

Eric Seiley

Burning Bridges As We Go

6, 185 Words

## Lessons to Live By

Brian Severs bit his bottom lip hard enough to break the skin, sending blood trickling down his chin. All because Professor McGill was scowling. Reading his essay aloud and actually scowling. Which was unnerving.

Sliding a box of Kleenex across the desk, Professor McGill continued, *"You can't always get what you want? Isn't it ironic? I'm a loser, baby, so why don't you kill me? I'm sorry, Mr. Severs, but what kind of essay are you writing? I don't understand what's going on here."*

*"They're lyrics, Professor. From songs."*

*"Ahh. Then my next question is why are you using song lyrics for your personal essay?"*

*"I was just trying to explain like who I am versus how the world sees me you know? Like trying be all creative and pithy or something."*

*"Pithy? You were trying to be forcefully expressive? Or possibly a fruit with too much pith?"*

*"Umm, yeah, I guess so..."*

*"Okay, I understand now. It was a valiant undertaking, Mr. Severs. And I applaud your effort. But this essay is a bit confusing to the reader. Especially us ancient teachers*

who aren't up on the current music trends. And you didn't include a thesis sentence at the end of your first paragraph to let us know what your paper would be about."

"I'm sorry, Professor."

"No sorries required. You still have time to fix it. Why not take another pass at it, only this time use your own words. I find them far more interesting and a better way to communicate who you are. First though, look up examples of how to write a personal essay in your text and follow the outline. Then, if you like, you can make a quick video highlighting the event you've chosen to write about and I'll give you extra credit."

"Thank you, Professor."

"After that, write your personal essay in your own words using clear, solid sentences and submit everything by Friday. At least five hundred words, please."

"Yeah, sure. Thanks, Professor McGill."

"Alright Brian. See you Friday. Keep up the good work."

For Professor McGill -- Steve to his friends -- freshman English classes at the University of Maryland had long ago become an exercise in suspending disbelief -- simply because so few students arrived with any competence in the principles of writing. Sure, most had heard of punctuation and could even spell a few words correctly -- when they weren't shortening sentences into initials, "btw." And some could even produce a decent introductory thesis statement. But Steve suspected this had more to do with A.I. writing databases rather than any particular student's knowledge of how to properly format an essay.

"Most of these kids, if you ask me," growled Professor Talibani, a fellow professor and friend of Steve's, "are fucking illiterate morons. I don't understand what's happened to our country. We've gone from Sontag and Rand to Ma and Pa Kettle in less than one

generation. Why did I burn my bra fighting for equality if we were only going to end up playing nurse maid to someone's idiotic child and their academically deficient brains?!"

"Really? You burned your bra? In the 90's? At Wellesley's? Was it a large fire?" Steve teased.

"Oh, go fuck a duck, Steve. Don't be a prick. You know what I'm saying."

Professor Talabani – Sue to her friends -- was known to complain in graphically vulgar terms during their weekly English department meetings. Students, the state of education, society -- it was all fair game to a National Book Award winning author already on the 100 best nonfiction books of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Which certainly endeared her to Steve, but didn't do much for the old goats on the faculty who were equal parts frightened by her acid tongue and attracted to her exotic good looks. Nor did the administration ever intervene. Sue was tenured. And published regularly, to great success, with the university's press banner. Which made her practically Teflon.

"I thought I would love teaching. I really did," Sue raged. "But this generation of students aren't shit! They scroll their damn cellphones like addicts hitting the pipe, whining the whole time about their bullshit "mental health." Then, if you ask them to explain the difference between expository, descriptive, or persuasive writing and they shit a brick. Like you'd slapped them in the face. The sad part is, most won't even try to learn. I mean, where the fuck were all their high school English teachers when this was going on? Were they off browsing Snapchat or trolling Tinder for their next underage date to groom. You'd think at least one of them would've taught their students that the word "literally" means precisely verbatim and not some metaphoric punctuation about nothing for fuck's sake! If I hear "literally" used incorrectly one more time in my classroom I swear I'm gonna rip that person's tongue out!

Metaphorically speaking of course! Am I alone in this?! Or do any of you neutered, cowardly lions of academia want to chime in?"

