loved the kids when they surrounded her, calling to her, “Mrs. Aires!” Some of them were anxious to touch her. All of them were eager to talk. She loved walking down the hall and being greeted and waved at and hailed...

“Hey, Mrs. Aires!”

“What’s Up, Mrs. Aires!”

“Hello, Mrs. A!”

“Yo, Miz Aires!”

It was... delicious. Yes, that was the word—it was something to be savored and enjoyed! That and the absolute thrill of watching an idea being born inside a kid’s mind and knowing... knowing... knowing that you were the parent of that thought.

It was—and again, she searched for just the right word—it was a sense of... power. It was a power that, once conceived and appreciated, quickened her pulse just a bit, raised one eyebrow a sixteenth of an inch, and actually started the corners of her mouth to move unbidden, turning upwards at the edges.

The large hand of the clock snapped to the next minute, and Mrs. Aires, white cup of black coffee in hand, continued to sit in the teachers’ lounge of Skyler Middle School with its sun-wrapped books and

schoolhouse smell and memories and visions only she could understand.

In a moment of magnificent lucidity, everything fit. It all seemed right—perfectly... right! Magnificently right!

As Mrs. Aires would recall later, she experienced a moment of great clarity, and she knew with a heart's assurance—knew one thing.

She loved teaching, and she loved being there!

There is no evidence—or so the investigation concluded—no evidence whatsoever that Mrs. Virginia Aires had any idea of what would shortly be taking place.

### **ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES**

Mr. Peter Romanelli had finished taking attendance in his homeroom as the eighth graders talked and touched and cavorted like squirrels and did homework they should have taken care of the previous night. He removed the yellow cards that contained the information on the missing students. There were only two, and these he placed in the manila envelope on which, in black indelible marker, had been printed “210—Mr. Romanelli—Gr. 8.” Presently, he would send this package to the main office where the information would be dutifully recorded and noted.

*And then, he thought, the gears of the machine could grind up the data along with the kids.*

He smiled slightly and placed the envelope on the edge of his desk on top of his marking book. Next, he got together the papers he would be using with his first period class and began to count off the necessary number.

It was at that moment that eighth grader Timmy Borne threatened to wipe a booger on Annie Greer, who screamed with the intensity, tone, and shattering timbre that only a 13-year-old girl could achieve.

Mr. Romanelli was on his feet at once.

“Mr. Borne,” he snapped, “whatever you’re doing, don’t!”

He stepped away from his desk to handle the tiny situation before it became a major situation. In so doing, he placed the papers for his class on top of the envelope containing this day’s absentee cards.

In the few minutes left of the homeroom period and the hotly contended “booger” debate, Peter Romanelli completely forgot about sending the ‘Attendance Envelope’ to the office.

It would be debated and investigated later, but no evidence was ever presented that this happened on purpose or by any design at all.

He simply forgot.  
Totally and completely...  
Forgot.

### ***SPOTTING “THE MAN”***

He came from the west—of that, at least, they were certain. When some remarked that the description was rather sketchy, the authorities smiled and shrugged. Some people took that to indicate that there was some secret knowledge that they would not or could not reveal.

The truth was—that was all they knew.

One driver would recall, or seem to recall, that he saw THE MAN emerge from under the Route 35 overpass, headed east along Foxhall Road. He had seen THE MAN fleetingly, he told the police later, and could not remember anything unusual or anything that made that person stand out in any way. The only reason that the driver made a mental note of him at all was the fact that Foxhall was a heavily traveled artery for cars, especially in the morning and late afternoon. Although there is a narrow sidewalk along the route he took, THE MAN, who was of normal height, slight build, and wore normal clothing, was walking on the side of the road.

That was the only reason, according to the driver, that he filed it away in his mind along with all the appointments he had to make that day and his own personal problems at home.

Of course, all of this happened very swiftly, and the driver had time only to strafe the walker with his eyes before his attention was forced back to the road. He also recalled looking up and ahead, seeing one brick corner of Skyler Middle School as it loomed through the trees some four or five hundred yards in the distance.

Then, dismissing everything except what he needed in order to earn a living that day, he drove on.

He did not look into his rear view mirror as he sped away.

If he had turned his glance to that reflection, he might have seen THE MAN walking briskly and steadily down Foxhall Road.

