

Turning Tables

The beard was his first. The outcome of a holiday spared the obligation of shaving. He'd resisted the hippie look at university. Now in his forties, he felt a beard gave him an air of distinction, particularly with grey flecks matching those in his black hair. Or so he thought.

"My god, David, why ever did you grow that?" Sally, his secretary screamed, jumping up from her desk. "You look ten years older."

"Maybe that's what I need for top jobs," David said, walking quickly towards his office before others could add their comments.

"Well, I hope you're relaxed after your holiday. I've had to fill your diary with interviews today. The job offer you made, before your holiday, was refused. The customer is demanding that we appoint a Project Manager this week. I've put the latest applicants' details on your desk. The first one is due here at 10am."

David retreated to his office, disappointed the PM job hadn't been sorted, that his holiday was over and his beard wasn't seen as an asset.

On his desk was a single sheet, with the interviews schedule and the names of the candidates, and a stack of their application forms.

He scanned the names quickly before returning to the first one, John Langton, a name he could never forget. Surely, this wasn't the same John Langton? He rubbed his beard, feeling perspiration through the hairs.

He remembered his first term at Grammar school, the nightmare that came to him for years after. He could still visualise Langton's snarling face; the bully who grabbed his cap and satchel and threw them into playground puddles, who locked him in the "dark hole", where the cricket nets were stored, and who followed him to the toilets demanding "soap money" for washing his hands. Fortunately, the torment had stopped when Langton left the school after his parents moved.

David's hand shook as he selected Langton's CV, willing the name to be a coincidence. Two words were enough to tell him it wasn't, Watford Grammar. In forty minutes, he would be facing his nemesis.

He thought about asking Sally to cancel the interview. Too late, probably. But was he still that eleven year old boy, nervous of a new school? No, this was his territory, he held the high ground, Langton had no dominion over him here. He scanned the CV in detail, no degree, some sporting achievements, three longish stints at well known companies and some claimed success at Project Management. He was a possibility for the job. David stroked his beard. Would Langton recognise him, thirty years on, in a senior role and with this facial disguise?

At 10am, David stood tall to greet the short bald headed candidate, John Langton, who edged nervously into his office.