

Hell Hounds of High School

Patricia Marie Budd[®]



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“Patricia Budd’s teaching career has no doubt brought her close to some of the characters you’ll find in the *Hellhounds of the High School*. These characters nearly jump off the page with their fiery independence and shout at you, ‘I’ve got something to tell you!’”

Alberta Author, Mar’ce Merrell

“A cynic in the classical sense of the term, Mrs. Bird conveys the teacher’s angst as she tries to reconcile a populace lagging in dedication to youth education and her own desire to make a difference. *Hell Hounds of High School* uses a language that both students and adults can enjoy, raises issues that parents can learn from and poses problems that anyone working in the education industry can appreciate.”

George Franko, teacher



In honour of Phil McKay,
the man who taught me what it means to be a teacher!





Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to all my students past, present, and future. I love you!

Thank you Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada! You are an amazing city, my home and a fabulously fun place to live! Since having moved here I have been inspired to write like never before.

Many thanks (ironically and honestly spoken) to the infamous 30-2 class—you *know who you are!* And to the notorious 10-2 class—Yes, *I mean you!* Don't worry, 20-2s (especially the first bunch who locked me out of my classroom by piling all the desks in front of the door), I haven't forgotten you—and *I never will!* No, you're not sweat hogs like *Welcome Back Cotter* but you've certainly given me a good run! 😊

This book was a delight to write, and a wonderful opportunity for me to laugh at myself along with all my students and everyone else out there who has ever hated a teacher (or a teacher who has ever hated a student).

Although I admit to having caricatured myself in some ways, this book is entirely fictional. All the characters are a product of my warped imagination—even Mrs. Bird.

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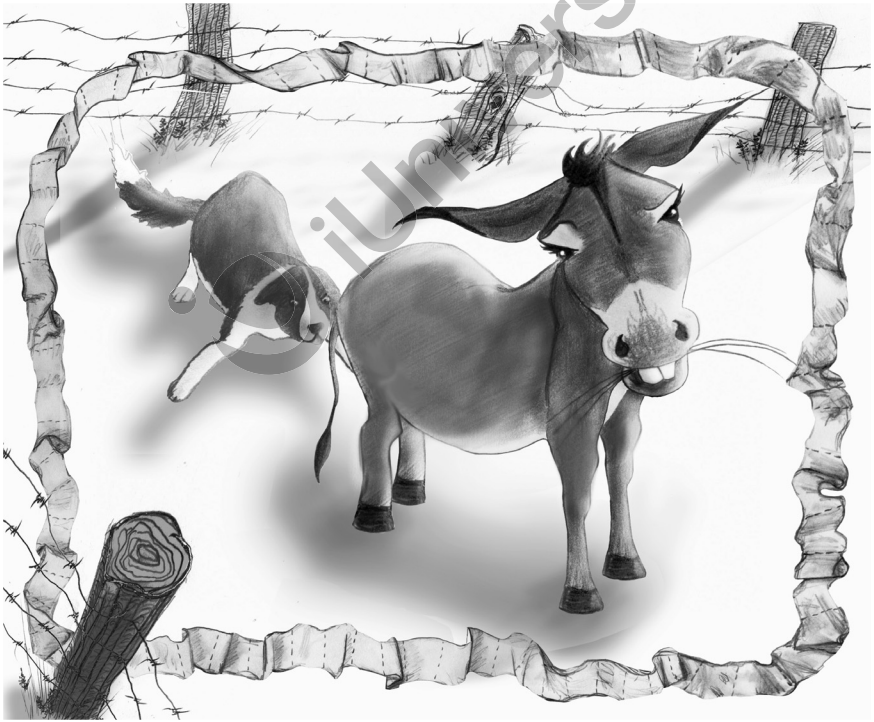
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The Bitch and the Ass

Together, the bitch and the ass make the perfect metaphor for the teacher/student relationship. The bitch growls, snarls, and exposes sharp teeth whilst constantly harping at the stubborn ass to make it move. Nipping at the ass's hooves, the bitch desperately attempts to make the animal go to work. All the while, the ass stubbornly stands still, refusing to pull its load.



The bitch and the ass



Prelude: Early January

Astounded is hardly the word for it! Seated at the dining room table, Priscilla Bird (Mrs. Bird to her students) reads and rereads the paper before her five times. “William,” a mystified Priscilla calls out to her husband.

“Yes, dear,” William replies from the kitchen. Priscilla has designated the kitchen as William’s domain since he is far more adept at cooking than she is. The fact is, Priscilla is far too busy marking to do any cooking, thus her silent expectation is that her husband fill that void in her life. It is a lucky thing for Priscilla that he complies as her previous diet of fast food had been injurious to her health. Since marrying William and being introduced to a healthy diet, she seldom ever gets sick anymore.

