

Twenty-Seven

Part Two: Staff Selection and Retention

“Mr. Canon, I’m sure that I speak for every member of the faculty when I say that we, all of us, value your perspective, and consider ourselves lucky to have you,” Principal Horen said to the assembled educators. A good many voices murmured their agreement. Not that everyone was even here, barely enough for quorum. Officially, they shouldn’t be. Any work teachers did over the summer was off the clock, unpaid. So for the principal to call a faculty meeting like this, outside the contractually obligated days of work? It was the sort of thing the union ought to be clamping down on hard.

However, the meeting had been announced as entirely optional, though advertised with big news on some new initiatives for the fall. The email hadn’t come out and announced that there would be a vote – votes weren’t for “optional” meetings – but with a quorum of the faculty present, as well as the president of the local chapter of the teacher’s union, there had been several votes so far.

None of them going Canon’s way.

“That said,” Principal Horen went on, “I really must ask you to take your seat and let us proceed. You’ve raised your concerns, and your proposed solutions, and the faculty has voted. As... unorthodox as some of your suggestions were, I’m frankly shocked you gathered even a single other vote on behalf of your proposals.”

The eyes of the gathering all shifted to Mr. Hardwick, who had been paying so much attention to his sudoku during the discussion of Mr. Canon’s first proposal that he’d reflexively voted in favor of converting the skirt length minimum to a maximum.

Principal Horen directed a pleading look at Mr. Canon. “Content yourself that you made your pitch, and let us conclude this, erm, gathering.” No, she mustn’t call it a meeting. After attempting to terminate one of the best-beloved teachers GHS had ever had – she was so lucky to have kept him on staff after all that she put him through! – matters between the principal and the faculty were incredibly tense. Give them no excuses. In time, she would regain the upper hand in negotiations with these entitled prima donnas. For now, accommodate. Later, convert that catastrophe to a catastrotunity.

Canon took to his feet, nodding somberly in acceptance of their rejection. “All right, then. Thanks for hearing me out, everybody.”

A rumble of mostly good-natured responses came back as the rest of the staff took to their feet. Most figured he’d been joking, if not in the best taste. A man who worked with young people, especially on the heels of that scandal with the naked

students waiting for him in his classroom... Well, they could see why *he* thought it was funny, anyway.

Canon approached his boss and offered a quick handshake. “And thanks again to you, Principal Horen. I have to say, I’ve been on the fence for a while, feeling like I’ve done all I could do here. It looks like I have.”

“You’re wel–” She froze mid-shake. “On the fence? May I ask what you mean by that?”

“Well, I’ve been entertaining an offer from another school – looks like there’s an opening across town. Same district, technically, but I’ve been leaning toward–”

“You can’t leave!” she exclaimed. Like the needle had been pulled from the record, the faculty froze as the principal’s voice pierced the gathering. Mrs. Nunn dashed into the hallway to cry out that the few who’d exited more hastily needed to return.

“Leave?”

“Leave? You can’t leave.”

“Mrs. Horen, do something!”

“You can’t leave, Mr. Canon!”

“We’re so lucky to have you! If you left...!”

Mr. Canon held up his hands, waiting for silence. It took some time. People had strong opinions. Thanks to Taylor’s well-intentioned but psychotic plan to Serenex the entire faculty to get him his job back, they were one and all convinced they were “lucky to have him.” The more he thought about it, and the more he pulled on that thread, the more he realized how much a lucky affiliation meant to folks.

Once they settled enough to be heard, he called out to the gathering, “I’m sorry, everybody. I didn’t mean to make that an announcement as yet. It’s not that I haven’t enjoyed my time here–”

“I told you not to rake him over the coals for that bullshit stunt by those awful Stern girls!” Amy Cook-Burfield planted her hands on her hips. To look at her, one would think department head outranked principal. Maybe she did, in the present climate. It had been over two months since Horen burned every bridge she had with her teachers, prosecuting him for what had turned out to be a simple case of that awful Stern brat setting him up. Inwardly, Horen was glad the girl was re-enrolled for a second senior year. She’d have two more semesters to exact revenge.