Sue did have a point, albeit made in her own garrulous fashion. Over the last few years, fewer and fewer freshman showed up prepared for college. At least academically. Nor could most wrestle their tangentially divergent thoughts into any semblance of a disciplined, cohesive narrative. Ironically, most new students still loved creative writing and had hopes of becoming the next David Foster Wallace on their way to writing *Infinite Jest*. Without realizing, of course, their adjective heavy, overly emotive pieces were academically illiterate. Not to mention painful to read, and incredibly boring.

Steve knew it would be easy to blame public education, but he didn't. Not public education nor the private school system nor charter schools. Because every teacher from middle school to high school to college knew, with each successive generation of young students growing up under social media's dominance, obsessed with the illusion of creating their "best life" with just a scroll or a swipe, had lost the ability to engage directly. At least in any academic sense of the word. Worse, acquiring the discipline to do so, as most colleges still expected, was seen as abusive. If not downright hostile and singularly prejudicial. If it wasn't given to them in a neatly dumbed down, fully comprehensive package for their consideration, students tended to reject it -- their academic brains having all but been deconstructed and desensitized to nearly everything, including the printed word.

"Do you realize this generation can't even read cursive!" Sue continued ranting. "The other day I wrote a note in cursive to one of my students, requesting she make specific corrections to a paper she'd authored, and she just ignored me. When I asked her why, she claimed since she couldn't read the note, she didn't feel it necessary to respond. Nor was it her responsibility. I was the teacher so, if I wanted to see those changes, I

should've just made them for her myself. On her paper! That she authored! Can you believe that?! What an entitled fuck-tard! I mean, son of a bitch, right?! When did students degenerate into the proverbial *Eloi* of our society?"

Steve already knew the answer. He'd discovered this little anomaly a few years ago and already adjusted his student communication style accordingly. But more disturbing than the death of cursive, or the ignorance of students, was the realization students matriculating to the U of M were purposely being mis-lead. Students used to arrive hoping to learn academics skills sufficient to earn a degree. Which would, in turn, help them achieve success "in the real world." No longer. This current generation still wanted the degree, sure, but they didn't want to work for it. Because they'd been told colleges were obligated to pass students just because their parents had paid "good money" for them to attend. With those fees guaranteeing not only passing grades, but a degree at the end of four years spent "partying" or "finding" themselves or whatever. As though colleges were some sort of societal Rumspringa rather than bastions of higher education.

"It's not just a millennial issue either, you know," Sue lamented, "These bloviated parents are just as delusional as their ignorant offspring!"

Steve *DID* think it was a millennial problem, but not because of an entitled laziness on the part of each student. The derivative issue had more to do with parental guidance. Most modern parents *DID* believe they were purchasing a degree for their children when they sent them off to college, whether that child did the work or not. Learned or not. Cared or not. To the parents, a college degree was, indeed, a receipt of purchase. Like they'd bought their child new shoes or a new car. It didn't matter if the shoes fit or whether the child knew how to drive. As long as they had it.

“If I didn’t think the administration would try to strip me of my tenure,” Sue growled, “I’d stand in the central quad at each year’s incoming freshman, parent weekend and use a bullhorn to tell each and every fat ass parent that little Susie or Johnnie or whomever they sired, are essentially idiots. And that they are morons! And that if they’d log out of their brain sucking social media accounts, stop whining, shut the fuck up and prepare to learn, maybe they could find real purpose and meaning in life.”

Steve agreed in principle, and he certainly had his own opinions on the matter, but rather than pointlessly complain about the state of education during their weekly faculty meetings, he decided to change his teaching style and see if he couldn’t raise his students’ expectations. He believed, at heart, most students still wanted to learn. But instead of insisting freshman learn the “old fashioned way” -- through lecture, study, and testing -- he decided to put the whole semester in their hands and ask how they wanted to acquire their education. Most students, except for the apathetic or academically sheltered, responded well to the changes.