“Come listen to this,” Priscilla encourages from her perch in the dining room.

William casually strolls into the small room, which is currently cluttered with a vast array of Priscilla’s work. A briefcase is lying on its side next to Priscilla’s chair, its contents spilled out onto the floor. The chair next to her holds a pile of essays as does the chair opposite. On the table, essays are spread all over in a cluttered mess. Standing behind his wife’s chair, William places his hand on her shoulder and gives it a slight squeeze as he glances over to see what she is working on. “What is it?” he asks.

“A student essay.” Her response is terse. Priscilla is leaning back in her chair with arms wrapped tightly under her breasts, looking down her nose at the paper.

“A good one?” he asks.

Looking up to see the half-quizzical expression on William’s face, Priscilla, too, feels the need to half smirk. “Expecting more teenage nonsense?”

William shrugs. “That’s what you usually share with me.”

“Sorry to disappoint you, dear, but this paper is good—very good.” Her reply is a bit too curt.

“You don’t sound too enthused,” he says as he gives her shoulder another squeeze. There is too much tension there, as always. “Usually a good paper brings out the chipper in you.”

She shakes her head, and loose strands of hair caress his wrist. “It’s too good, William,” she says. “Too good to be true. Listen.” Lifting the paper off the table, she begins reading:

Jimmy Buffett’s song “The A—hole Song” is one of the great existentialist quandaries of the twentieth century. In “The A—hole Song,” Buffett questions what exactly has produced the a—hole persona of the driver who “nearly cut [him] off the road” (Buffett line 2). He wants to know whether this man was “born an a—hole” (Buffett line 6) or if he “worked at it [his] whole life” (Buffett line 7). In this one line, Jimmy Buffet is asking whether God created the a—hole or if the man, through choice and action, turned himself into one.

“Wow, that kid’s smart,” William replies. “He must be one of your best.”

“No, he isn’t.” With tears glistening, Priscilla smiles softly. “He’s my worst.”

“Holy cow!” he exclaims. “How did you get that out of him?”

“I don’t know.” Shaking the paper at her husband, Priscilla announces, “This boy is the amalgam of every bad student I have ever had.” Pausing momentarily to consider, “In fact, he is the culmination of—”

“In other words,” William reasons, “he has reached the highest point of stupidity—”

Before William can finish, Priscilla points out the less-common use of the word culmination. “Or, rather, has sunk to the lowest point to which a student can possibly descend.”

“Is it okay for him to use that song? I mean it does have swearwords in it.”

“Oh, aren’t you little Mr. Mischievous. Trying to help me knock him down a peg or two, are you?”

“Why not?” William inquires.

“Well, to begin with,” Priscilla says with a sigh (she now has her thumb in her mouth and is tapping her nail against her teeth), “the boy does not swear.” Her head reverts to shaking. “Jimmy Buffet swears.” Pointing to

the paper with emphasis, she continues, “And everything Greg says about the song is accurate.”

“Is that the kid’s name?” William smirks. “Not *the* Greg?”

Leaning her head back, looking up over her glasses, Pricilla reiterates, “*The* Greg.”

William bends down to kiss her. “The one Wood calls *McYou-know-what* McGregor?”

“Yup.” She tilts her head for another kiss. William complies. “Look at the title page.” She hands the page to her husband.



title page

He's reading silently, Priscilla surmises, as he doesn't want to risk saying out loud anything this kid might have written. She chuckles at her thought and taunts her husband, “Afraid to read it out loud?” William grunts a response and hands her back the title page. “You know,” she says with an impish smile, “for a not-so-very-pious man, you certainly have strange views on swearing.”

Noting the rise in William's brow, Priscilla advocates, pointing directly to the boy's name, "I'd call him *McYou-know-what* too—" William's expression turns into a scowl. "But I don't." She places her hand on her heart as if making a vow, "When I give my word, William, I keep it. I call him Gregory McMiscreant McGregor."

Pleased, William laughs. "*Miscreant* is a much better word. More suiting an English teacher, don't you think?"

Priscilla responds with an affirmative grunt. Retrieving the title page, she takes a moment to reexamine the boy's name. "The *A* word seems better suited to McGregor."

"You can think what ever you want, my dear, just as long as you refrain from using the words."

For her part, Priscilla complies with a half-muttered, "Yes, dear." She is too busy staring at the essay as if faced with an impossible conundrum to worry about foul language. Pondering, she mutters, "I can't believe this is the same kid." Jumping up from her chair, Priscilla backs into William. "Move, please." Priscilla Bird, in teacher mode, shows no heed to her treatment of others. Heading towards William's den, she calls over her shoulder, "I need to use your computer."

