

COMMENTARY

Sunshine State Horror Flick, August, 2009 (Screenplay)



FADE IN:
INTERIOR, PUBLIC SCHOOL (FORT MYERS) — DAY

A 5th-grade class is beginning the first morning in Ms. Steadfast's room, where 24 sweating 10-year-olds are staring in stunned silence at their new teacher. The children shift their gazes restlessly from her to what appears to be a human head on the wall — the head of a female closely resembling the previous year's art teacher, Ms. Davidson, taxidermically flawless, with dyed magenta hair, blue eyes and a pleasant smile.

Elsewhere, the walls are festooned with numbers and letters and a variety of enlarged images and photos, showing endangered animals and American historical moments or people: Abraham Lincoln, a soup line, Eleanor Roosevelt; several photos of panthers, indigo snakes, scrub jays and snail kites; Marines raising the flag atop Mt. Suribachi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the most prominent photo of all, a generic image of young Americans in hats and gowns grinning exuberantly at graduation.

The children are standing in front of desks designed for small people. But only a single chair appears in the room, sitting behind the teacher's large desk in the front. There are no chairs for the children.

VOICE FROM A SPEAKER IN THE WALL:

...So as your principal I welcome you to

Alvantage Elementary to begin the 2009-2010 school year, and I ask students, teachers and parents to practice patience in our classrooms this year, and to remember that success is not up to budget cuts, it is up to YOU and ME and ALL OF US — except for art and music teachers, and some additional staff, and a few hundred other teachers, and so on.

But THEY are not OUR concern. YOU are OUR concern, boys and girls.

If you try hard EVERY single day, you will succeed, with or without books, with or without art teachers, with or without chairs. At Alvantage, we don't make excuses. We make successes. LET ME SAY AGAIN, boys and girls: YOU WILL SUCCEED, no matter what your standing in life, or how much money state and county officials have cut from our budget.

Thank you, boys and girls, thank you teachers, thank you parents, and have a good day at Alvantage, where EVERY day is a good day, and EVERY meal is a banquet, and EVERY opportunity is an opportunity to SUCCEED!

WALL SPEAKER GROWS SILENT

MS. STEADFAST, ADDRESSING CHILDREN:

In my class, we will ALL start with the same standing this year. And we will finish with the same standing. None of us will sit, not even me. And we will succeed!

SHE WALKS BEHIND HER DESK AND DRAGS OUT THE ROOM'S ONLY CHAIR. IT HAS THREE LEGS.

MS. STEADFAST

Do you see this chair, boys and girls? It only has three legs. That's because I decided to cut off the fourth leg. Since the school

district sold your chairs you will not be able to sit, I will not sit, either. You notice the strips of duct tape I have placed in a row on my desk? They will be very useful, as I will demonstrate.

A BOY, DEEPERS NASHTON, RAISES HIS HAND AND BEGINS SPEAKING IN A RUSH:

Ms. Study I mean Steadpissed I mean Um Ms. Steadfast why are there no chairs, and where are the books and the paper, and, ah, why is that head of Ms. Davidson on the wall and where is the rest of Ms. Davidson, and um, where are the pencils and crayons and things and why is there no more television screen and where are the computers, and um, and is the air conditioning going to start...

MS. STEADFAST, SWEATING AND SCOWLING

MR. NASHTON! Did I give you permission to speak? No, I did not. But I will tell you how this year is going to work.

SHE STOOPS BEHIND HER DESK AND THEN STANDS UP AGAIN. In one hand she balances a large stack of fresh leaves the size of dinner plates, taken from a fully mature, native Sea Grape tree. In the other hand she carries a large, clear plastic bag, containing about 25 straight razors commingled with a large assortment of goose quills. She puts both the leaves and the bag on the corner of her desk, then selects a leaf and a razor.

MS. STEADFAST

This is a sea grape leaf from the wonderful and hardy native plant, coccoloba uvifera. We will be using these leaves throughout the year for all our VERY SUCCESSFUL exercises. They are much better than paper,

especially when used with human blood. You take a razor like this...

MS. STEADFAST HOLDS UP A RAZOR IN ONE HAND AND EXTENDS HER OTHER ARM

...And you make a nice slender line like this...

MS. STEADFAST OPENS A CLEAN 1-INCH INCISION IN HER FOREARM

...And then you put the blood in a neat pool, like this...

MS. STEADFAST EJECTS A THIN STREAM OF BLOOD INTO A POOL ON THE DESK, THEN CLAMPS THE WOUND SHUT WITH A SLENDER STRIP OF DUCT TAPE

...You see the duct tape working there? Ask your parents to buy it for you, because the school district cannot provide it. Now you take a quill...

SHE GRABS A GOOSE QUILL

...And you dip it in the homemade ink, like this...

SHE DIPS IT IN THE BLOOD

...And you write your name on the top of each leaf. I will give a zero to any student who fails to write his or her name at the top, in blood. I mean, in homemade ink.

SUDDENLY, THE MAGNIFICENT HEAD OF MS. DAVIDSON, LAST YEAR'S ART TEACHER, CRASHES TO THE FLOOR. TWO CHILDREN FAINT

MS. STEADFAST, SHOUTING LIKE A DRILL INSTRUCTOR

And no fainting! The school district cannot provide school nurses this year, and I will have no fainting in my Class!

MS. STEADFAST FAINTS AS BLOOD CONTINUES TO FLOW FROM HER ARM
FADE TO BLACK ■

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