(Assuming she could SRO Barbour to assist her, though she liked her odds. That was one woman at GHS who was anything but enamored of the popular English teacher. If only she weren’t setting an indecent example for the children with that pretty young social studies teacher.)

Amy regarded her next-classroom-door neighbor pleadingly. “Mr. Canon, please, let’s talk about this. You’re practically an institution around here.”

He shrugged. “There’s not much to talk about, Amy. Now it’s nothing personal, but—”

Principal Horen, however, already saw the obvious solution to Canon’s threat. A bluff, maybe, but then again, she was also seeing the bigger picture. The usually unflappable principal suddenly raised her voice, calling out to the assembly. “In light of this new information, I move that we vote again. Now I wouldn’t dream of coercing anyone,” at present, “but... now that you realize the alternative, perhaps...” She grimaced. “Perhaps we can find some...wiggle room. On... some of your... proposals.”

It clearly galled, entertaining his outlandish ideas. But they were all of them lucky to have him. Besides, this would be win/win for her. She’d get the credit for retaining the beloved Mr. Canon, and the faculty could take the fall for any of his policies they voted to enact. Only one member of the faculty knew why, but they loved him, one and all.

Well, all but the new P.E. teacher, hired only weeks ago to replace a forty-year retiree whose name Principal Horen had already discarded from memory. Candace was waiting to dose this new fellow until they were alone in the parking lot after the meeting, then bring him back to her house where she and Isa could process him properly.

For now, it was time for Canon to sit back and marvel at the faculty’s commitment to retaining talent. Aside from Ms. Salata, there were no others who’d been selected to show him exactly *how* lucky they considered themselves to have him, though perhaps that would change soon. It wasn’t right, he knew, taking advantage of them like that, except he had with five students, one of their parents, a teacher, and the SRO. One and all, they were glad he had (though Isa would never admit it, and Candace would only admit it in front of Isa just to get her going).

Like Megan had said when she was massaging away some of his anxiety over all this, just because he was positioned to be able to take advantage of people didn’t mean he had to. Serenex had turned her from his blackmailer to his most devoted servant. These votes, this bluff about quitting, they were a stress test of his influence. That was all. Not like he needed, or even much wanted, more women in his life. Probably not even the recently Ms-ed Mrs. Crovetti. No, almost certainly probably not.

The stress test commenced as Principal Horen took charge, revisiting his proposals now with the realization that refusal to vote might cost them the Canon himself. Some of these decisions would need to be ratified by the school board; Candy and Isa would be jointly tackling that group at their July meeting. The agenda would likely draw out the more engaged parents, so they could nab a good chunk of them, too.

Had Taylor felt this nervous, taking their synthesized Serenex to the masses? It felt like so much could go wrong. Like any second now, his colleagues would march up and expose him for the pussy he really was.

Mr. Canon retreated to a lurking position at the side of the conference hall's massive white board as Mrs. Horen went back to his slides. "Very well. On the subject of instituting a, erm, college credit course, taught by Mr. Canon, who will hand-pick his students...? And implement a custom curriculum of his own devising?"

"I can't be the only one who chafes under all that oversight," he opined.

"All in favor?" Principal Horen asked resignedly. One by one, hands slunk into the air. "All opposed...?" She looked pointedly at the innocently smiling Mr. Canon. Hands went down.

So it went.

"All in favor of an after-school mentoring program, in which recent graduates provide support and education to current seniors, to be overseen by Mr. Canon?"

"All in favor of establishing a committee to explore our... 'woefully outdated dress code...' and other adjustments to the hidden curriculum?" She shook her head ruefully as she repeated the phrasing from his presentation. "Hidden curriculum" was a term referring to all the things learned in school not explicitly taught in class – walk on the right side of the hall and apace with one's peers; wash your hands before and after going to the bathroom; fuck around, find out. That sort of thing.