Here's how he set it up. On the first day of class, when nearly all registered freshman were sure to show up, Steve eschewed the traditional rollcall. Instead, he held his hand up, like he was asking a question, introduced himself quickly with “Hello, I’m Professor McGill and this is English 1A,” and then pointed to a row of blue filing cabinets lined up at the back of the room.

“The syllabus,” Steve explained, “along with all course requirements are in those blue file cabinets. Any student can access them and peruse the material at their leisure -- it is yours for the taking. If you want an A, then everything you need is there. And if you submit all the listed assignments and attend the final, you will receive an A for this course. As simple as that.”

Here Steve always paused to give each student a chance to process what was being explained.

“To be clear,” he continued, “You don’t need to come to class unless you want to. Everything you need to learn over the course of the semester regarding the principles of English composition is in that file cabinet for you to have, in totem, today. There is a workbook with five chapters to be completed. And you are required to write five essays: one Personal, one Argumentative, Expository, Descriptive, and Narrative. You can do the work over the course of the semester or all in the first week if you choose. You can turn those assignments in one at a time or all together at any point during the semester. All you have to do is submit them here to me, or in my office, before the end of the semester. If you do that, you will receive an A.”

Some students were starting to catch on. Others still looked unsure.

“You should know, I will not grade your work. You’re A is assured simply by completing each assignment to the best of your ability and turning them in. However, if you would like me to review any essay you’ve written, or cover any workbook assignment with you, and make recommendations, I would be happy to do so. My goal is for you to determine how you want to learn and at what speed suits you. Then apply it for yourself. I am here to assist where I can.”

Another pause. Most students getting it and buzzing like bees in a hive with the expectation of an easy A and additional free time. Others still a little cautious.

Steve continued, “I will be in this classroom every week on the scheduled Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during the times noted for this class, as well as those noted office hours, for any of you who would like additional instruction. Attendance will not be taken, nor mandated, for any class except one - on the last day, which is the Final. Please familiarize yourselves with that date. Every student must present themselves

here on that prescribed final date and time as mandatory to pass this class. Other than that, your time is your own to invest in whatever way you deem best to acquire the knowledge needed to pass this course.”

Steve always took this moment to look out across the sea of student faces, wondering who would stay, who would leave, and which student would, at some point, become a problem. There was always one though he never quite knew who it might be. Many students were predictable at this age, but there were always a few surprises in the bunch. This year, he had his eye on a group of cheerleaders bunched up together in the back of the room.

“Let me say in conclusion,” Steve finished, “For those who wish to improve their knowledge and skills in English composition, it would be my honor to provide the instruction needed to challenge yourselves. For those who just wish a rudimentary A, then make your way over to the blue file cabinets, remove a syllabus, a workbook and any additional, appropriate materials named. Then complete them as instructed. For the rest, I look forward to collaborating with you over the course of the semester. Thank you. Class dismissed.”

Five minutes start to finish.

After a few semesters, Steve always recognized the lazy students simply because they had the biggest smiles on their faces when they jumped up and rushed over to the blue file cabinets. The average students, fearful and hesitant, didn’t charge right away. They usually waited and followed suit till each had collected what they needed and left. The few students who stayed behind were generally split between two types: the more academically obedient, who felt confused as to what to do with the free will granted for the first time in their young adult lives. And the few genuine, education-minded

students who wanted to learn and improve their writing skills. The latter being, by far, the most rewarding group to teach.

And so each semester generally flowed. The average and apathetic student doing whatever - usually showing up during the last week, turning everything in at the last minute. The dogmatic, sheltered student showing up every week expecting traditional lecture, quizzes, and tests – only to be confused when Steve simply asked them to discuss their learning process. And the genuine student, excited to earn well written victory after victory through hard work, trial and error, and as much inspiration and teaching skill Steve could bring to the task at hand.

Steve always hoped one of his students would one day write their own *Infinite Jest*, though he knew most wouldn't. Still as long as they tried, he was happy.

On the week after Finals, before his winter break began, Steve usually received one or two calls from helicopter parents whose children had either failed the class because they forgot to attend the final, or failed to turn in their work during the course of the semester. It boggled the mind, but it happened.