Walking... toward the school.

### ***PADLOCK AND CHAIN***

Oliver “Ollie” Janowski, who would place a Smith & Wesson .38 caliber pistol to his frontal lobe and pull the trigger some time hence, at the moment was not concerned at all with the subject of suicide. Rather, he was looking at the terrazzo floors of Skyler Middle School and regretting the fact that very soon, he would have to clean them.

He understood that kids drag the dirt in with them. Yet it never ceased to be a source of wonder just how much of the surrounding soil average kids could carry on their shoes to deposit on the floor that the night crew had polished only twelve hours before.

Twice each day, morning and just after lunch, he and Bobby Cavelli, his assistant in 'Maintenance,' would push the huge brooms around the halls and restore a semblance of cleanliness, not that the kids noticed—or cared.

First, however, there was the morning ritual to perform. This included raising the flag on the pole when all the lights had been turned on and the classroom doors opened. Then, he had to attend to the doors to the outside, all ten pairs of them. They had to be unchained from the inside, and those locks and chains stored until all the kids were inside. That influx would be supervised by assigned teachers who complained heartily of the duty but did it well nonetheless—even conscientiously.

Now, carrying the last chain and padlock, he headed down the main hallway of Skyler Middle School toward the set of double doors that fronted on Foxhall Road. When all the kids were in and the school day more or less officially begun, only the double doors by the main office remained unlocked. Those doors could be seen readily from the main office itself, from the school library, and by the various teachers who stood hall watch there. Anyone entering there from the outside would be immediately seen and critically observed—not once, but any number of times. Chains threaded through their handles and joined by a strong padlock effectively closed all other doors to the outside.

This all happened before the first class of the day was five minutes old. The chains would be removed shortly before dismissal for the day or if a planned activity were to take place. Otherwise, they stayed locked.

The process, were it widely known, might have brought substantial outcry. Some might have pointed out the difficulty of getting out of the place in the event of a fire. Yet others might have countered with names and figures such as Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, with its fifteen dead, and Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas, with its five dead and ten wounded by assailants just 11 and 13 years of age. Besides, they might have pointed out that the ground floor windows were less than two and one-half feet above the lush lawn and could be opened if ever a true emergency existed.

Groups might well have formed on both sides of the issue, and the battle might have become a continuing spectacle in local editorials and school board meetings.

However, it was not a widely known fact. It was kept very quiet. Since it was not even noticed by the general public, there were no questions at all.

Just the way the school liked it.

Ollie Janowski, head of maintenance for Skyler Middle School, could have cared less. All he knew was that he had one more chain to attach to the last set of doors, thread the padlock through two links, and push it shut with a satisfying metallic click.

Then, he would be able to get to the brooms and the sweeping and the kid dirt. Maybe he could get that done in time to gulp a cup of coffee before he had to begin getting the cafeteria ready for lunch.

He hefted the chain and the padlock in his hands and increased his pace towards the west doors, through which, as he approached, he could just see a few cars whooshing by on Foxhall Road.

### **THE POWER IN BELLS**

Classes, lunches, physical activities, procedures for record-keeping, and, indeed, most aspects of life at Skyler Middle School were regulated by what everyone called “The Bell.” In reality, it was not a bell at all, but a series of three electronic beeps, repeated three times via the school’s public address system.

On another day, in a time less technologically complicated, in a school where 40—perhaps as many as 80—pupils lived and learned, one student might well have been assigned to retrieve a large, golden brass bell with a dark wooden handle, stand in the hall and ring—actually ring—the instrument until all students changed class, went to lunch or came in from the playground.

Now, the series of beeps began automatically at 7:55 a.m., indicating five minutes until the start of school. This “bell” sounded again at 8:00 a.m. to herald the start of “Homeroom,” where attendance was taken and reported to the main office and “business” matters tended to. Returning PTA questionnaires, insurance forms and the several pounds of paper the average student passed back and forth between teacher and parent over the school year took up considerable time. At 8:16, the “bell” ended homeroom and began a four-minute period when students moved to new rooms. At 8:20, the signal heralded “First Period,” and classes began for the day. The bell-that-was-not-a-bell continued this pattern every 45 minutes throughout the remainder

of the day until 2:51 p.m. Then the nine beeps were repeated three times indicating that another school day had been assigned to the memories of students and teachers. The power of the “bell” controlled the day.

