TELLING TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

 Chris Lowe and friends

**Number 102**

 **Just a Little Matter**

Last day of the school year…. farewell school assembly….. tutor group parties….. mini-games on the field in glorious sunshine….. oh, and the final visits to bend the Head’s ear…. from staff ‘not happy, Principal, not happy at all with next year’s timetable……’

8.25am: Two more already done and dusted…. Surely time for one more?.... ah, yes, Caroline… in her thirties, wanting to be back in her twenties…and looking as though she was in her forties……. Chameleon Caro… Anne-Marie had been warned….. no real problems, but craving attention…. Caroline peered round the door.

‘Do sit down, Caroline, and what can I do for you?’

Caro pulled the chair right up against the Principal’s desk, barely half a metre from Anne-Marie’s inquisitive gaze.

‘It is rather tricky, Principal….. a bit embarrassing….. and I must ask that you keep it confidential…’

‘I can’t give you that guarantee, Caroline, until I know what it is….. spill it out…. we haven’t got much time….’ Anne-Marie had been warned not to prevaricate with Caro.

Caroline cleared her throat…

‘Er…. well, Principal… I have to tell you that I might be…. well…..er…. pregnant…..’ she tailed off. Anne-Marie could understand why that might be….Caroline was not married and was known to have a London bus arrangement with boyfriends…. either none…. or three at a time….Anne-Marie was not aware of the present arrival and departure schedule.

‘Congratulations are in order, I hope, Caroline…. it sounds like great news!.... is it?’ She wanted to sound as upbeat as possible.

‘Well…. er… it might be…..or it might not….. ‘ Caroline tailed off and she peered into the distance over Anne-Marie’s shoulder, as though the answer might be out there somewhere….

Anne-Marie broke the silence. ‘Well, it doesn’t seem like a school timetable problem, Caroline. Perhaps we should…..’

‘Oh, but it is, Principal…. or might be……’

Silence again.

‘Yes?... meaning what exactly?’

‘You see the father might be Mr. Hope, the time-tabler!..….’

Anne-Marie could not help herself…’What! Reg Hope…… crikey…..’

Silently, to herself Anne-Marie thought, how on earth did weedy Reg manage that….. Reg with wife of thirty years and two sons at university…..blimee….. was she hallucinating…

‘You mean Reg Hope and you……’

‘Yeeees!’ rather sheepishly….. ‘At the end-of-term staff party…. in his little cubby-hole….. He keeps a bottle of whisky in his filing cabinet, you see….. says it does wonders for the timetable….. well it did wonders for me……I needed to have a lie down….. on his little desk….’

‘Was everything ‘little’ with Caroline?’ thought Anne-Marie.

There was a moment of silence again…… this was no longer a ‘normal’ timetable conversation…. Care was needed.

‘Caroline… you said Reg ‘might’ be the father… is there someone else?’

Caro cleared her throat again.

‘Well, Eddie from Science was at the same party…..’

‘Oh dear… and did he also have whisky…. in the Science Preparation Room?

‘Oh no……’

‘Thank goodness for that…..’

‘It was gin…..’

‘Gin!..... and at the same party?....

‘Yes….. he keeps a few bottles in the cupboard marked ‘Private. Medicine Chest. For Staff Use Only’….. and he had a little desk as well….’

Good Lor’ !’ Anne-Marie wiped her brow…. She thought she had better move the conversation on….she was learning more than she could cope with five minutes before morning assembly.

‘Look, Caroline, we need to discuss….’

‘And there is another possibility, Principal……’ Caroline cut in, fearful that not all would be revealed, when she really wanted to unburden herself…

‘Not another member of staff at the same party…..?’ Anne-Marie felt both aghast and admiring.

‘Oh, no….. nothing like that……. it’s just that it might simply be….. a sort of prolonged indigestion… the doctor said it could be psychosomatic….. and I don’t know what to think….’

Anne-Marie put her hand up…. ‘Hang on!.....let’s get this straight…. are you informing me…. officially….. that you may, or may not, have suffered….. let us say…., some physical change….. somewhere on the spectrum between immaculate conception….. a rumbling tummy….. rape….. and a rather stimulating dream?’

‘I don’t know, Principal… it might be none of those!..... I shan’t know the true situation till the end of the school holidays…… but I did come about next year’s timetable… I needed you to know why I am asking to be moved out of the room next to Reg’s next year!.... and as far away as possible from Eddy, too…. it would be far too embarrassing….. and I dare not ask Reg……I would have to explain about Eddy……..’

Anne-Marie let out a long breath, and shook her head…... She could cope with the room bit….. once she had time to breathe…. the implications of all the rest of the revelation would have to wait.

‘I haven’t done anything….. wrong, have I…?’ asked Croline plaintively.

‘Wrong….?’ thought Anne-Marie….. ‘What is WRONG?...’ But then she shook her head…. now was not the time for existentialist musing on right and wrong….. there was the question of the misuse of school desk and table, whatever their size, of course…… potential disciplinary matter…. but best keep away from trifles like that….

‘Consider it done, Caroline….. I will get the rooms changed….go away and…. er ….. enjoy your break….. your health and…. er…. possibly the health of the baby…. are paramount…..let me know exactly what the situation is once you know yourself!... You realise there may be some…. er…. implications…. but on the other hand, there might not…… I prefer to deal with the real and the actual myself.’

‘Thank you so much, Principal…. I knew you would understand and sympathise….’ Caroline slipped away, leaving Anne-Marie staring at the door. She looked at her watch…. Two minutes to morning assembly…… she picked up the internal phone.

‘Reg….. you seem to have got your subjects, timings, teachers….. and possibly periods,’…. she added as an afterthought…. ‘all muddled up….. We need to sort them out….. soon.’

‘O.K. Principal, I shall look forward to that.’

Anne-Marie put the phone down, ‘I doubt it, Reg.’ she mused….. ‘I doubt it very much.’

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