This semester's helicopter parent call was courtesy of a freshman named Bridget Hamilton-Ashbury. A truly uninspired, apathetic, and entitled young woman whom Steve hadn't seen since the first day of class. Nor received any course work or written essays from. And come the day of Finals, surprisingly showed up with barely five minutes left till class ended.

Steve wondered why she'd even come since she didn't have any papers or workbook with her. Or had yet to turn in a single assignment. She just walked in with five minutes to go and sat next to a boy named Roy. Roy Denton, the ironically cliched, not so bright All-American, All-Star football player – who himself had managed to get an A

simply by copying answers provided by his tutor and writing five sincere, if not particularly skillful, essays turned in the week earlier.

Steve generally used the finals as a medium to talk with the class about the process -- what worked for them, what could be improved. How they could apply their learning efforts to the rest of their college courses. But with Bridget, Steve wasn't sure what to say.

As he wrapped up class, Bridget perched haughtily in the front row using the last few minutes to file her nails, all while side-glancing Steve's way and sigh-moaning to make sure he understood she was the one being put out. Not him. Her. It was a spectacularly entitled performance and quite possibly the most insulting Steve had witnessed in all his years. Apathy, to Steve, being the most cardinal sin in academia. And entitled laziness hugely disrespectful to professors who put in the work on their behalf.

"Thank you, everyone," Steve concluded. "I'll be seeing some of you next semester in English 1B. And for the rest of you, enjoy your holidays. Thank you for your time and efforts. Class is now concluded."

Several students came up after to briefly chat with Steve. But Bridget waited till she was the last in the classroom, allowing Steve to approach her.

"Hello, Bridget. How are you?"

"Look, Prof," Bridget jumped right in, forgoing courtesies, "I'm, like, totally an Omega Nu this year and totally legacy, but I still have to like totally follow the pledge rules and be on call and stuff like that for my sisters. Which I've been doing all semester. So like I was literally busy all semester. And this week has been such a bear. A real monster. I mean like Sister Kiki - she's not really a sister in the catholic nun way or anything - but totally a Sorority sister who literally keeps us busy 25 hours a day. Well, she was all, you guys have to decorate for the Alpha Betas this week for their big homecoming

event. And me and the other pledges were literally super busy and didn't even get to sleep our necessary ten or nothing. So, the point being, I just didn't get the chance to turn in any assignments. I did them, of course, but I've just been like totally busy with my Omega Nu responsibilities. That's like why I didn't even get to the final on time because, like, I literally had to drop off decorations to the Alpha Betas and couldn't say no. You understand, Riiiiigghhheettt?"

"Not completely. But, you still have till the end of this day to turn in your assignments and essays. Feel free to bring them to my office. That's where I'll be for the next two hours."

"Like I just explained I did them, I swear. And I'll get them to you as soon as I can, honestly. But like Sister Kiki is expecting me and the other pledges back at our sorority house like right now. It's a must, must, must. So I have to go, but I'll get them to you when I can. Promise. Riiiiigghhheettt? I just wanted to let you know so there wasn't, like, any misunderstanding."

Of course, humans being human, such things invariably happened and the student tended to make promises they had no intention of fulfilling. Especially when their experience with adults told them adults rarely enforced accountability in the face of juvenile protest. Steve wasn't one of those kind of adults. So, at the end of the day, as he was closing up his office, he recorded Bridget's final grade as an F, sent her an official student notification, and included the required addendum all grade decisions could be appealed within one week's time to the Dean of Academics before her grade was officially recorded. Then he went home.

On Monday though, Steve was taken off guard when Bridget presented herself to his office looking a bit disheveled, at least as far as a sorority girls tended to allow. Wearing

a thick Omega Nu sweatshirt over jeans, her hair pulled back in a ponytail, ball cap on, and white adidas, which signaled her “serious student” affectation.

“Like here,” she spat dropping a stack of crumbled essay papers and class workbook on his desk before taking a haughty pose before him, hands on her hips. “Here’s your stupid papers.”

Curious, Steve picked up the stack and started reading the essay on top. But halfway through realized the essay wasn’t hers. Sure, it was handwritten, but the essay struck him as very similar to another student’s -- Roy, the All-American football player. Including a reference to “lessons” he’d learned at a young age playing Pop Warner football. An activity Steve doubted Bridget had participated in.