Mrs. Aires watched the clock in the teachers’ lounge and sipped the last of the bitter coffee. She crinkled the Styrofoam and was tossing it into the trash can in the corner of the room next to the Pepsi machine when the “bell” sang its next scheduled aria. She smiled, picked up her books from the table and headed for the hall. She smiled as she slipped into the stream of students already beginning to fill the corridors. She smiled at the thought that one more day had begun.

It would not be very long until that smile vanished.

### **WHILE TENDING THE ROSES**

Mrs. Roberta Garellson, mistress of roses and president of the Botania Garden Club, had just sallied forth from the front door of her well-landscaped home on Foxhall Road. The thought had occurred to her that she might re-appraise her own gardening skills and see what, if anything, might be done to improve upon an already—Well, why not?—an already *magnificent* display.

To take a plot of bare earth and, with thought and deed and the fashioning of your own hands, to impose upon it your own will, to force and command and decree it into what you wanted rather than what nature had assigned—that was a power that Roberta Garellson understood... and cherished.

So, yellow legal pad and ballpoint pen in hand, she had barely turned towards the magnificent display of full-blooded roses that fronted the area beneath her bay window when she became aware of a man walking east on Foxhall in the direction of the school. She did not recognize him, but that was hardly unusual. There were many people in the neighborhood she did not know, or—in reality—did she care to know.

Therefore, when this one walked by, his stride fixed and steady, the thought bloomed in her mind that he was a bit lightly dressed for autumn. But then, she reasoned, it had been a rather warm October so far, and she wondered if that would do anything to the border flowers that she had planted just last week.

Therefore, without any further notice of THE MAN who rapidly approached the intersection where Skyler Middle School loomed up

on a gently rising hill, Roberta Garellson turned her back on the road and embraced her beloved roses.

THE MAN kept walking.

### **CAUGHT IN THE FLOW**

If nothing else, Galen Booth believed in the power of routine. As principal of Skyler Middle School, he insisted upon it. In his personal affairs, he lived by it.

He must have been distracted, therefore, because on this particular day, he violated one aspect of it. Normally, he stayed in his office from the moment he entered the building between 7:40 and 7:45 each morning until 8:30—after first period had begun. At that time, he could walk his school unencumbered by screaming, rushing, flamboyant and extremely physical middle-schoolers.

Perhaps he was thinking of something else, or perhaps his watch or the clock on the wall of his office had broken, but, for whatever reason, this day he walked out of his office at 8:15 a.m., one minute before the change of class for period one.

This produced two phenomena. The first was that he found himself in the hall caught up in a maelstrom of kids flowing with the intensity and abandon of a tidal flood. This was upsetting enough, but it was made even worse by the fact that this riptide of students literally swept him around one corner of the downstairs hall and deposited him directly—or very nearly directly—into the arms of Betty Jean Beatty, Chairperson of the Language Arts Department of Skyler Middle School.

Mrs. Beatty was not only, by all reports, an excellent teacher of literature, writing, drama and all subjects that fell under her specialty, but she also served as the President of the Rock Township Education Association, the R.T.E.A. Informally known as the “Teacher’s Union,” this group was the sole negotiating unit for the teachers of the township which included, of course, the faculty of this school.

Mrs. Beatty had quite a reputation, especially in the academic community, for an almost total lack of shyness when it came to all bureaucrats in general and the school administration in particular. It was she who had coined the phrase, “There is no such thing as a good administrator!” It was she who would walk into a school board meeting five minutes late so she could receive a standing ovation from her constituency. It was she who had conceived and published within the Township the heavily satirical and locally infamous ‘Administrators Code,’ which read in part: “Since, as a School Administrator, I am by

nature infallible and cannot make a mistake, then when something goes wrong, it must be the teachers' fault, and I will blame them loud and long!"

Consequently, this face-to-face meeting, however forced by circumstances, was far from pleasant for either one.

"Oh... I'm sorry!"

"Yes... um... excuse me!"

They turned away from each other, Mrs. Beatty with one eyebrow raised and Mr. Booth with a look on his face that affirmed that he would never deviate from his personal schedule again.

"Mr. Booth!" a voice called above the din.