She finished, "To be selected and chaired by Mr. Canon?" Canon could get more specific about what he'd like to see enforced later, once his committee began meeting, under his close personal supervision.

"All in favor of tasking the science department with this, erm, engaging new laboratory procedure?" Mrs. Horen looked at the screen in plain confusion. "You're sure this is safe, Mr. Canon? This program you've discovered sounds, ah, intriguing? But this stuff it has them brewing, it's not going to cost us an arm and a leg, is it?"

He shrugged. "It costs what it costs."

"All those in favor of setting aside funds for the sound-proofing of classroom H121, to reduce disruptive noise transference in a high traffic area?"

"All in favor of recommending a... a \$30,000 pay raise... \$30,000? Really?"

Canon nodded.

"Very well, a \$30,000 pay raise for the SRO?" Candace's groan was mistaken for indignation, when in fact it was a tiny orgasm triggered by the thought of watching Isa sign over a huge portion of her inflated pay to her master.

"All in favor of eliminating the..." This time she pinched the bridge of her nose and muttered the rote utterance into her wrist. "The 'so-called professional dress standards' to allow faculty to dress according to their preference?"

"And staff."

"... and staff."

The last one was actually popular even before Canon's coercion, but Mrs. Horen had denied a vote on it the first go-round. To retain Mr. Canon, however, she was willing

to embrace a more casual style. At least until she could persuade him of the good sense of returning to slacks and button-ups.

“Next up...” She took a deep breath. “All in favor of, um, pitching in to pay for a GHS face tattoo for the... um... for...” A deeper breath. “For me.”

Canon waited until a reluctant majority’s hands were up before interjecting with a laugh. “That was a joke, Mrs. Horen. I would have thought it was pretty obvious.”

Her shoulders slumped with relief. “Oh thank god.”

“Yeah, you know me. Always kidding around. Here, let me pare down the other jokes for you, so there’s no confusion.” In the heat of the moment, he’d forgotten how many outlandish demands he’d proposed to offset the ones he meant to see passed, in case he needed to negotiate. Would they really have instituted a maximum dress length? Install a foldout sofa in his classroom? Allowed Canon to deliver corporal punishments to students *and* faculty?

Surely not. Right? He imagined bringing Isa along with him into the gym, walking right up to P.E. teacher Kasi “Hardass” Hardison, pulling her tight purple gym shorts down around her knees, and paddling her bare-handed over the bleachers while her students did their stretches and warm-ups.

No, he wouldn’t do something like that even if he’d let them. It didn’t make him less of a man not to pounce on every last opportunity. That’s what he’d said over and over while discussing it with his girls, and it remained true. No matter what Abbie had implied with all her sniffs and eye rolls.

Mr. Rohani, one of the social studies teachers, made his way down to Canon as the faculty was noshing on the cake, saved for a post-capitulation surprise. “Gotta say, Canon, you sure you’re up for all that? New curriculum, after school programs, committees... Hell of a lot of work. Oh and happy birthday, by the way. Good frickin’ cake.”

“It’s not until next Friday, but I figured if I could get everybody some cake, may as well, right? From Donaldson’s Bakery.” He shoveled a bite into his own mouth.

“Hell yeah, buddy. Seriously, though. You’re not worried about burnout? I can barely do everything that needs doing as it is, and you just took on another two, three dozen hours a month on.”

“You know, Ro, I was talking it over with some friends, all these things that I wanted to see happen around here There’s always so much that needs to happen, and it feels like so little does. For so long I didn’t think I could do it myself, or that I should, and I just...” Canon shrugged. “I was tired of being a pussy, you know?”

“Heh. Well you’re sure going ironman mode this fall, man. Badass.”

“I am *not* a pussy,” Mr. Canon reiterated.