That Asian Kid

by

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I'm taking my short cut through the woods, all-innocent and minding my own business, when I hear the sound of laughter coming from somewhere behind me. I slow down. I'd know that laugh anywhere. It's like a boom: loud and deep; a guffawing that emanates from the ground beneath his boots, and rumbles through the belly before erupting out of his mouth, Father Christmas style, but raised to the power of ten. It can only be Mr. Green, my History teacher. I glance back. It *is* Green. He's with a woman, but I can't make out her face. I grind my half-smoked cigarette under my heel, silently cursing my one-every-other-day habit (yeah, I know, I'm such a rebel), and Mr. Green and his companion for invading my space.

Did he see me smoking? 'Cos if he did he won't let me off with a simple lecture or a look of disdain. He'll be massively disappointed – and he'll make sure I know about it on a daily basis.

They're coming my way. Damn. I sniff the air; the smell of smoke is sticking in the air like an accusatory finger pointing directly at me. They're still some way off, so I could easily make a break for it, but I hesitate, curious about who the woman is. It could be Mr. Green's wife, but I've never seen his wife and there's something oddly familiar about this woman. I duck behind some bushes. As they approach, they slow down, and I get a good look at the woman walking beside him. What a shocker! It's Mrs. Greaves, my English Lit teacher.

I use this short-cut every day – the bus drops me off on one side of the woods, and I cut through the woods to get home, shaving fifteen minutes off my journey. I've never once seen any teachers from school down here, and as for these two particular teachers, well, I've never even seen them speak to each other at school. Any thoughts I might have had about surreptitiously creeping away are fast disappearing as I wonder what the hell my favourite teacher and my least favourite teacher are doing skulking round the woods on a freeze-your-nose-off January day.

Whatever they're here for, I have a sneaking suspicion that it's not for an innocent chat – you'd choose a warmer venue than these damp, cold woods for that. I hunker down further. There is a distinct possibility this could end in trouble – especially if they come any closer to the monster holly bush I'm currently being pricked to bits in.

I can hear them clearly now.

"This will make you laugh – I asked one of the boys how his Christmas was and this is what he said," Mr. Green is saying. "His cat climbed up the Christmas tree and toppled it over. The tree hit the dining table, and scattered pine needles all over the roast potatoes and veg. Then the cat landed on the platter of sliced turkey breast, his mum screamed, his grandmother grabbed the cat, and the cat clung onto the turkey for dear life and took half of it with him. So his family ended up eating all the trimmings minus the turkey for their lunch, which his grandmother was ecstatic about because she's a vegetarian and she said it served them right for forgetting to make her a special vegetarian dish."

That's my story!

Mrs. Greaves laughs. "Shame he didn't record it – it would have gone viral if it really happened. Cat videos get the most hits, apparently."

"I agree," Mr. Green chuckles. "He's got a way of putting things, that Jeevan."

What? *Mrs. Greaves* is laughing? Apart from the fact that I've never in the eighteen months she's been my teacher ever seen her smile (it would put a serious crack in her face), much less laugh, the real surprise is that she's laughing about *my* story.

"I suspect he probably made the whole thing up, Daniel."

Mr. Green shrugs. "He had the whole class in stitches – me included."

"There's a class clown in every form."

That's when an idea explodes into my brain and my phone's in my hand before I've given it another thought. You'd think I'd think before I acted – I mean, I get straight As in everything.

But I don't stop to think.

The idea has me on autopilot – I've accessed the camera, flicked to VIDEO, and pressed RECORD faster than most people can blink.

"Anyhow, good to see the smile back on your face, Nic," Green says. "You sounded so upset earlier. Are you going to tell me what's happened?"

"It's horrible, Daniel. I don't really know where to start."

Mr. Green pats her arm. "It can't be that bad, Nic."

“I wish you were right. The Head called me in for a meeting. He wouldn’t tell me much except that he’s concerned.”

“Concerned about what?”

Greaves looks away. “Someone’s sent in an anonymous letter.”

“What do you mean?” says Mr. Green.

“Never mind. It doesn’t matter.”

“It obviously does matter. Isn’t that why you asked me to meet you here? You said you needed to talk.”

“On reflection I think I would rather put all that out of my head – it’s very distressing.”

“Hang on – distressing? What was in the letter, Nicola?”

“Someone has made certain – *allegations*, in the note, which the Head says he feels bound to look into.”

“Allegations? Christ. That sounds serious.”

“Yes, it must be for Rawson to give it any credence.”

“So what are they alleging, Nic?” And then it’s like the penny has dropped, because Mr. Green’s tone changes. “You haven’t told anyone about what happened, have you? Because it was only the once, so–”

“Of course I haven’t. Give me some credit. My reputation would be at stake too, you know.”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. So what is the note alleging?”

“I’m pretty sure that one of the boys is playing the race card because he doesn’t like his grades. It’s utterly preposterous. What kind of person does that? Clearly one with very little going on up here,” she taps her head, “or otherwise they wouldn’t be resorting to devious, underhand and frankly ludicrous tactics.”