*Ahh*, Steven realized. Bridget had copied Roy’s work to complete her assignments. Of course. Or Roy had copied his own work for her over the weekend. “Is this your work, Miss Ashbury?”

“Like totally yes, of course. I like just gave it to you, didn’t I?!”

The funny part was cheating with all the answers available seemed ludicrous to Steve. But, instead of being contrite, Bridget had resorted to rationalizing and using one the oldest trick in the books – having the boyfriend do the work.

“Like, it’s really important to my mom and dad, you know,” Bridget informed Steve, “I can’t get an F when I’m like supposed to get an A. Which is kinda what you promised everyone on the first day of class. That’s like literally what you told us. Plus, I already told my parents I was getting A’s in all my classes. So here’s your papers. I did them. So you have to give me the A like you said. If you don’t, then I’ll tell my parents you like totally cheated me.”

*Could this degree of disconnect be possible?* Steve wondered. *Well, sure. It wasn't that unbelievable.* "I'm sorry Ms. Ashbury, but any and all assignments for the fall semester's English 1A class are now past the due date. I cannot offer you an A grade. Not to mention, the work itself looks very similar to another student who was in this semester's class. I believe you might know him." *Now que the protest and complaint,* Steve thought.

When students who failed his class came to his office at the end of the semester, Steve knew from experience they would fall into one of two categories: the first would beg. Or try coercion – sometimes even involving the “oldest” profession. After a little bluster, the student might offer sexual favors - sometimes full liaisons – boys and girls alike, in exchange for grade improvement. A few just blatantly told him to drop his pants and they'd “blow” him right there in the office.

*Lord, this generation is so quick to compromise and mitigate their disappointments,* Steve always thought. *Without any shame. Like they were simply offering you a piece of gum from the store in exchange.*

Steve always, with the most gentle and non-judgmental grace, turned the student down. But after being rejected, some students threatened to “expose” him even if they had to make false accusations. Which didn't fly because Steve was careful to show them the open office door, the secretary sitting outside, and the video and audio recordings he used with every student meeting for just these sorts of occasions. Which helped. But to help the student save face, he would also offer them the opportunity to complete the course work before the next semester began and receive a passing grade. Most were only too glad to accept.

The other student tactic involved the threat of lawsuit, which often came from the more affluent students who were raised to see educators as their personal servants assigned

to fulfill their least demand. The greater the affluence, the more the demand, the stronger the opposition. Affluent students were seldom dissuaded. They wanted something for nothing, and even the university chancellor couldn't protect Steve when those students enlisted their parents' outside lawyers for help. The pressure was too great.

Bridget, as affluent a student there was at the university, didn't take rejection well. "I don't, like, think you know who you're talking to, Professor McGill," Bridget stated. "I like did the work and you're not giving me the grade you owe me. That's totally fraud and I'm gonna like totally sue you and get you fired. My dad's like totally a senator and has lawyers at his beck and call, you hear! So like, you'll totally get fired! He won't let you take advantage of me like this."

A few days later, Steve received a call from Bridget's mother, Abigail Hamilton-Ashbury.

"Let's be realistic, Mister McGill," Abigail condescended during her prearranged call on behalf of her daughter, "College is a time for our children to find themselves. To experience the world away from their parent's and develop those long lasting friendships that will serve them well in the life ahead. It's what we did when we went to college. It's what they are supposed to do now that they have the opportunity. This is what college should be. But when you fail to regard Bridget's important extracurricular activities and penalize her for taking part in them, it seems capricious."

"I understand," Steve replied.

"Do you?" Mrs. Ashbury asked. "Because Bridget wasn't in a position to refuse her sisters. Nor should she have to. I believe you put her in that unfair position and so I expect you to restore her grade to a justifiable A. You should know, Bridget explained all about your first day of class speech. I don't know what you're on about, but as far as

I'm concerned, Bridget confirmed she did the work, yet you still failed to give her the A. She thinks you might have something against her. I assured her, of course, that was not the case. But she is a beautiful girl and I know how you professors are with impressionable young women. I experienced my fair share of discrimination when I went to university."

