

MRS. DENT HAS SPOKEN



Characters: Mrs. Dent
 Mr. Hayes
 Carole
 Phil

Scene: the office of Mrs. Dent, school principal. Mrs. Dent and Mr. Hayes, faculty advisor to the school paper, are seated at a desk. Spread out before them are several typed pages. There are two vacant chairs. They await the arrival of Phil and Carole, student co-editors of the school paper. Someone knocks on the door.

MRS. DENT: Come in. (*Carole and Phil enter.*) Please be seated.

MR. HAYES: A seat.
(The two sit next to Mr. Hayes.)

MRS. DENT: Now, I've had a chance to talk with Mr. Hayes. There still seems to be some misunderstanding about the whole thing.

MR. HAYES: There's not really any misunderstanding at all, Mrs. Dent. Carole and Phil are in the right. That's all there is to it!

MRS. DENT: Mr. Hayes, I wish life was always so simple. I wish all problems could be solved as easily as you think.

CAROLE: But Mrs. Dent, you *must* know that we haven't

done anything wrong. Not one thing we've written is untrue.

MRS. DENT: I know that, Carole. And I understand what you're trying to do.

MR. HAYES: Mrs. Dent, these are two great people sitting here with us. They're thoughtful, sensitive and pretty down-to-earth.

MRS. DENT: I agree. Again, Mr. Hayes, I have no doubts about the intentions of Phil and Carole. I'm sure they meant well, but—

PHIL: Mrs. Dent, it just isn't fair. Mr. Powell has no right to build a big apartment house on that land.

CAROLE: That land was supposed to be used as a park by the community.

MRS. DENT: Now, just a minute. Mr. Powell is aware of the town and its needs. He is a very community-minded person.

PHIL: I'll bet!

MR. HAYES: Cool it, Phil. Mrs. Dent is on our side. You know that.

MRS. DENT: Yes, I am. But I am also trying to see the other side. Both of you know Mr. Powell—and what he has done for the community. Without him, many of our town's charities could never survive. Think of the money he gave to the scouts. And don't forget our school—the new stage curtain, the two college scholarships in his name. Why, his advertising helps us publish the school newspaper you work on!

CAROLE: O.K., we agree with that. We know that his company advertises on the whole back page of the school paper.

PHIL: That still doesn't excuse the fact that he's using land that was promised for parks.

MR. HAYES: Mrs. Dent, there must be something we can do to work this out.

MRS. DENT: Mr. Hayes, I simply cannot allow these students to place this editorial in the school paper. Can you imagine the uproar Mr. Powell will cause when he sees this? An editorial condemning him for misuse of public land? He'd be in my office in no time. (*She picks up a page and reads from it.*) "Pollution of the nearby stream, traffic jams, lack of proper waste disposal, destruction of trees and wild life." Why, Mr. Hayes, you know that none of these things can actually be proven. And Mr. Powell has promised me none of these things will happen.

PHIL: But, Mrs. Dent—there is such a thing as freedom of the—

MRS. DENT: Phil, please don't quote the Constitution to me. I'm the first one to push for the rights of the individual. But I also am realistic enough to know that we need Mr. Powell's support here at school.

MR. HAYES: (*to Phil and Carole*) Mrs. Dent has spoken. And what she's saying is that the all-powerful Mr. Powell is a god to whom we must all bow down.

MRS. DENT: Mr. Hayes, that remark was uncalled for. I know that you are transferring to another school next semester. And I also know that you want to go out of here as a hero. But—

MR. HAYES: Oh no, Mrs. Dent, you've got me all wrong. I'm sorry you took my words that way. Carole and Phil and I know how you generally back us up. But we also know you're giving in to a man who's so powerful that his friends on the town board agreed to sell public land to him.

CAROLE: Please, Mrs. Dent. It's important to us that we write the truth about things the way we see them. Mr. Powell didn't live up to his promises when he built the

factory on the other side of town. Look at the damage it did.

MRS. DENT: I understand he's taking steps to correct that.

PHIL: Mr. Powell has no right to this land. It has to be kept free of that building. Nature is being crowded out as it is. It's got to stop somewhere.

MRS. DENT: Carole, Phil—I'm saying to you here and now, you are right. We must protect the open spaces. But I am also telling you that I can't allow anything in the school paper against Mr. Powell. I owe it to the school.

MR. HAYES: (sarcastically) And to Mr. Powell.

MRS. DENT: (beginning to show anger) I've had just about enough. This meeting is over. (*She stands up.*) If you use that editorial, I shall be forced to replace both of you on the newspaper.

PHIL: (with a little anger) We kind of expected that, Mrs. Dent.

CAROLE: That's why we've already made plans to start putting out a paper of our own.

MRS. DENT: You mean one of those "underground" papers?

PHIL: If that's what you want to call it. But at least it will tell the truth to the students.

MR. HAYES: Mrs. Dent, please, can't we work out something? I'm certain that you don't want to force these two into leaving the newspaper. There must be some compromise.

MRS. DENT: Mr. Hayes, you've met Mr. Powell. There can be no compromise with him. You ought to know that. And our school needs him. That editorial would kill our school as far as he's concerned. There are too many good things he can do for us. I can't risk losing him.

CAROLE: Mrs. Dent, we don't want to make things any

worse for you than they are. We respect you and what you believe. We know you want what's best for the school. But we also know you're giving in to a sickness we all must fight.

MR. HAYES: They're right, Mrs. Dent. Somebody's done a good job in raising these kids to fight for what they believe is right.

MRS. DENT: Mr. Hayes, I'm getting very upset with this whole thing now. I've tried to be reasonable with Carole and Phil. And with you, too. But I will not allow this article to be printed. And furthermore, no "underground" paper will start up at this school. Do it and you will force me to expel both Phil and Carole and dismiss you as a teacher.

PHIL: Mrs. Dent, if I understand you correctly, you're saying that we have to drop the article from the paper.

MRS. DENT: Yes.

PHIL: Even though you know Mr. Powell is in the wrong.

MRS. DENT: Yes, even though I know that.

CAROLE: And you'll expel us if we start a newspaper of our own?

MRS. DENT: Yes, that's right.

MR. HAYES: Well, kids, Mrs. Dent is as clear as she can be. And, I guess, as fair as she can be. After all, she's caught in the middle. So, what's it going to be?

CAROLE: _____

PHIL: _____

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