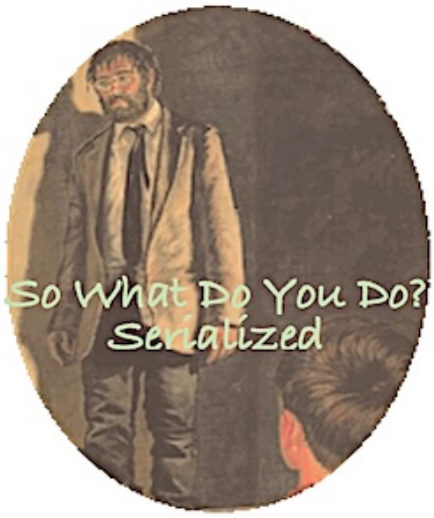


# Chapter 2

The next thing I did was really stupid. I mean, I rushed right up to my teacher and started babbling away. "Hey, Mr. Adams. It's me, Charlie Fuller."

He remained slumped over his book. I touched his shoulder.

"Remember?" I said. "I had you in third grade. I always wore black tennis shoes, and so did you, and I was the lousiest writer in the class. Remember me now? Charlie Fuller. You might not recognize me. I mean, I've grown a lot—I'm almost as tall as my mom now—and my hair's a lot longer. Man, third grade was the best class in the world, Mr. Adams. You were my all-time favorite teacher ever. Remember that giant bubble we made out of a clear plastic sheet? We blew it up, and we all climbed inside. I remember you brought your guitar in there and we sang songs. Can you still juggle? I remember you juggling when we were doing math work. And you always drew those cartoons on our math papers. And the squirt-gun fight. Remember? And the time you roller-bladed around our classroom. You were crazy."

Mr. Adams said nothing. He wiped his nose with a sleeve and turned a page of his book.

I jabbered on. "Remember Colleen Martin? She's in my homeroom at the middle school now. Remember Oic? I'll never forget how you'd say 'Oic' whenever someone understood something you were teaching. They'd say 'Oh, I see,' and you would say 'Oic'. Remember? 'Oh, I see' spells Oic and 'Easy' spells Ez. You were the funniest teacher."

I was talking like a maniac, much louder than my library voice. The whole time, my teacher just sat there reading his book.

"Hey, what happened, Mr. Adams?" I asked. "I mean, what are you doing here? How did you get so...you know...dirty? And why did you quit teaching? What's going on, Mr. Adams?"

He looked up from his book and stared at me with watery eyes. Blood vessels zig-zagged over the white parts.

"You got any money?" he said. His voice sounded old and crackly. And phew! His breath smelled like booze. "You got a dollar to give me?"

I reached into my backpack where I always keep some emergency money. "Sure. Sure I do, Mr. Adams," I said, holding out a five-dollar bill just like that. "Here you go. That's all I have."

I didn't even think about what I was doing. I had never given that much money away in my life. But this was Mr. Adams. He had given me tons of stuff in the past--pencils, paperbacks, lunch money.

He snatched the bill from my hand and stuffed it into his tweed coat. That's it. He didn't say thank you or anything. All he did was start reading again. I watched as a wad of spit dribbled from the corner of his mouth into his beard.

"You know, I hated school before I had you, Mr. Adams," I said. "My mom says you were the teacher who straightened me out. I guess I used to be pretty lazy in school. Mom says if you hadn't gotten me excited about learning stuff,

who knows where I might have ended up. But in middle school, I'm doing pretty well, Mr. Adams. Really. You can ask my teachers. Especially my art teacher. She says I'm one of the best drawers she's had in sixth grade. I told her about you. Remember how you gave me a sketchbook once. Remember how you had a special place on the bulletin board for my animal drawings? Remember that, Mr. Adams? Here I'll show you some sketches I did today. Look at these, Mr. Adams."

I reached into my pocket and pulled out four slips of paper. About an hour ago, I had sketched an old lady sitting on a bench with a pigeon on each knee. I also drew a bald man who had tied a talking Barbie doll around his neck. Whenever someone walked past him, he pressed a button on the doll, and Barbie would say, "Won't you be my friend? Won't you be my friend?" Weird. I tried to show the drawings to Mr. Adams, but he ignored them.

My memory is fuzzy about what happened next. I remember Mr. Adams standing. I remember his round, crazy eyes staring down at me and the yellow stains on his teeth.

"Get away from me!" he shouted. "Get away!"

The library security guard rushed toward us.

"Sh! Sh!" went people in the library.

For the longest time, I stood there frozen.

Mr. Adams covered his ears with his hands. He continued to glare at me with his wild eyes.

"Get away! I don't know you!" he shouted. "Get! Get!"