"I assure you Mrs. Ashbury, that was not the case."

"Well, I am glad to hear that. But it still doesn't correct the issue at hand or how capricious you've been."

Steve wondered if Abigail looked up the word *capricious* in the dictionary before deciding how to best to work it into their conversation. Most parents, even the affluent ones, wanted professors to think they were smart, even when they weren't, and became defensive if suggested otherwise.

Ironically, in Steve's many years of experience, he did find affluent parents believed wealth was equal to smart -- intelligence by sheer benefit of financial sufficiency. And financially sufficient meant being right. And being right meant they believed they were smarter than everyone else who was less wealthy, otherwise they'd be more wealthy. Even professors, doctors, and clergyman, who worked diligently to acquire their doctorate, were only thought of as a slightly elevated class of blue-collar worker and not in the same league as those with excessive wealth or generational money.

Steve understood, like many of his colleagues, how any person could be smart without being educated, but only the discipline of education made a person educated. Few people with elevated finances understood this.

"Mrs. Ashbury, your daughter, Bridget, is...well, she's an 'energetic' girl who could easily have received an A had she even remotely applied herself to the course dictum provided on the first day of class. I understand your concern, but I do not believe it

would be fair to the other students in the class, namely those who did the work and completed the final, to have Bridget's grade elevated above theirs when she did not earn the higher grade. It would also be unethical considering Bridget simply did not earn a grade higher than F. But it is only one class. With a little extra work before next semester, Bridget can complete all assignments and receive a passing grade. I trust you understand."

"Oh, I do, Mister McGill. I do. But I am not sure you do. Bridget needs to receive an A now for her required classes so she can maintain her on campus eligibility for the Omega Nu's. An F jeopardizes that. Nor do I want her burdened with unfair requirements, especially since she completed the work and needs to move forward. She will be focusing on other, more important matters from now on. I am sure you understand. If not, I would, unfortunately, be required to engage my husband and have him contact the chancellor directly. That would certainly not look favorable on you. But, we don't have to let it come to that, do we?"

"I understand." He did. Steve knew how far entitled and affluent people were willing to go for their own purposes. And how willingly the current academic administration would allow them to do so when money, threats of lawsuit, and image were at stake.

"Do you?"

"I do. I will rectify the issue immediately."

"I am glad to hear you say that. Thank you for being reasonable. That will be all, Mister McGill."

Steve noticed she ended the call not with "professor" but "mister" and hung up on him like he was the butler.

Steve did as he promised. He elevated Bridget's grade to an A knowing it wouldn't make any difference to her education or his ethical integrity. Such issues, he had long ago reconciled, would never become "the hill you die on" as his mother used to intone. She'd been a teacher who taught Steve a few tricks along the way. Like never openly exposing yourself or getting into a power struggle when other means were available.

After elevating Bridget's grade, Steve put a call in to one of his "other means available."

"West End Bar and Grill," Joey shouted into the phone so he could be heard over the clinking of beer glasses, the football game on the tv, and the rowdy laughter coming from his patrons.

"Hey Joey, its Steve."

"Steve-O! Where you been, buddy? Missed you at the card game last month."

"Sorry, academic life. Mid-terms were in full swing and I picked up a couple of new freshman classes to my teaching load. Speaking of loads, is Bobbie around?"

Laughing, Joey set the phone receiver down and went to get his wife, Bobbie, from the back.

Bobbie, aka Bernadette. Aka Joey's wife and Steve's one time girlfriend from high school. If you could call a few movie dates and the beginning of a lifetime friendship, girlfriend. More like big sister for life. Bobbie, for some reason, had taken a liking to Steve right from the start and really looked out for him – from bullies, teachers, anyone who looked down on Steve. She encouraged his "book smarts," was the first girl he kissed, and the first to stay with him the night he learned his parents were killed by a drunk driver on their way home from the movies. The drunk driver, a sixteen year old kid from a rich family, was blatantly at fault, but still let off with a warning after his affluent father called in several favors to the Chief of Police. Who determined the

incident to be a “no fault” traffic accident and dismissed the whole thing as closed. And no one, except Steve and Bobbie, cared enough to challenge the injustice of it all. Steve planned to quit school after that and get a job to support himself, but Bobbie wouldn’t hear of it. At her insistence, her family took him in, even though it stretched their meager financial means, and treated him like one of their own. Steve would do anything for them. Since that day and forever.

