

“Pastor, that red car is still parked out at the curb,” reported Mr. Sanders as she brought in the mail to Pastor Robert Hancock, who was seated behind his desk.

Looking up from one of his commentaries he asked, “Is the woman still in the car?” The southern drawl revealed an air of sincerity whenever the pastor spoke.

“Oh, yes Pastor.”

“Go ask Lee to come down here.”

“Yes sir.” The pastor’s personal secretary departed from the room as quickly as she had entered.

A few minutes later, Lee Jackson, the school principal, entered the always opened door to the pastor’s office. “Doctor” Jackson, as the high school young people called him, not so much from his educational background, but as a result of Pastor Hancock calling him “Doc”, walked across the office and sat in the chair closest to the pastor’s desk. Lee had come on staff at the church three months before, right after graduation from Bible college with a degree in Education, to assume the duties of Principal over the Emmaus Christian School, a new ministry of the Emmaus Bible Church. The pastor and new associate had struck a good relationship together, and Hancock already placed much confidence in Lee’s ability to discern truth from error.

“Doc, did you ever have Bureaucrat 101 in Bible College?”

A wry smile crossed Lee’s face. “Mrs. Sanders told me she was still out there.”

“My guess is that she is spying out the situation to see if she can get anything on us.”

“What do you suppose she wants?”

“I don’t know...but I’m pretty sure we’ll find out soon enough.”

“This is only the second day of the school year and already someone’s camped on our doorstep.”

“Just remember the number one rule, Doc. Mouth closed, school open, mouth open, school closed.”

“Pastor, I’ve modified that for the high school students’ benefit. I told them there were ten rules for talking to people who work for the government. The first rule is don’t tell them what the rest of your rules are.”

Hancock chuckled. “I’ll have to remember that one.”

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The gray, 1998 Cavalier’s door opened as a woman in her early thirties, dressed in a tan blouse and brown slacks moved toward the side entrance of the church. The unmistakable clipboard stood out like a sore thumb as she crossed the church parking lot and slid through the door. Once inside, she immediately read the sign that said OFFICE with an arrow pointing to the left hallway. Turning right, she started down the hall in the opposite direction looking in the window of each door when Mrs. Reed, the third grade teacher, noticed her in the hallway and came out of her class to speak with the woman.

“May I help you” Mrs. Reed spoke with a high pitched, but professional sounding voice.

“Do you have a Day Care?” The other woman tried to match the professional quality in the voice and manner.

“Did you see the sign to the office when you entered the building?”

“No,” the woman stated. “I’m looking for the Day Care.”

Opening the door to her classroom, Mrs. Reed instructed the children to open their Mathematics book to page six, and do problems one through ten until she returned. The other woman amazedly noticed the third graders obey the command in unison, with the only noise being the sliding of books out of their desks.

“If you will follow me, please,” said Mrs. Reed as she started down the hallway toward the office.

The other woman had no alternative but to follow the teacher whose personality showed the pleasant but firm characteristics every good teacher developed. In less than a minute they arrived at the pastor’s office. With the door still open, Mrs. Reed knocked as she poked her head inside the room.

“Pastor, there is someone here who needs some information from you.”

“Show her in, Mrs. Reed.”

The woman came just inside the doorway of the office, and Lee noticed the glazed look that came over her eyes as she faced the pastor. Bringing the clipboard up in order to write something down, she stated, “Are you in charge here?”

“How may our church be of help to you,” smiled the pastor, offering the woman a chair and purposely avoiding her question.

“Reverent, I’m Camille Johnson from the county Welfare Department. We’ve received a report that you’re running a Day Care here in the facilities.”

Again the pastor motioned her to a chair. “Have a seat please, Mrs. Johnson.”

“That’s Ms. Johnson,” she stated emphatically. “Reverend, I have other things to do today. I am just here to verify the fact of whether or not there are pre-school age children being kept here on the premises for more than two hours per day.”

Pastor Hancock paused with the palm of his hand still inviting access to the chair directly across from his desk. A smile was on his round face. Being a pastor for over twenty-five years had taught him that silence is many times the best tool a person has to persuade others, plus, he knew that anything he did not say could never be used against him. The woman hesitated, but, forcing a smile upon her face, moved to the chair and sat upon the front half of the seat. A thought crossed her mind as she wished her supervisor, Mr. Boyd, was here in her place. After all, it was he who had told her earlier this morning to find out if an illegal Day Care was being run by this church. Her mind reflected back on him telling her to just sit around in her car until she saw pre-school children out of the playground. She had realized after sitting in her hot car for over two hours that the direct approach would probably be faster, and she dare not return to the office without some information to present to him.

“Mizz Johnson, this is Mr. Jackson, the Pastor over our educational ministries.” Lee smiled at the woman and nodded with his head. The woman shot a nervous glance at the young associate but quickly returned her eyes to the pastor. “Now Mizz Johnson, just who is it down at the Welfare Department who wants to know that information?”

“Reverend, I’m just doing my job and-“

“I know you are,” he said, cutting her off, “and I appreciate the fact that you are just doing your job. I just want to know the person’s name who sent you here.”