"Yes, Ollie," the Principal answered as the head custodian came up to him through the thinning herd of students.

"Mr. Booth, I was wondering if you wanted the new supplies distributed this afternoon. The teachers have been on me to..."

"Yes, yes," Booth snapped, his mind still on Mrs. Beatty—Beatty the Bitch as he called her, if only in his mind, "as long as you get the work done."

He added, "Is everything on schedule?"

Ollie Janowski nodded vigorously.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "I just finished chaining the doors."

## ***UP THE HILL***

Foxhall Road crosses Bennett Drive at a slight angle, curving gently to the right then quickly turning obliquely left. On the northeast corner, the land begins to rise smoothly, forming a small hill. When the decision was made to build the school that would be named after former mayor and respected local judge, the Honorable Beverly Skyler, it was determined that the acreage was wide enough and prominent enough for the purpose. The selection of that plot of ground as the site for the structure was, in fact, one of the few things upon which everyone could agree.

If you stand on the southwest corner of the intersection and look across the street, what you will see is one large red brick wall with no windows and only one set of double doors at its base.

Those who were familiar with the school realized that virtually all students entered by the front doors where the yellow and black busses would deposit them in the morning and collect them when they were disgorged from the building some seven hours later.

The two side doors were used infrequently. Sometimes, they exited students to board special busses for field trips, since the side street,



Bennett Drive, offered more space and less traffic. During certain seasons, they were the departure points for teams heading for away games. Less frequently, science classes marched out those doors, around the corner, and down Bennett to “The Pond,” that was a continuous source of microscopic biological delights.

Most of the time, however—most of the time—these doors were not used at all and remained closed, the chain and padlock hanging motionless on the inside... most of the time.

Now, however, THE MAN who had emerged from the underpass and walked past the houses on Foxhall had reached the intersection and the wall of bricks and the chained double doors. His litheness and the spring of his step must have been evident as he glided up the short incline and approached the two closed portals to Skyler Middle School.

All of this, however, is speculation—pure speculation—but it is the only way it could have happened. There was no one the authorities could find, and they did try, who saw THE MAN approach the doors and place his hands on them.

But, it must have happened that way.

There was, quite simply, no other rational explanation.

### **THE SECOND FLOOR**

The second floor of Skyler Middle School runs east to west and is just slightly under three hundred feet long. It is as straight as any ruler used in any math classroom. It is lined with student lockers, broken every now and then by heavy doors, each crested with a rectangle of reinforced glass and a number from 200 through 214 stenciled on it. About midway in that football-field expanse of corridor were the lavatories, twin water fountains, and two janitorial supply closets. Diagonally across from these facilities were the double doors that led to the stairway to the school’s midsection on the first floor. At the east end of the second floor hall were doors that led to stairs which, if taken, would let you off almost directly in front of the main office. At the opposite end of the upstairs hall were identical doors leading to identical stairs that dropped to the west end of the first floor. In fact, they directed their traffic to the double doors that led outside and were the only opening in the windowless west wall of the school. These were the same doors that head custodian Ollie Janowski had secured as part of his morning routine just minutes before.

It was to this huge, second floor hallway that Virginia Aires hurried, books and papers piled in her arms. This was her first assignment

of the day, and it didn't even involve teaching. Hall Duty, as it was called, involved sitting in a hallway of the school during a class period and, as a witty colleague had observed, "Making sure some kid doesn't steal the hall!"

Of course, it was more than that. She was there in case a teacher became ill or had to 'leave the room,' a euphemism for urgently needing the rest room. Then, she would supervise the class until the teacher's return. Also, she would be a visible authority figure should some student decide that the academic pace could be enlivened by some mischief—something that your average sixth to eighth grader was all but world-class at creating.

Of course, she was there also in case anybody 'unusual' should prowl the halls during her watch. Indeed, given the tenor of the times, there had been an extended faculty meeting on suspicious behavior and the absolute—*the absolute*—need for all hall duty teachers to be present on their duty posts all period long and, of course, begin and end their tour *on time*.

That, or so Mrs. Aires would report later, was why she was mildly upset when she arrived at her post two minutes after the start of the period. It was a given among the faculty that the first rule of effective teaching was this: Go the bathroom BEFORE class. As Mrs. Aires unloaded her books on the desk that had been placed near the center door that encompassed her 'Hall Duty' perch, she made a mental note to start the bathroom process a little earlier tomorrow.