Mr. Green’s mouth falls on the floor. “No!” he says. “Seriously? I’ve never heard such a thing. I’m surprised Rawson’s bothering to look into it at all.”

“I know. Unbelievable, isn’t it?”

“What else did he say? What’s he going to do about it?”

“Rawson said it’s a serious allegation and it doesn’t matter if there’s no truth to it, he has to look into it regardless. He said he wasn’t overly concerned, but I’m not sure what to think.”

“Christ! I can see why you’re so worried. Something like that can get blown out of all proportion. Remember that case in the papers last year? You have to be careful. Things like that can stick – even when there’s absolutely no truth to them.”

"I know. It's so good to know you care, Daniel. It's a real worry. I don't even know exactly what the note said. Rawson wouldn't show it to me. I wish he had – I'm sure I would have recognised the handwriting."

"Whoever wrote it would have disguised their writing, Nic."

"Yes, you're right. Of course they would have. It's such a cowardly act. If they really felt unfairly treated, they should have gone straight to the Headmaster instead of sending a backstabbing, slanderous note. I've never been accused of – of anything like this." She sobs. "It's a total shock, Daniel! I've been a teacher all my life. I love the kids, and I love my job. It's all I ever wanted. It's all I know," she says, sniffing, and wiping the tears away with her hands.

Mr. Green rummages for a hanky and hands it to her. Greaves has put her hand on his arm, drawing him in. She lets her head rest on his chest as she cries. Mr. Green pats her on the back, saying soothing words.

"It'll be all right, Nic. Don't let it get to you. You have nothing to fear. Rawson won't give an anonymous note much credence."

"I know, but still, Daniel, as you said, lies can stick." She's really sobbing now. "What should I do, Daniel?" Green's put his arms around her, hugging her.

I hear kissing noises, which would make me puke if I wasn't so shocked.

They're an item?

Greaves and Green couldn't have picked a more romantic spot for their assignation.

I squat down on my knees, resigned to being stuck here a bit longer. It's only half past four, so I've still got half an hour before I have to give Maji, my gran, her insulin shot. Besides, this conversation might get even more interesting.

Mr. Green's *married*. He's always talking about how his wife prosecutes criminals for a living; "So you'd better watch your step, sonny Jim," he threatens us on a regular basis. No one pays his threats any attention, though, because Mr. Green's one of those all right teachers. Unlike Mrs. Greaves, who just doesn't get us. Well, she doesn't get *me*, that's for sure.

What I cannot get my head round is how he can fancy her. Some of the boys at school think she's all right, pretty attractive even. I've told them there's a two-for-one offer on at Specsavers and they should get themselves down there sharpish. Greaves has long frizzy blonde hair and watery blue bug eyes that would win a staring competition hands down, and she wears dangerously low-cut, close-fitting tops to show off her ample cleavage. On no planet would that be considered professional when you're teaching a bunch of hormonal teenage boys, IMHO.

“Oh, Daniel!” Mrs. Greaves exclaims breathlessly. “It’s been too long.”

“Too long? Hang on a minute, Nicola, please don’t misunderstand–”

“I know I’m not misunderstanding this,” Greaves replies, her voice suddenly low and husky.

Uh oh! I don’t want to know what’s happening – but at the same time, it’s *way* more interesting than Eastenders, which Maji insists on watching even though she can’t understand half of what the cast are saying. That’s why I have to watch it with her, so I can translate for her. It’s surprising how much of it she gets, though, just from the actors’ expressions and the way they say stuff. Not bad for a woman who’s never been to school in her life. What’s unfolding before my eyes is in a totally different league – it’s car-crash reality TV, and I’m hooked.

“Look, Nicola. Stop, please.” Mr. Green seems reluctant. “We came here to talk.”

Mrs. Greaves is leading him the few steps towards the large oak tree almost directly in front of the bushes I’m hiding in, and he’s allowing her to lead him.

What’s wrong with him?

My heart is thudding so loudly, I’m surprised they haven’t heard it.

Sticking around for the show was not my best idea, I think.

And the camera is still recording.

Okay, this is seriously gross!

Mr. Green isn't that into it if you ask me. Almost as if he's doing her a big favour – maybe he is, maybe this is how his sympathy manifests itself – hell, I don't know, I'm no psychologist. But it's seriously messed up. In PSHE, teachers are always going on about how we need to learn to say "no", usually where sex and drugs are involved. Man, some of them need to practice what they preach.

Greaves has unbuttoned her coat. She isn't giving up – and she isn't about to let Green get away. Pretty soon, after more buttons get unbuttoned, Green finally seems to realise that resistance is futile.

They're *at it* now. Shit, the huffing and puffing and panting are seriously messing with my gag reflex. I'm wishing I'd stuck my ear-buds in my ears to muffle the sound-effects. Although it's obvious what they're up to, most of their clothes have, thanks to the freezing cold weather, stayed on. So that's one image that won't be searing itself into my memory to haunt me until the day I die.

I spoke too soon. Greaves is yanking her tights down. I look away, letting the camera do the watching for me, and wonder what kind of idiot I am. I should have legged it when I had the chance.