“I’m the one assigned to this case,” she stated. Lee noticed that she seemed far less comfortable answering the questions than being the one who asked them.

“Then could I see your identification?” The southern drawl slowed the whole conversation down considerably.

Reaching into her purse, she took out her ID and handed it to the pastor. He looked it over and handed it back.

“Camille,” he stated fatherly, “I simply wish to know your supervisor’s name so that I can verify whether you are acting in the best interests of you department, or whether you are acting alone, in your own interests.”

She knew he was going over her head, and yet she was trapped into giving her boss’ name or being accused of acting outside her official capacity. This pastor was so much as brushing her aside and letting her know that she was not important enough to deal with. Finally she surrendered.

“My supervisor is Thomas Boyd.”

“Would you be so kind as to tell Mr. Boyd that Pastor Hancock would like to have an appointment with him? I’ll call his office in the morning and make one. Camille, it certainly was a pleasure to make your acquaintance. Your job is over now. I’ll work directly with Mr. Boyd concerning this matter.” He pressed the intercom button. “Mary, would you kindly escort Camille safely to her car?”

“I can find my own way out, Reverend.” Ms. Johnson stood to her feet and move toward the open door, only to find Mrs. Sanders standing there and smiling, waiting for her.

The pastor sat back down behind his desk and looked over at his associate. “Welcome to Bureaucrat 101, Doc. I’m Professor Hancock, your teacher for this course. This is not your ordinary Bible College or Seminary course, but it is vital for the survival of your ministries in this day and age. Did you learn anything pertinent today, class?”

“Wow!” Lee’s mind was still absorbing all that had taken place.

“Let me teach you something about bureaucrats, Doc. First, always call a bureaucrat by their first name. When you get high enough on the bureaucrat totem pole to find one arrogant to call you by your first name, then you’ve identified the one who really wants to control you. It’s not Mizzz Johnson. It’s probably not Thomas Boyd. But someday we’ll find out.”

“You handled her great.”

“No, the only purpose for what I did was to remove her from the picture. From now on she’ll still be there, but she’ll have to show her teeth from behind her boss.”

“I see.”

“The second thing to learn is: It’s not what you say that’s important, it’s what you don’t say. Most preachers in this same scenario would have gone on and on about how an educational ministry for one to four-year-olds is not a Day Care. They would have explained to her how advanced their curriculum is, or how good their workers are, when in the long run, someone like Camille can never help you, even if she wanted to. She can only hurt you by being a witness against you. It helps her job standing only if she files bad reports, not good reports. And believe me, she would find plenty wrong with us if her job preservation is at stake.”

“How did you learn all this, Pastor?”

Hancock reached for the intercom while saying, “I’ve been in the battles. Mary, get me Dr. Ryker on the phone.”

“Yes, sir.”

Turning back to his principal he continued. “Doc, I was with Roloff in ’79. That’s when my eyes started opening. I couldn’t figure out how the state of Texas could vindictively go after a man of God who was helping the state by making outstanding citizens out of riffraff and scum that even their own judges would send to the homes.”

*BUZZ!* “Pastor. Dr. Ryker on two.”

Hancock picked up the receiver and pressed the speakerphone to the on position. “Hello, Dave.”

*“Hello, Bobby. What’s up?”*

“Round one just occurred in my office. Welfare’s very own Mizz Johnson...”

*“Hmm. Well, we knew it would be sooner or later. I’m surprised it’s sooner. How’d you do?”*

“Fine. The lower echelon is easy, remember?”

*“It gets harder real fast.”*

“Dave, you remember Lee Jackson, my new associate? I’ve got him here in my office. You’re on the speaker phone.”

*“Yes, I remember. Hello, Lee.”*

“Hello, sir,” said the associate, leaning forward in his chair.

“Dave, I told her that I would contact her superior, a Thomas Boyd, tomorrow.”

*“Did she see any of your facilities?”*

“No. Everyone here is trained in defense tactics.” A laugh was heard at the other end of the line.

*“Well, if you’re not having fun, you’re not doing it right,”* replied Ryker. *“Do you want me with you when you meet with Boyd?”*

“No, I’d rather keep you in the background right now. Just alert the brethren and pray.”

*“You can count on that, dear Brother. Take me off the speaker for a minute.”*

“After pushing the button, Pastor Hancock said, “OK, you’re off.”

*“Bob, remember that conversation we had last week, the one about Lee?”*

“Yes.”

*“Well, I’ve read some of his research papers he did while at the college. This young man’s got brains. You might consider freeing him up a couple of days a week to research some of these Day Care laws and regulations.”*

“That’s not a bad idea. I think we can handle it.”

*“Well, if I can be of any help, just call.”*

“You know I will. ‘Bye, Dave.”

Hanging up the phone, the pastor turned to the associate. “Doc, the best law library is in Indianapolis. I want you to go there and find all the laws regulating Church Day Care ministries in Indiana.”

Lee’s eyes opened widely. “But I’m not a lawyer.”

“In a couple of weeks you’ll think you are, Doc.”