"Why?" William demands.

"I need to get on the Net. All I have to do is type the word *plagiarism* into the search engine and all kinds of sites pop up that will help me determine if this boy has plagiarized."

"How?" William's voice has softened some for this inquiry.

Priscilla, unfortunately, ignores William as she races down the hall to his office. It is spacious, their having converted the second largest bedroom for this purpose. His desk spans two walls; his computer sits advantageously in the corner. Sitting down in William's high-back chair, Priscilla instantly converts it from the lean-back position to the upright position. There is no relaxing when this woman works.

Following his wife into his office, William inquires, "So how can the Net help you determine if this kid plagiarized?"

"Easy." Priscilla is all smiles. She is certain she has finally got her hands on the evidence she needs to get this boy out of her class and out of her hair forever. "All I have to do is type in one line from his essay and the whole text or its web link will appear."

"Sweet," William replies. "Do you really think he cheated?"

"I have to consider the possibility." Priscilla, swiveling the chair around, presents her husband with a grave countenance. "This boy has not written

a thing for me all semester, and, suddenly,” she says, waving the paper for emphasis, “he hands in this. For all he’s bothered to show me, the boy could be illiterate.” Looking at the work, a dark cloud covers her eyes. “He means this as a statement—a statement I can put up with from the average kid—if it’s his own. But if he stole it, well, William,” she looks her husband in the eye to emphasize the severity of the crime, “that is intellectual theft, and I will slam him down hard for it.”

Priscilla taps a key to wake up the iMac. Using Google as her search engine, she types in the word *plagiarism*. When she gains access to an online plagiarism catcher, she immediately begins her sleuth work.



Mrs. Bird as sleuth

After two hours, Priscilla finally admits defeat. “William,” she calls. Her husband, having abandoned Priscilla and her search one hour and fifty-seven minutes ago, reenters his office.

Swiveling the high-back chair to face her husband, and staring up at him with disbelief, Priscilla exclaims, “He didn’t cheat.”

“Are you sure?” he inquires.

“Well,” Priscilla grimaces, now chewing on her thumbnail. “I can’t prove he copied anything from the Net.” William slaps the back of her head. “Ow!” Priscilla ejaculates, “what did you do that for?”

“Stop chewing your fingers.” Priscilla has asked him to hit her every time he catches her biting her nails, a nasty habit she has had since her own high school days.

“Sorry, it’s just ... this kid has me so wound up.”

“I can tell,” William adds. “Your nail biting has gotten really bad since you started teaching him.” Pausing for a moment to study his wife, he says, “You shouldn’t let one kid get to you so much.”

“I know,” she sighs, “but it’s so da— da— *darn* hard.” She accents her difficulty in avoiding the curse by tapping her fist on William’s desk.

“You can’t fix every kid’s problems,” he reminds her yet again.

“I know that, but, when I started teaching him .” Her hands open and start shaking in the air as she tries to grasp at the concept that is alluding her. “And I heard all the rumours about what a bad a-jackal he was ...” This time she pounds her fists on her thighs. “I swore I would drag him by his ears into a pass.” Sighing now, she closes her eyes and places her fist on her forehead. “And now all I want to do now is get him the Hades out of my class.” William smiles. “Don’t laugh at me.”

“I’m not laughing,” he says as his cheek muscles twitch to subdue the impending outburst. Once he appears to be under control, he begins, “So, what’s next?”

“Well ...” Priscilla pauses a moment to ponder her options. “He may not have copied off the Net, but he could just as easily have hired someone to write for him.”

“Who?” William asks.

“That, I don’t know. My first guess would be one of my thirty-dash-one students. I taught them the concept of existentialism.”

“Well, there you go,” William says in an encouraging manner.

“Uh huh,” Priscilla grunts as she shakes her head. “None of my current academic kids are smart enough to have written this essay. No, wait,” she adds judiciously, “Richard is smart enough, but he’s too dry and pedantic ... and this essay,” she gives the paper a little shake, “has its own unique style.” With a slight tilt of the head, she considers, “Scott—now he’s witty enough, but he lacks the higher-level thinking skills required of such prose.” She slaps the side of her face in wonder. “Nope, it wasn’t one of my current kids, and it doesn’t make me think of any of my past kids either.” Now with her thumb rubbing her temple and two fingers rubbing

her forehead, Priscilla's sigh is both audible and lengthy. "If he cheated, William, there is absolutely no way I can prove it."

"What are you going to do then?"

"The only thing I can do. Accept it as his work. Grade it as his work and congratulate him on it.