“Steve?”

“Hi, Bobbie.”

“Hey Sugar, what’s up? You doing okay?”

“I am, thanks for asking. Cindy and I are planning on attending your mom’s birthday party next week. Let me know what we can bring. Otherwise, I’m just gonna show up with condoms and flowers and flirt my ass off with her all night long.”

“Sure, sugar. She’d love that. You know her. We’d love to see you, too. But that’s not why you called. Cindy and I already spoke about the party yesterday, so I know you got something else on your mind.”

“No, of course. You’re right. I do. I was hoping to enlist a complete surrender.”

“Oh yeah? It’s been a hot minute since you asked for one of those. This one must be really rich, and a really big bitch.”

“Well, she ain’t Mother Theresa that’s for sure.”

“She got a name?”

“Bridget Louise Hamilton-Ashbury, 18 years old. Lives at Bastion House on Faber Ave with the Omega Nu Sorority.”

“Omega Nu’s, huh? I knew a few of those self-righteous little sluts back in the day. Think their shit don’t stink. Okay, Sugar, I’ll pass it along to Joey’s crew. Talk soon. Say hi to Cathy.”

“Will do. Hey, tell Joey I won’t skip his next poker night. I might need a down payment for a new car or something.”

“Funny man. Bye Sugar.”

A week later, after the semester ended and winter break officially began, Steve sat down to his morning coffee and his beloved Maryland Gazette newspaper. On this particular morning, the picture of Bridget being arrested, in the seen and heard around town section, caught his attention first. He read the full article -- enjoying every detail about how a well-known senator had to bail out his Omega Nu college freshman daughter from jail over the weekend. Seems she was caught breaking into a local dentist’s office and charged with felony B&E. Drugs were suspected to be the primary motive.

Two local boys, who witnessed the break in, claimed the girl had picked them up at a nearby west end bar claiming she wanted to “party” and took them to get some “really good blow.” They didn’t know what she was on about till she drove them down the street, parked her Mercedes in front of a dental office, and used a hammer retrieved from the trunk to smash the front office door open.

“Wait here,” she told them before going into the dentist office through the smashed front glass door. One of the local boys immediately left to call the police because he didn’t want to get blamed for the burglary. He was on probation, you see. The other stuck around simply because he’d never seen such a “rich, crazy chick” in action and wanted to see what she’d do next.

The case, the paper reported, seemed solid. Your classic “open and shut.” The responding officers discovered the front glass door of the dentist office shattered and the politician’s daughter drunkenly passed out on the lobby floor inside -- with the hammer in one hand and two sealed packages of dental cocaine powder, worth around \$25,000 each, in her other. At the time of arrest, when the girl woke up, she could be heard yelling, “But, I didn’t do anything! I don’t even remember how I got here. It’s not right. I didn’t break into any, like, dentist office. And I don’t own, like, any hammer. Look at me! Like I would even touch some dirty hammer from some dirty carpenter or whatever. Like literally look at my nails. You think I did this? If you don’t let me go, you’re gonna be in big trouble! Do you know who my father is?! I’m gonna call my dad and he’s gonna have you all fired.”

She was partially telling the truth. At least regarding her lack of knowledge and culpability. But fair was fair when karma got involved.

Steve put the paper down, smiled, and poured himself another cup of coffee before moving on to the book review section. Pete Hegseth’s new book, *Battle for the American Mind, Uprooting a Century of Miseducation*, was out and Professor Talabani had written a review for the university press, which she wanted Steve’s opinion on.

Before reading Sue’s article, Steve wondered if Bridget would return to school or not. Experience told him no. Especially after the proper lesson had been imparted. Which, ironically, few ever truly understood. He did though, and was satisfied. Steve liked teaching students new lessons to live by.

The End.