She was about to sit down and get started on correcting some papers when the thought nudged at her from inside her brain that perhaps she should check the lavatories. She couldn't go into the Boys' Room, of course, but the Girls' Room was within her scope, and checking the lavatories at least once during the period was part of the description of hall duty. Therefore, she set aside the papers for the moment and headed toward the girls' lavatory.

Later, she would tell any number of people that it was one of the few decisions she had made in her life that she regretted ever after.

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Even before she was fully through the door to the Girls' Room, the heavy smell of burning tobacco was clawing at the back of her throat. Silently, Ginny Aires stuck her head around the corner of the door and watched a cloud of gray-white smoke cling to the ceiling over one of the toilet booths. She made her way toward it.

"Hello, Doreen," Mrs. Aires said flatly.

The eighth grade girl was sitting on the toilet with her jeans pulled up and the cigarette an inch from her mouth.

“Shit!” the girl exclaimed, and the cigarette flew, landing only inches from Mrs. Aires’ right shoe.

“I wasn’t...” the eighth-grader stammered, “See, I didn’t... it’s like... it’s not mine... I was...”

“I know, Miss Petty,” Virginia Aires finished for her, “you were holding it for a friend.

“Come on, now, Doreen, let’s go.”

Picking up the cigarette between thumb and forefinger, Mrs. Aires drowned it under a sink faucet and headed for the door.

Doreen followed reluctantly.

“Bitch!” the eighth grader breathed at the teacher’s back.

Mrs. Aires smiled swiftly and continued for the door. Inside, she was laughing.

“Now,” she thought with a triumphant grin, “*I really AM a teacher!*”

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Mrs. Aires and the cigarette-smoking Doreen Petty walked out of the lavatory and proceeded toward the east end of the long hall. Neither of them spoke, and when they reached the east stairs, Mrs. Aires held open a door for Doreen, and they both disappeared into the stairwell that would deliver them to the main office and the vice-principal’s office and the inevitable paper work that went with the referral.

All of this happened rather quickly, and it left behind a second floor hall bereft of any supervision.

Although there was no one there to see it, when the east doors swung shut on the teacher and the errant student, the door to the far west stairs opened.

THE MAN who had been spotted by the overpass walking briskly down Foxhall Road; who, it was assumed, had mounted the hill to the locked west doors of the school—that same man took a step forward and stood alone on the second floor hallway of Skyler Middle School.

### **THE MAN IN THE DOORWAY**

“We are going to explore something called *Cultural Literacy*,” Mr. Romanelli told his class. “All that means is what knowledge is held in common by any particular group of people, clan or nation.

“For instance, there is a whole generation who remember where they were and what they were doing when President John F. Kennedy

was assassinated. You people weren't born yet, so that event has far less meaning for you, if any meaning at all."

He took the papers from his desk and began to pass them out.

"So, we will take twenty minutes and fill out this sheet you're getting, and then we'll talk about the results."

"Mr. Romanelli, is this gonna be graded?" came the inevitable question.

"Just do it," the teacher smiled. "We'll talk about grades soon enough."

There was a brief snicker and a mumble, but pens and pencils were appearing, and the class began the assignment.

Peter Romanelli returned to his desk at the front of the room; he moved to place the remaining questionnaires back on his marking book.

That's when he saw it.

The 'Attendance Envelope' from his homeroom lay there—the one he had forgotten to return to the main office!

*Crap!* he thought. *This is going to be one more reason for Mrs. Shaun to get on my case!*

"Mr. Romanelli," a student called quietly.

The voice had come from directly in front of his desk, and Mr. Romanelli's attention went instantly to the boy who had spoken. The young man said nothing more, just slid his eyes to the right.

Peter Romanelli followed the student's gaze.

A man stood framed in the doorway to the room.

The boy who had spoken would later insist that he thought it was a substitute teacher, new to the school, who needed to know something.

"Yes," Mr. Romanelli said as he rose from his desk. "May I help you?"

THE MAN in the doorway smiled. Very slowly, he placed one hand into his pocket. Still smiling, he took a step forward.

THE MAN was inside the classroom.

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