When it stops, I almost yell 'hallelujah,' in sheer relief. Luckily for me, it hasn't lasted too long and both parties seem happy enough with their performance, so who am I to argue?

I'm kind of hoping there's more to the sex thing than that, though. Because if that's all there is then there's not much to look forward to. Here's a confession: I haven't got that far myself yet; but then I'm only fifteen, I go to a boys' grammar, and, since my grandma got sick, I don't get out to parties as much as I'd like.

Mr. Green lights up – another shocker. I'd never taken him for a smoker.

“Daniel! You told me you were giving up,” Greaves says. “Another broken promise,” she mutters, buttoning up her coat.

Mr. Green exhales a cloud of smoke. “I didn’t promise anything, Nicola. I merely said that I was considering it. Besides, it’s only the occasional one. No harm done.”

“My clothes will stink of smoke,” Greaves objects.

“Your cat is hardly going to complain.”

I muffle a laugh.

“What was that?” Greaves is peering round anxiously. Her eyes settle briefly on my holly bush. I’m trying not to shake the damn thing, but an attack of the giggles is threatening to give me away.

“Just the wild-life, Nic. Time we got going. I’m late.” Mr. Green stamps out his cigarette and starts walking.

She catches hold of his arm. “Wait! You promised me you’d talk to her.”

My ears prick up. I hunch forwards, so I can hear better. He’s not going to leave his wife for Greaves, is he? He must be mad!

“Talk to who?” Mr. Green asks, baffled.

“Susan.”

Mr. Green looks seriously troubled, so I’m guessing Susan is his wife.

“Look, we were both very drunk that night, and you’ve obviously misunderstood. I’m sorry, Nic. It was an easy mistake, considering what a state we were both in.”

“Speak for yourself, Daniel, I was driving that night. Remember?”

“Were you? Didn’t we share a cab?”

Mr. Green can’t seem to remember anything about *that night*. He must have been well tanked. Either that, or whatever happened between them was so gross, he blanked it all out. So why would he do it again – here, in the freezing cold, stone-cold sober? He really has got one hell of a problem saying *no*. I’m kind of wishing that Mr. Green had seen me smoking now – maybe none of this would have happened if they’d known that these woods were not as deserted as they appeared. I’d have happily taken all the detentions he demanded and promised never to smoke again; in fact I don’t think I’ll ever smoke again after this. But it’s too late – it’s happened, and I’ve got the evidence on camera.

“Look, it doesn’t matter. Susan wasn’t well and things were difficult. It was a rough patch, but we’re trying our best to get through it.”

Really? This is trying his best?

Greaves is thinking the same thing, judging from her arched eyebrow.

"Look, Nic, you were there for me then. You gave me a shoulder to lean on when I really needed it, and I'm grateful for that."

"I think I gave you a bit more than that, Daniel. I seem to recall you were more than happy to take things further."

"I'm sorry, Nic."

"So you were just using me."

"No, it just happened, and I'm very truly sorry."

"And what about what happened just now?"

Mr. Green is squirming. It's not a nice thing to see. When you so rarely see teachers out of school, you don't think they can be much different to what they're like in school. One thing's for sure: I don't know if I'll ever be able to see Mr. Green in the same way again.

Plus I don't honestly know who to feel more sorry for – Green, who's acted like a complete idiot, or Greaves, and the less said about her the better.

Just last week, Greaves reported me to the Head for 'answering back in a belligerent manner.' One thing I don't do is *belligerent*. Sarky, yes, smart-aleck, big yes, but generally I'm not a stroppy kind of guy. By the time Greaves had finished telling Mr Rawson, the Head, about my unacceptable behaviour, even I believed her.

Anyway, to cut a long and miserable story short, I ended up with my first detention ever, and had to get the school to call my mum – it was an after-school detention, which meant I was going to be late back for Maji. Mum blew her top at me. I could practically see the flames from where I stood in the school office thirty miles away. Needless to say, I got scorched.

"Don't tell me you were just doing me a favour because I was upset," Greaves is saying.

"Of course not!" Green says.

But it does look that way, I'm thinking. It's not just Green though – it takes two to tango, except that I'd call what they were doing a little bit more than tangoing! In fact, I don't even want to think about what they've just been doing.

"Oh, Nic, come on. Please don't be like that. You've got a lot on your plate at the moment, what with that ridiculous anonymous note hanging over you."

"It *is* ridiculous, isn't it? Rawson should have put the note exactly where rubbish like that belongs – straight into the bin!"

He takes her hand. "You're frozen. Come on, let's go. I'll walk you to your car. And whatever happens over this note thing, Nicola, try not to worry too much. The Head isn't going to give an anonymous note the time of day – he's just making you aware of the fact that

someone’s making a false accusation. And, of course, I’ll back you up and support you all I can...”

I can’t believe Green’s saying he’ll back her up! Now would be a good time to stroll out of my hiding place – I’m SO tempted – just to see the look of complete horror on their faces.

I resist the temptation. As soon as they’re out of sight, I have to get home. My gran is waiting for her insulin shot, and I have an X-rated video on my phone that’s already started feeling like a ticking time-bomb.